


Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 25, 2026

Day 73

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta**
**The 31st Legislature**
Second Session

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

Al-Guneid, Nagwan, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)
Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC), Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Campbell, Kyle, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC), Deputy Premier
Elmeligi, Sarah, Banff-Kananaskis (NDP)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP), Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Hon. Peter F., ECA, Airdrie-Cochrane (PTP)
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP), Official Opposition Assistant Whip
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UC)
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kasawski, Kyle, Sherwood Park (NDP)
Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP)
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)
Long, Hon. Martin M., ECA, West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC) Government Whip
McDougall, Hon. Myles, ECA, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Metz, Luanne, Calgary-Varsity (NDP)
Miyashiro, Rob, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Nally, Hon. Dale, ECA, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Nenshi, Naheed K., Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP), Leader of the Official Opposition
Neudorf, Hon. Nathan T., ECA, Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaides, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP), Official Opposition Whip
Petrovic, Chelsae, Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, ECA, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawyer, Hon. Tara, ECA, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, ECA, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Hon. Joseph R., ECA, Cardston-Siksika (UC), Government House Leader
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. R.J., ECA, Highwood (UC)
Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC), Premier
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Turton, Hon. Searle, ECA, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Williams, Hon. Dan D.A., ECA, Peace River (UC), Deputy Government House Leader
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Wright, Hon. Justin, ECA, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC), Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland

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

**Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly**

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Trafton Koenig, Law Clerk
Vani Govindarajan, Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and Executive Director of Parliamentary Services
Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and Committees
Aaron Roth, Committee Clerk
Amanda LeBlanc, Managing Editor of *Alberta Hansard*
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Lang Bawn, Managing Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Shafer, Acting Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
James Matsune, Acting Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

## Executive Council

| | |
|---|---|
| Danielle Smith | Premier, President of Executive Council,<br>Minister of Intergovernmental and International Relations |
| Mike Ellis | Deputy Premier, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services |
| Mickey Amery | Minister of Justice |
| Andrew Boitchenko | Minister of Tourism and Sport |
| Devin Dreeshen | Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors |
| Tanya Fir | Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Technology and Innovation |
| Grant Hunter | Minister of Environment and Protected Areas |
| Brian Jean | Minister of Energy and Minerals |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Hospital and Surgical Health Services |
| Todd Loewen | Minister of Forestry and Parks |
| Martin Long | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Myles McDougall | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Dale Nally | Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction |
| Nathan Neudorf | Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Education and Childcare |
| Jason Nixon | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Tara Sawyer | Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation |
| Joseph Schow | Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration |
| R.J. Sigurdson | Minister of Affordability and Utilities |
| Searle Turton | Minister of Children and Family Services |
| Dan Williams | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Mental Health and Addiction |
| Justin Wright | Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Multiculturalism |

## Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|---|---|
| Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk | Parliamentary Secretary for Settlement Services and Ukrainian Evacuees |
| Scott Cyr | Parliamentary Secretary for Transportation and Strategic Development |
| Chantelle de Jonge | Parliamentary Secretary for Affordability and Utilities |
| Nolan Dyck | Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous and Rural Policing |
| Chelsae Petrovic | Parliamentary Secretary for Health Workforce Engagement |
| Ron Wiebe | Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (North) |
| Tany Yao | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development |

## STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

**Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund**

Chair: Mr. Yao
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Johnson

de Jonge
Ellingson
Kasawski
Kayande
Rowswell
Stephan
Wiebe

**Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

Chair: Mr. Wiebe
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Boparai
Bouchard
Cyr
de Jonge
Elmeligi
Hoyle
Stephan
van Dijken

**Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Batten
Haji
Johnson
Jones
Lunty
Sinclair
Singh
Tejada

**Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

Chair: Mr. Lunty
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Johnson

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Chapman
Dyck
Miyashiro
Petrovic
Shepherd
Sinclair
Wright, P.

**Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. McIver
Deputy Chair: Mr. Yao

Eggen
Gray
Lunty
Metz
Petrovic
Rowswell
Sabir
Singh

**Standing Committee on Private Bills**

Chair: Mr. Bouchard
Deputy Chair: Mr. Cyr

Ceci
Deol
Hayter
Horner
Jones
Lovely
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Vacant

**Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deputy Chair: Mr. Wiebe

Arcand-Paul
Brar, Gurinder
Brar, Gurtej
de Jonge
Gray
Horner
Jones
Sinclair
Stephan

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Chair: Mr. Sabir
Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

Bouchard
Cyr
Dyck
Eremenko
Lovely
Renaud
Schmidt
Sinclair

**Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Chair: Mr. Dyck
Deputy Chair: Ms Sweet

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

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**1:30 p.m. Wednesday, November 25, 2026**

[The Speaker in the chair]

## Prayers

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

Please be seated.

## Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, seated in the members' gallery today are staff from the Legislative Assembly Office who are participating in new employee orientation. Their orientation provides valuable insight into the legislative process, committee operations, and House proceedings. This important introduction to the work of the Assembly will provide a strong foundation as they begin their careers with the Legislative Assembly Office and continue supporting Alberta's parliamentary process. I ask that those members all stand to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

School groups. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Member Hoyle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm truly delighted to introduce the fabulous grade 6 students, teachers, and volunteers from Garth Worthington school from Edmonton-South. Please all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Introductions. The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you this year's winner of the Premier's 4-H award, Isabella Sweet, and her mother, Rebecca Sweet. This award is the highest honour that can be bestowed on a 4-H Alberta member, and Isabella has earned this distinction with her exceptional leadership as an ambassador for this wonderful organization. Joining them in the gallery today, I'd also like to introduce Alberta's 4-H board chair Syeda Khurram, Alberta's 4-H provincial program manager Tracy Dietrich, and Alberta's 4-H vice-chair Arlene Good. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, if we're going to get through introductions, we need to make them happen.

Go ahead, please.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce a number of members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. We've got their president Sandra Azocar, vice-president Shamanthi, and other worker leaders. I'll be introducing Rodney, Megan, Seema, and Loveline. Many others will be introduced later. Please rise, those who I've introduced, and receive our warm welcome.

**The Speaker:** Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through Chandan Talukder, an exceptional volunteer and professional accountant who organizes the Vijayadashami celebrations here in Edmonton. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Mr. Haji:** It's my pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Curtis Jackson and Andrew Wilson, who are the vice-presidents of AUPE, and Aaron Truman, Eunice Paul, Jobin Rajan, and Olinda Faria, who do advocacy on continuing care space. I ask all of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Dr. Metz:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you six members of the AUPE red team who we all depend on for our care. Gustavo, Priyanwada, Maribel, Jean, Nicole, and Erin, please rise.

**Member Boparai:** Sarbat da bhala is a core Sikh principle that calls on us to work for the welfare and well-being of humanity. Today I am pleased to welcome distinguished representatives of Khalsa Aid, an organization whose humanitarian work has brought relief and hope to people around the world. I would like to recognize Ravi Singh, founder and CEO of Khalsa Aid; Jatinder Singh, director for Canada; and Upneet Kaur, director for Alberta. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Calgary-East.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you Bhupinder Singh Dhaliwal, a gold-medal-winning hockey player, and Jaspreet Singh Noorpuri, both visiting us all the way from Bathinda, India. They're accompanied by Rajeev Mittal, president of the Thumri music foundation. I ask our guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

**Ms Wright:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce members of AUPE who are here with us today: Kim, Judy, Birgit, Nova, Darren, James, all from AUPE, who are here today pushing back against impossible workloads because their working conditions are our loved ones' care conditions. If they could please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you members that are continuous care workers who provide essential care to our senior citizens. We have with us today Stella Diaz, Inna Taraday, Praveena Naidu, Teofila Mendoza, Joally Nunez-Garcia, and Alma Magday. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-McClung.

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the MLA for Edmonton-McClung I am delighted to introduce three of his wonderful constituents: Renée Vaujeois and her two children, Jordan and Alexander. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**Mr. McDougall:** Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce a delegation from Mount Royal University seated in the gallery, including members of their board of governors and executive leadership team. Thank you for your commitment to Alberta students and for the role MRU plays in our postsecondary system. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Riverview.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also am going to introduce some AUPE members that work in continuing care: Violeta, Donna, Jane, Gregorio, Helen, and Natasha. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Ms Lovely:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Chamber Mayor PJ Stasko from the city of Camrose and councillor Don Rosland, Cindy Trautman from Camrose county, and Trevor Nabe from Border Paving. Would you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Chamber.

**The Speaker:** St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you my daughter Madeleine and her husband, Alex, and their 10-month-old baby, who's the cutest baby ever, to rise and be welcomed by the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to rise and introduce my well-flannelled friend and constituent Chris Gallaway. Not only does he give back a whole lot to the community; he also serves as the executive director of Friends of Medicare, fighting for public health care each and every day. Please rise and receive the welcome of the House.

## Members' Statements

### Holodomor Remembrance

**Member Eremenko:** It was the genocidal campaign of a dictator, Mr. Speaker, a deliberate act to eliminate a nation through starvation and devastating oppression. The Holodomor is formally recognized as the period during 1932 and 1933 whereby the Stalinist regime's forced collectivization of agricultural production in Ukraine shattered an agrarian way of life and a vibrant culture. At the height of the genocide it's estimated that 25,000 Ukrainians died every day. Total fatality estimates vary from 3 million to 8 million. Despite the concerted effort to eliminate Ukraine and its people from the map, they endured. For many years after 1933 it was strictly forbidden to speak about the Holodomor in the Soviet Union. As a result, for decades the world wouldn't fully know of the atrocities. Ukrainians couldn't grieve.

Today, 93 years after the end of the Holodomor, I recite the words of a survivor from that unimaginable period. From Ms Vera Stefaniuk:

> In 1932 there were still some potatoes or beets or maybe pickled cucumbers, but in 1933 there was nothing. People walked around and ate grass in the spring. There was nothing. I remember that I was very swollen, hungry, and tired. I wasn't able to get up and was very hungry. Mother and I prayed a lot, and she found a porcupine in a hole. She cleaned and baked it. It was small, but she gave me most of it and only took a bit for herself, and that saved my life. People were swollen. People died. They lay there, and there was nobody to bury them. Nobody had the strength to give graves.

I am of Ukrainian heritage, Mr. Speaker, as are several others in these Chambers and nearly 370,000 more across the province. It's through each of us that we will keep alive the memory of those who perished in the Holodomor as much as the stories of those who survived.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

### *1:40* Freedom of Speech and Criminal Code Amendments

**Mr. Dyck:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are fundamental rights protected through Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. They protect our ability to speak openly, to debate difficult issues, and to practise our faith even when our beliefs are controversial, unpopular, or disputed. This is why Alberta's government has introduced a motion under the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act in response to the federal government's decision to remove the long-standing good-faith religious opinion defence from the Criminal Code.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans should never have to wonder whether reading from the Bible, the Torah, or the Quran; discussing their faith; or expressing a sincerely held religious belief could expose them to criminal prosecution. A pastor delivering a sermon should not be looking over his shoulder. A rabbi should not fear quoting from the Torah. An imam should not have to second-guess a passage from the Quran. And ordinary Albertans should not be afraid to respectfully express the beliefs that guide their lives.

At the same time, protecting religious freedom does not mean tolerating violence, threats, or criminal hatred. Those acts remain illegal. They should be investigated. They should be prosecuted. There is no contradiction between keeping our communities safe and protecting the fundamental freedoms guaranteed to Canadians. In fact, a free society must be capable of doing both.

This motion sends a clear message that Alberta will stand up when those freedoms are threatened. We will defend the ability of Albertans to practise their faith. We will defend their ability to speak openly about their beliefs, and we will continue to stand against hatred, intimidation, and violence whenever they occur. Alberta will not simply stand by when fundamental freedoms are put at risk. In this province we will defend both public safety and fundamental freedoms, and we will not apologize for doing so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Support for Persons with Disabilities

**Ms Renaud:** While far too many disabled Albertans are fighting to stay afloat, the minister responsible for the destruction of AISH, the Member for Lethbridge-East, is fighting to stay elected by gerrymandering. It's clear this UCP government is comfortable being known as one of the most corrupt governments Canada has ever seen. When they use their tired excuses about why they have to rig the next election, how do other people believe that they don't?

The same UCP government that endorsed the Member for Morinville-St. Albert's 11-stop Kentucky booze cruise with his buddies or approving a $2,300 posh chauffeured ride in London for one meeting. The same UCP government destroyed the stability of 80,000 AISH recipients by reducing their already low income, changing their health benefits despite saying, "Oh, we didn't change a thing," and making life more miserable and more difficult.

I still can't get over the fact that this UCP government thinks 46,000 severely disabled Albertans that are being kicked off AISH will be able to find work given their incredible simulated work environments. It is ridiculous and it's dangerous. I still wonder how UCP MLAs sleep at night knowing that they're stealing $200 from the Canada disability benefit for severely disabled Albertans who already live in poverty and rely on the food bank. Food Banks Canada gave this government an F on their disability supports.

Mr. Speaker, all Albertans deserve more than this. They deserve a government that is honest and transparent and focused on them – all of them – to make life better, not just to throw out a distraction or to, you know, do favours for friends. It's about leading the entire province and being there to serve the entire province, regardless of how you vote. Disabled people are hurting so badly and their families as well.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

### Holodomor Memorial Day

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize Holodomor Memorial Day, a solemn occasion observed by Ukrainians and their descendants in Alberta, across Canada, and around the world. The Holodomor was a genocide. Between 1932 and '33 Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin used hunger as a weapon to break the Ukrainian people. Food was confiscated, villages were sealed off, and millions of men, women, and children were deliberately left to starve. The name Holodomor means death by starvation, but it represents something even darker, a calculated attempt to destroy a nation, its culture, and its identity.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, the history lesson remains painfully relevant today. An example of this is in the Russian-occupied town of Oleshky in southern Ukraine. Thousands of Ukrainians are trapped and isolated from essential supplies and services. Although the town sits only a few miles from Ukrainian-controlled territory, it has been effectively cut off from the outside world. Food shortages have become severe, roads are heavily mined, humanitarian aid faces significant barriers, families who attempt to flee risk being shot, and many residents, including children, remain isolated from essential supplies and services.

This is more than a humanitarian crisis. It's part of a broader effort to break the will of the Ukrainian people through fear, deprivation, and suffering. The people of Oleshky remind us what remembering the Holodomor means. The tactics may change, but the use of hunger and hardship as tools of oppression remain tragic and a reality.

We understand the importance of remembering those who perished during the Holodomor, and we understand the importance of standing with those who are suffering today. As we mark Holodomor Memorial Day, let us honour the memory of the millions who died, reaffirm our commitment to freedom and democracy, and stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine. Slava Ukraini.

### Public Service Front-line Workers

**Member Batten:** Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize the thousands of Albertans who show up every day to deliver the public services that keep our communities running. Behind every public service is a person doing important work. They are the LPNs, the health care aides supporting health care, the educational assistants helping students thrive, the custodians keeping schools welcoming and safe, the public health inspectors protecting families, and the municipal workers maintaining the infrastructure that keeps us all moving.

Thousands of these workers are represented by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, who have joined us today in the gallery to fight for stronger public services. Across our province these Albertans tell a similar story about their work. Staffing shortages are growing. Workloads are increasing. Recruitment and retention remain a major issue.

Too often today front-line workers are being asked to do more with less. Alberta depends on strong public services, but strong public services depend on the unionized workers who deliver them. Investing in recruitment, retention, workplace safety, and fair compensation is not just about supporting workers. It is about ensuring that all Albertans have access to quality public health care, excellent public education, and reliable public services.

Today we thank the workers who keep Alberta working, the hundreds of thousands of Albertans whose work often happens behind the scenes, whose contributions are essential in every community across our province. Thank you to the members of AUPE who are here today to represent them, and thank you for everything you do to build a fairer, safer Alberta.

### Electoral Boundaries

**Member Ceci:** Mr. Speaker, the UCP spin doctors are making up what happened with the last round of the boundary review process from 2017. To borrow a turn of phrase very overused in this Assembly from the other side: nothing could be further from the truth. Here are the cold, hard facts. Here's the truth.

In 2017 Premier Rachel Notley appointed an independent boundary commission comprised of two government-appointed commissioners, two opposition-appointed commissioners, and one impartial justice. The commission quietly went about its work, talked to Albertans in towns, cities, and rural communities, and came up with a fair map. It wasn't a good map for the NDP. Believe me, it wasn't a great map. It broke apart the ridings of key cabinet ministers, got rid of a stand-alone seat in Medicine Hat, and failed to keep up with the population growth in south Edmonton and in Calgary.

What did Rachel Notley do? Did she strike a do-over panel and stack it with NDP donors to redraw the maps? No. She accepted the maps as, period, required, period, by, period, law, period, and ran on them in the next election, no questions asked.

The UCP Premier has done the exact opposite, Mr. Speaker. When a bipartisan panel led by an impartial justice delivered a fair map that didn't give her everything on her wish list, she led her party through a nine-month tantrum that resulted in the unconstitutional bill the UCP is ramming through the Legislature today to redraw the maps, protect their weakest ministers, and steal the next election. A textbook example of immaturity and gerrymandering. This is a government and a Premier that can't accept being told no, but very soon Albertans will have the opportunity to send her a message she can't ignore.

## *1:50* Oral Question Period

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

### Electoral Boundaries

**Mr. Nenshi:** Mr. Speaker, the roots of this gerrymandering of the electoral map run very deep. The Premier seems to have conveniently forgotten some of the details, and maybe I can remind her. In 2024 it was clear that Calgary and Edmonton needed more seats due to population growth. In response, the UCP passed legislation limiting that growth to only two seats in the entire province, knowing that would dilute the voices of voters in Calgary and Edmonton. Does the Premier understand that limiting the number of seats before a commission is seated is unprecedented?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier of Alberta.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What actually happened during the course of the consultation is that we heard from members opposite that they would have been able to fulfill the task easier if they'd gone to 91 seats. That was the recommendation in Justice Dallas Miller's recommendations. It came from the members opposite, and that is what the new advisory committee did. They maintained the seats in Calgary, they maintained the seats in Edmonton, but they restored the two rural seats to make sure that both urban and rural have effective representation. That's what happened.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Oh, we'll certainly get back to that, but it was clear even in 2024 that the government was preparing for gerrymandering by also changing the rules on municipal boundaries. At that time the Premier was still calling for Alberta to double in population, but the government didn't do the math. The commission did do the math and realized they needed to add more urban seats. Why was the Premier

opposed then and why is she opposed now to giving Calgarians and Edmontonians the representation their population deserves?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, there are two new Calgary seats. I support that. There are two new Edmonton seats. I support that. And there are two restored rural seats. I support that, as did all five members of the electoral boundaries advisory commission. There was no disagreement about those things. Urban and rural both need representation. The members opposite knew that. That's why they asked for two additional seats and for those two rural seats to be restored; that's what the advisory committee did.

**Mr. Nenshi:** It would be so much better if the Premier had read the report. There's only one new Edmonton seat, and Edmonton and Calgary remain significantly underrepresented.

Now, on the morning of October 28, 2025, just before the interim report was released, the Minister of Justice said that the independent commission did great work, quote, unquote. Quote, the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, not the minister, not the government, get to draw or choose the map, unquote. Not even an hour later, when he saw the map wasn't gerrymandered, he flip-flopped. Why did they believe in that independent commission until it didn't give them what they wanted?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, if you look at what the five-member committee said, they agree on 84 out of 91 of the seats. There's no dispute on most of them. There's a difference of opinion on seven seats. And what has to happen in any of these circumstances is that the independent justice who is leading the commission has to come up with his best guess and best estimate of what will determine effective representation and best represent both rural and urban. That's what he did. You don't get a hundred per cent agreement on 100 per cent of things 100 per cent of the time, but they came pretty close.

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

**Mr. Nenshi:** Now, that interim report was unanimous. The UCP and the NDP appointees all agreed; the only people who didn't like it were the government. In the second round of public hearings hundreds of Albertans came out and said: hey, good job. But behind the scenes the government was attempting to subvert the process. If the government thought the commission had done, quote, great work, unquote, according to the Minister of Justice, why did they work so hard to change the commission's recommendations after the interim report?

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, because of the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and the Member for Calgary-Beddington and the Member for Lethbridge-West: they were the ones who were talking about hybrid ridings in the case of Lethbridge, they were the ones talking about how they needed to restore two additional seats to get to 91 so that rural maintained representation, and the justice was convinced by that. That's why Justice Miller said: "You know what? We would have been able to do this job better if there were 91 seats," and he recommended ways in which to do that. The new advisory committee took that information, and they came up with 84 out of 91 agreement. That's pretty good.

**Mr. Nenshi:** I'm happy to hear that the Premier just admitted that the government did attempt to subvert and change the work because that is, in fact, what happened.

A small number of Albertans came to the commission with professionally drawn maps; same colour, same font. They all looked the same. Unfortunately for the government, one of these supposedly random citizens forgot to photoshop the government document identifier off the map, showing it to be a government document. How much taxpayer money did the government spend on creating those maps and engineering a fake public consultation process?

**Ms Smith:** Zero, Mr. Speaker. I would invite the member opposite to go and look at the *Hansard* of the proceedings. The only time that our government members made any representation on the issue of the number of seats was to tell the members opposite, "If you feel that strongly about it, put it into the recommendations," which Justice Miller did. It was based on the interjections of their members. It was based on the observations of the two people they appointed to the panel. That is why the electoral advisory committee came back, made the modifications, and most of the changes are unanimously supported.

**Mr. Nenshi:** As much as the Premier wishes that were true, none of that is true, but we will come back to that.

One of the people who was embroiled in the fake maps was the Premier's staffer, multiple failed candidate Happy Mann. Happy Mann was handing out copies of those supposedly random maps in support of his own bid to become a UCP candidate in one of the gerrymandered ridings. Now the Premier tells us the government did not interfere. If they did not interfere, how come a taxpayer-paid staffer had copies of those maps, and why was he handing them out like it was a done deal?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, I invite the member opposite to read the report, and he will see the areas of concurrence in the vast majority of cases. There are a couple of areas where there was a difference of opinion, and the judge is the one who has to decide what he thinks is going to lead to the most effective representation. Two new seats in Calgary, two new seats in Edmonton, two restored seats in rural, and of those four new seats, three of them would go to the NDP. One of them would go to the UCP if the same election results happened as last time. That's about as fair as you can get.

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

**Mr. Nenshi:** The Premier has yet to answer any of my questions, but let's try again. When the final report was released, the majority map was extremely similar to the interim report, but the UCP members who had voted for the interim report, having heard no new information from the public, suddenly changed their side and wrote a minority report, which was not only crazy but – surprise, surprise – used the Happy Mann maps. How can the Premier expect any Albertan to believe that this government did not attempt to influence those two members to gerrymander the map?

**Ms Smith:** Well, because, Mr. Speaker, the minority report was rejected by this Assembly. What was accepted was Dallas Miller's recommendations to maintain the bulk of the majority report but to restore the two rural seats that had been left out and which the members opposite were asking to have restored. That was the process that we went through. That's why there was so much concurrence on the final report, 84 out of 91 seats. There's concurrence of all five members, slight differences of opinion on the remaining seven ridings, and the justice had to make the best judgment to make sure we had effective representation.

**Mr. Nenshi:** The Premier has now stated seven times this afternoon that the majority wanted 91 seats. This is simply not true. One, it ignores the fact that the UCP government themselves limited the commission

to 89 seats. Two, Justice Miller clearly stated – it's sad that the Premier hasn't even read the report – that no other commission member agreed with his addendum, not one. And three, those seats, if they were added in the first place, when the minister stopped it, would have gone to Calgary and Edmonton. So why did the Premier and the Minister of Justice continue to say that the majority wanted this when they didn't?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, the four new seats did go to Calgary and Edmonton. Two additional seats in Calgary, two in Edmonton. Edmonton-Enoch and Edmonton-Nisku are Edmonton-area seats. What was raised was that the rural representation would have been better represented, more effective representation, if they were able to restore those two rural seats. He should go and read the report. That is not controversial. All five of the committee members agreed to restore those two rural seats. That's what happened.

***2:00***

**Mr. Nenshi:** Someone really needs to tell the Premier that there's only one new seat in Edmonton because one was taken away.

Now, this government interfered in the process two years ago. It interfered in the process a year ago. When the independent commission still didn't do its bidding, it created a fake process never before seen in Canadian history to get what it wanted. Third time's a charm, I guess. Their ministers have been bragging all over town about how they influenced the work of the process. All three members donated money to the UCP during this process. Does the Premier really think this is how politics is normally done and that Albertans will fall for it?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The way the Electoral Boundaries Commission process works is that the NDP appoint two members, the UCP appoint two members, they try to find as many areas of concurrence as possible, and where there's a disagreement, the justice weighs in and makes a determination and a recommendation based on what he heard. In the case of what Dallas Miller heard, he heard that they could have done the job better by having 91 seats and restoring the two rural, and in the case of this most recent report 84 out of the 91 seats have concurrence. There are only seven with a small dispute.

### Electoral Boundaries Committee Review

**Ms Pancholi:** The right to vote is the heart of democracy. Electoral boundaries are supposed to be about ensuring Albertans' right to effective representation, but the UCP has put their political interests ahead of the people of this province. For the first time in Alberta history the government rejected the recommendations of the independent boundaries commission. They rejected a map that protects Albertans' right to vote. It is unprecedented. It is undemocratic. It is unconstitutional. The UCP government is cheating to win the next election. Why?

**The Speaker:** We established yesterday that that phraseology isn't allowed. You won't get any more questions if I hear it again.

The minister.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Not only is it not allowed, but it's absolutely absurd. The independent advisory panel looked at the report from the Electoral Boundaries Commission, which recommended 91 seats. Justice Miller said himself in the report that Albertans would have more effective representation if 91 seats were available. That was the recommendation of the report. That's what this Assembly took from that recommendation, added two new seats, sent it back to the panel for reconsideration. They came back with a report with better representation for all Albertans.

**Ms Pancholi:** The UCP replaced an independent process with an illegitimate one. Judges wanted nothing to do with it. Albertans were denied the chance to provide input. The UCP's panel members were not independent. The maps they came up with were gerrymandered. It is unprecedented, it is undemocratic, and it is unconstitutional. Is the government willing to do anything to win the next election?

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, the opposition full well knows that the panel was chaired by two members appointed by the NDP opposition, two members appointed by the government, and chaired by a highly respected former Court of Appeal judge who served for more than 20 years on the bench. It's an interesting strategy to be disparaging not just oil and gas workers, tradespeople, foreign governments, but now they're targeting highly respected, independent judges. It's absolutely ridiculous, and it's shameful.

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker, democracy is a living, breathing thing. If you ignore it, if you starve it, it will die. This government continues to break the democratic norms and values that make this province strong. The UCP have no problem with cheating. They just don't want anybody to call it that.

**The Speaker:** Okay. You're done. You're done.

Next question goes to Edmonton-City Centre.

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-City Centre. I'll move on. Edmonton-City Centre.

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** You need to sit down, hon. member.

**Ms Pancholi:** I'm standing up for Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-City Centre.

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker.

### Speaker's Ruling
### Parliamentary Language

**The Speaker:** No. Your time is finished here. You abused the privilege. You need to sit down.

**Ms Pancholi:** I'm standing up for Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** No. You don't get to speak now. You've abused the privilege. You need to sit down.

**Ms Pancholi:** I'm standing up for Albertans.

**The Speaker:** Okay. I guess you want to be named, do you?

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker, what's happening in this Legislature is deeply . . .

**The Speaker:** Would you remove the member, please.

[Ms Pancholi was escorted out of the Chamber by the Sergeant-at-Arms]

### Alberta Sheriffs Police Service

**Mr. Shepherd:** With Bill 44 it's official. Alberta has a provincial police force despite the fact that the vast majority of Albertans never asked for one or wanted one. Over 70 per cent said that there

are more important priorities, that they'd rather spend the money on their current police, for many, the RCMP. But the minister of public safety isn't listening, and he doesn't have to because the UCP are redrawing his seat to make sure he wins. Albertans can't touch him. So to the minister: how does it feel to push a government policy so unpopular that now the government needs to set up a booster seat to keep his place at the grown-ups' table?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of public safety.

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the member opposite, of course, is paying a lot of attention to the RMA. They put forward a resolution, sought to halt the advancement of any municipal transition towards the government of Alberta's proposed Alberta Sheriffs Police Service. But it failed. He didn't let anybody in the Chamber know that. You know why? It's the urban privilege of the members opposite who do not understand nor respect the people of rural Alberta.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Given that this urban minister won't tell Albertans what his new pet police force will actually cost and given that that's despite the fact that that's exactly what his supposed customers, rural municipalities, have been asking him for years and given that what they want is an answer for why he keeps raising their costs and given that they're not going to get one because by rigging the map, the UCP are making sure Albertans are forced to foot the bill while the minister's will never come due, to the minister: was it the government's policy to go from protect and serve to neglect and the nerve to legislate away Albertans' right to choose?

**Mr. Ellis:** Given, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure the members opposite have been to rural Alberta – but I can tell you that it's very beautiful in rural Alberta – let me tell you that I will say that the costs that are going up are a direct result of the increased costs directly from the RCMP. All of those costs and all of that money goes from the municipalities directly to the RCMP. What we are doing is augmenting and supporting the RCMP, the Calgary, the Edmonton police services to make sure we have effective policing in Alberta.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Given that in the last election the UCP did not run on creating a provincial police force – they hid it from Albertans and just pushed it through after, like so many other pages from the separatist playbook – and given that that's exactly what they're doing with these changes to the minister's seat, hiding the fact that they're stealing his constituents' choice to vote for anyone else, and given that that's just how entitled this government is – they think they have the right to rule forever – will the minister just admit it's his government's policy to tell Albertans and his constituents to sit down, shut up, and let this government choose for them?

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, let's not forget that one of the greatest issues that is facing Alberta and Canada right now is gangs and gang violence, and I can tell you that it was the NDP that defunded ALERT by $12.5 million. I can tell you that it is the former mayor of Calgary who passed a motion to reallocate $20 million from the Calgary Police Service. Shame on the NDP, and shame on that leader.

### *2:10* Freedom of Speech and Criminal Code Amendments

**Mr. Cyr:** Mr. Speaker, freedoms of religion and expression are fundamental rights protected under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The federal Liberals' decision to remove the long-standing good-faith religious defence from the Criminal Code has understandably raised concerns about the potential impacts of lawful religious expression. Can the Minister of Justice please explain to this House why Alberta's government believes this sovereignty act motion is necessary and what it is intended to prevent?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are fundamental rights protected in the Charter. They're also incredibly important and sacred to Albertans. These rights protect our ability to speak, to debate difficult ideas, and to practise our faiths in this province without fear of persecution. That is why Alberta is challenging the federal government's decision to remove the good-faith religious opinion defence from the Criminal Code. That protection has stood in the Criminal Code for years for a particular reason. Removing it is unacceptable. We will not allow our pastors and . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Cyr:** Mr. Speaker, thank you to the minister. Given that Albertans of many different faiths rely on freedom of worship, the ability to discuss their beliefs, and to read their sacred texts, including the Bible, the Torah, and the Quran, and further given that those freedoms should not depend on whether those beliefs are popular or whether everyone agrees with them, can the minister please explain this motion and how it would help Albertans from the fear that they have from prosecution for expressing their sincerely held religious beliefs?

**Mr. Amery:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. Albertans should never have to wonder whether reading a passage from their holy book or scripture could put them at risk of criminal prosecution. This motion asks cabinet to consider further lawful measures in response to the federal government's decision. It asks us to protect the ability for Albertans to practise their faith, to discuss their beliefs, religion, and read and quote from sacred texts without fear that it'll be treated as a crime. That's what this motion is doing, and I hope all members of this Assembly support it.

**The Speaker:** Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

**Mr. Cyr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that we know that the members opposite will try to suggest that defending freedom of religion somehow prevents government from protecting Albertans from hate and further given that threats and violence and criminal hatred remain unacceptable, regardless of who is targeted, can the minister please explain to this House how Alberta can continue to address hate and violence while also ensuring lawful religious expression and sincerely held beliefs remain protected in this remarkable province we reside in?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would certainly hope that no member of this Assembly uses their platform to spread fear amongst our communities. There's no place in Alberta for attacks, for intimidation, or violence directed at any religious community. Those crimes will continue to be investigated, and those crimes will continue to be prosecuted. Everyone must continue to comply with the Criminal Code, but protecting people from criminal conduct and protecting people from government overreach are not competing goals. We think we can achieve both with this motion, and that's what we're going to do.

### Indigenous Relations

**Member Arcand-Paul:** The UCP have left no stone unturned in what looks like a mission to tear down the treaty relationship between

the Crown and First Nations. From restricting treaty flags and Métis flags in classrooms to a referendum for their separatist friends, trust is at an all-time low. For the first time in history treaty chiefs have voted in nonconfidence against this government. The priority of the Minister of Indigenous Relations should be mending the damage the Premier has done to treaty, but it's been radio silence. Is that why the UCP is gerrymandering her riding? If this minister is confident in her work, why won't she run on fair boundaries?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to say that I've had some very productive conversations with Indigenous leadership across this province in the coming days, and the majority of those conversations are around the Pacific link pipeline and perhaps looking at equity positions on that. The relationship does require some more work. We do understand that. It's always ongoing when we're talking about reconciliation, but I'm very committed, and I'm happy to say that many chiefs have reached out and also are very committed to moving forward in a very productive fashion.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Since this minister took over her portfolio, the government's relationship with First Nations and Métis people has deteriorated terribly. Given that this minister voted against consulting with First Nations before holding a referendum on separation and given that when asked, this minister's constituents have said clearly that they do not want to live in a gerrymandered, hybrid riding but she continues to ignore their voices, is this minister really willing to gerrymander before she'll consult with her stakeholders or even with her constituents?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Mr. Speaker, I just had a conversation with the chief today again about economic development opportunities and the Pacific link pipeline. I will reiterate that there are lots of conversations that are happening between myself personally and Indigenous leadership and my department as well. I look forward to sharing more as we get more information around what equity participation will look like, what employment opportunities will look like. That is what Indigenous leadership is interested in talking about.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Given that the minister's own constituents spoke loud and clear and told the legitimate Electoral Boundaries Commission that they do not want to be in a gerrymandered riding and given that the UCP's unconstitutional do-over panel ignored the voices of her constituents and served the minister a gerrymandered seat on a silver platter and given that last election this minister jumped to a new riding across the city rather than face the voters who elected her in 2019, again, how many times will this minister pick her own voters?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member fails to mention the contributions from the Big Horn group who were incensed with the outcome of the riding distribution in the Electoral Boundaries Commission that was provided earlier this year. The recommendations required 91 seats for effective representation. That is the simple conclusion, that the recommendations that the panel made were adopted by this Legislature. The independent panel, chaired by Justice O'Ferrall, made those recommendations and put them into . . .

**The Speaker:** The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

## Education Policies

**Ms Ganley:** The minister of education would have us believe that things have never been better, but the facts say otherwise, Mr. Speaker. From fighting over flagpoles to gutting graduation requirements to announcing schools but never building them, this government is dismantling our public education system. Albertans deserve better for our kids. Is the minister so distracted worrying about rigging his own riding boundaries that he can't count flagpoles?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, Mr. Speaker, in my role as Minister of Education and Childcare I attend question period every day to answer questions about government policy. If the member has any, I'd be very happy to answer them, but I didn't hear a question at all to do about government policy as it relates to our education system or to child care.

That being said, I will take the opportunity to remind Albertans that our government is investing heavily in our education system. We've hired 2,100 net new teachers, over 1,000 net new EAs, and we are building schools aggressively to make sure students have the supports they need.

**Ms Ganley:** Given that lowering graduation requirements will leave students less prepared for the workforce and given that educators warn that students will need to upgrade classes for apprenticeships or postsecondary and given that I understand the minister might not want to face his voters after using the notwithstanding clause but he owes them that, why is this government unable to deliver the public education parents demand? Are they too distracted trying to steal the next election?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In November of last year we moved forward with the largest and most comprehensive data collection exercise in Alberta education history. We subsequently moved forward in providing funding to help secure over 700 complexity teams across the province. We also provided $200 million in a new K to 9 class size reduction grant. These efforts are paying off and are making real, meaningful differences in the classroom to help ensure that students have access to the supports that they need.

**Ms Ganley:** Given that reannouncing the same thing over and over again isn't a new policy and given that this government never consults teachers, parents, experts, or anyone, really, before ramming through their badly designed policies and given that they will limit debate to do so or use the notwithstanding clause when all else fails and given that instead of listening to voters, they'll just pick their own by rigging the next election, to any minister over there: why is this government so afraid of Albertans?

***2:20***

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Again, Mr. Speaker, I know that the member has been around for a while, but I didn't hear anything in that question related to government policy as it affects education or child care.

That being said, again, I'm happy to take the opportunity that I have to talk about some of the work that we're doing. As I mentioned earlier, the $200 million that we've provided in the class size reduction grant is going to help our school divisions hire thousands of teachers, which will be critical in reducing class sizes. We're also providing very targeted funding to support students with specialized needs in Budget '26. We increased grant rates for the refugee student grant and other grants to support kids.

### Charter Schools

**Mr. Bouchard:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta's education system is seeing record levels of growth in enrolment, funding, and staffing. Public charter schools are creating new capacity within the public system, offering specialized and innovative programs designed to meet the diverse needs of students. Charter schools are part of Alberta's public system but do not have the same access to facilities, land, and capital funding as other public boards. To the Minister of Education and Childcare: what is our government doing to assist in the expansion of charter schools?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that charter schools play an important and valuable role in our education system. Unlike the NDP, who dislikes charter schools, wants to shut them down, and wants to eliminate all opportunities for choice, our government firmly believes in supporting choice in education. We believe that parents, not politicians, know what's best for their kids. We believe that it's critically important that a variety of options exist so that parents can make those informed choices. One of the first things our government did was eliminate the cap on charter schools, and we're continuing to support them in finding new spaces as well.

**Mr. Bouchard:** Given that rising demand for charter schools reflects parents' desire for educational options that meet their children's needs, not ideology or trends, and given that charter schools can offer focused approaches to subjects like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and further given the recent changes for high school graduates to assist them in finding jobs in the trades, to the same minister: are there plans to make charter schools a larger part of Alberta's education system in the future?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. We have to continue to fight back against the NDP trying to shut down charter schools across the province. That's why our government is going to continue to support them, continue to find avenues for them to grow. We're doing that very recently as part of the schools now program. We're building 15 public charter schools; 12 projects have been approved to date. That'll create approximately 10,500 student spaces across the province. This will ensure that unique programming can be administered to students across the province.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Bouchard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that charter schools are publicly funded, nonprofit, tuition-free, and independently governed by their own board of directors and given that each charter school is governed by a volunteer board of directors like any nonprofit organization in Alberta and further given that Alberta's charter schools are open to all students, serving a wide range of learners, including students with diverse learning needs, to the same minister: what is the actual cost of operating charter schools to Alberta taxpayers?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of education.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. When we look at the investments that are provided to support public charter schools, it breaks down to approximately 2 per cent of the total budget that is allocated to support education in the province. With this 2 per cent, we're able to make a real meaningful difference and provide students with unique programming that suits their needs and, more importantly, of course, provide parents with those opportunities. As I've mentioned, our government firmly believes that parents know what's best for their kids and that parents should be in the primary driver's seat when it comes to their children's education. I know the NDP, however, wants to dismantle that if they ever got in power.

### Lethbridge's Electoral Boundaries

**Member Miyashiro:** Mr. Speaker, UCP MLAs are constantly trying to convince Albertans that the UCP listens to them. That could not be farther from the truth. Over the past two weeks I've read many e-mails from Albertans stating their opposition to the gerrymandered map of the sham UCP select special committee. The real boundaries commission heard from over 2,000 Albertans to create their new map based on what they heard. I ask again: Premier, how many Albertans provided input into the UCP's new map designed to steal the next election?

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, the independent panel looked at the recommendations from the commission and looked at all of the submissions that were provided to the commission, including the thousands of Albertans that weighed in on it, not to mention or not to forget the contributions of the Member for Lethbridge-West, who on January 16 said: "What I would suggest is that we bring in . . . part of the county of Lethbridge into Lethbridge-West." Hybrid ridings have existed throughout the history of our province, and guess what? It was that member who asked for . . .

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

**Member Miyashiro:** Thank you. Given that there's context to everything, Mr. Speaker, and given that almost all of the hundreds of e-mails received by my office on boundaries are copies of those . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Member Miyashiro:** Sorry.

**The Speaker:** I'll give the hon. member another 10 seconds. Then we're going to try to hear what he has to say.

**Member Miyashiro:** Thank you.

Given that almost all of the hundreds of e-mails received by my office on boundaries are copies of those sent to the Premier and/or the MLA for Lethbridge-East and given that the vast majority of those e-mails state opposition to the gerrymandered map of Lethbridge, has the MLA for Lethbridge-East reviewed any of the e-mails, and if so, what is that MLA's take on what is being said in those e-mails that accuse his government of trying to steal the next election?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The nerve to get up and to criticize the maps that were put forward before this Assembly, when it was that member who asked for hybrid ridings. In that same submission, when referring to communities around Lethbridge, he said: "They're actually not municipalities for one. They receive most of their – just about everything they do is in the city of Lethbridge." That is that member coming up and trying to ask a question when that member got exactly what he wanted. Those were hybrid ridings. On this side of the House we keep receipts.

**Member Miyashiro:** Very good.

Well, given that NDP and UCP supporters alike as well as long-time conservatives sent e-mails opposing the gerrymandered map and

the UCP's process to redraw those maps, given that many of those e-mails expressed disappointment that the MLA for Lethbridge-East, aka the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services, seems to represent the government to his constituency versus representing the concerns of constituents to the government, why won't the minister listen to his constituents and vote against these gerrymandered maps that are designed to steal the election?

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, despite that member having prewritten questions before him, it sounds like he's in a little bit of a pickle here because he's got no idea how to ask a question for which he contributed to the outcome of the hybrid ridings in Lethbridge. No, he's not going to get a sound clip for today, but I'd hope that you'd send this sound clip so that I can post it on my Facebook and the Member for Lethbridge-East can post it on his. Hybrid ridings are here to stay. They've always been part of Alberta, and the members of Lethbridge can thank the Member for Lethbridge-West for their wonderful hybrid riding.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Camrose.

### Road Construction in Camrose Constituency

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway safety is important to every family in Alberta, and communities across Camrose constituency know just how devastating serious collisions can be. Our government has always been and will continue to be committed to improving roads to ensure people can get back home to their loved ones after a long day. Can the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors please provide an update on a vital stretch of road in the Camrose constituency, highway 21?

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

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Member for Camrose for her strong advocacy for her constituency and especially on highway 21. I'm happy to say that highway 21 passing lane designed between Armena and Hay Lakes is well under way. We're planning to have the design work tendered out by next year, but this is just a pattern with this government of having a commitment to improving the quality of life for all Albertans in every corner of this province.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Camrose.

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that response. Given that in Alberta we have two seasons, winter and construction season, and with that comes a lot of roadwork, employing thousands of people every year, but given there will always be work to do not just in building new roads but maintaining busy corridors we already have, can the same minister please provide an update on work being done on highway 14?

***2:30***

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, west of Tofield there's a 19-kilometre stretch that is targeted for repaving as well as an upgrade at highways 630 and 833. We actually have McElhanney that's doing the engineering work right now. Just further east of that project we have a roundabout in design at highways 14 and 36. Again, these are important projects to make sure that not just goods can get to market and that we can grow our economy but also that families in the area can get home safely.

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you, Minister. That is great news. Given that safe and reliable highways are essential for connecting communities, supporting families, and driving Alberta's economy and given that, as you have outlined, our government continues to make significant investments in transportation infrastructure to improve safety and mobility across the province, to the same minister: can you please provide an update on the work being done to improve highway conditions through repaving and grading across Alberta and the process that goes into identifying and prioritizing different projects?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The budget that was passed just last year has $8 billion over three years for transportation projects all across this province. It's interesting that on this side of the House we can get projects built when it comes to infrastructure. I don't think that Albertans can obviously trust the Leader of the NDP when it comes to infrastructure. He would ignore water infrastructure reports. Couldn't design or build any transit in the city of Calgary. The green line: a big, huge anchor hanging over his head. I don't even think I trust him to build a bike lane. But on this side we can make sure that we build infrastructure.

**The Speaker:** The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

### Public Service Compensation

**Ms Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we are joined by members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. They've raised serious concerns about declining public service funding, staffing shortages, and the pressure facing front-line workers. Instead of the minister finding time to meet with the workers who keep this province running, this government has been consumed with redrawing electoral boundaries in a way that many Albertans see as an attempt to steal the next election. To the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services: why has this government given up earning Albertans' trust and instead decided it's easier to win by redrawing electoral maps?

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, this government has given increases to our unions and our public service amongst the highest in the country and is spending unprecedented amounts on every line item to be able to make sure we can provide services, particularly to our large, increasing population. You know who did not provide increases to unions? It was the NDP when they were on this side of the aisle. They declared themselves the party of the working man and woman, and they gave them zero the entire time that they were in power. They care about unions as much as they seem to care about the tradesmen and women that they make fun of each day in this Chamber.

**Ms Wright:** Given that Albertans see a government fighting with workers while obsessing over changing electoral boundaries to save unpopular cabinet ministers from a trumping political defeat, given that Lethbridge residents are asking for fair representation and have the right to pick their politicians, not be picked by politicians, if this government is truly confident that it has Albertans' support, why is it spending so much effort defending partisan boundary changes to steal the next election instead of respecting workers' rights to advocate on behalf of the people they serve and care for?

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, this side of the House has made agreements with all of our public-sector unions. There's a period of labour peace, something that Alberta should be very, very proud of. I can tell you that what does not help with labour negotiations or anything to do with

budgeting is what the NDP did: over $80 billion in debt in their time in power; nonstop credit downgrades, making it harder to be able to borrow money; not building things like housing; and, in particular, not building things like continuing care centres, which never happened underneath the NDP government. Not one got built.

**Ms Wright:** Given that Albertans want a government focused on the cost of living, health care, seniors' care, and the quality of public services in their communities, given that residents in Lethbridge didn't advocate for hybrid ridings or for their votes to be worth less, given that Lethbridge boundaries look an awful lot like they've been drawn to protect the minister of assisted living and not for constituents, why is this government trying to redraw the map instead of addressing their own failures that have caused so many Albertans to lose confidence in their governance?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we heard from the Member for Lethbridge-West already. He does want the riding that was drawn.

That said, again, we're very proud of the agreements that we've been able to bring into place with our unions, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to continue to work with the men and women that provide the services all across this province. But we cannot do that if we go down the road that the NDP socialists did when they were on this side of the House, which is bringing in some of the largest debts in the history of the province, bringing in the job-killing carbon tax, and continuing to be able to make sure that we could not pay our bills and to attack the men and women that work inside trades across the province.

## AER Board Meetings in Fort McMurray

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Mr. Speaker, I would love to see the menu the energy minister picked to wine and dine the Alberta Energy Regulator's CEO and board. Was it steak au poivre and lobster risotto? And what was served for dessert? But the real dessert may have been a $20,000 pay raise for the AER board chair. What's with the entitlement? Is this what happens when an independent regulator stops acting independently? Why is the minister rewarding the AER leadership instead of meeting with landowners?

**Mr. Jean:** Mr. Speaker, the only provinces that actually compare to Alberta's provincial GDP in the energy sector are Ontario, B.C., Quebec, and Saskatchewan; $81.6 billion in real GDP. That's managed by the AER board. These people are experts. They are highly trained. They know Alberta. They know the energy sector. I'm not going to apologize for having the best people in the world receive a fair salary for the work they do.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Given that the UCP has been busy gerrymandering, shutting landowners out of consultations, and ignoring their concerns while the energy minister spends three days wining and dining the AER leadership in Wood Buffalo at the same time the UCP caucus is holding its retreat, given that the regulator is supposed to be independent, was this one big coincidence? Or were the AER leadership invited to join the UCP caucus retreat? Albertans deserve to know. Was this an AER leadership meeting or a UCP political retreat with a few extra guests?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Jean:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to let the member know first of all that people from all over the world send their regulators here to Alberta to learn because they are the best in the world. As far as the Alberta Energy Regulator and their board being in Fort McMurray to look at the oil sands, I would hope so.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Given that the UCP treats conflict of interest rules and regulatory independence like optional guidelines, given that the minister thinks it's perfectly appropriate to post photos of himself wining and dining the CEO and board of Alberta's biggest industry regulator, given that when the regulator and the governing party are dining in the same backyard, Albertans have every right to ask who is calling the shots, when will the minister stop meddling with the regulator and start meeting the rural landowners his government keeps shutting out?

**Mr. Jean:** Mr. Speaker, I remember that night. It was nice to see them. We were at The Keg. Great restaurant. It was actually that evening because that day was full of all sorts of companies from all over Alberta, Canada, and the world at the heavy oil show in Fort McMurray, the oil sands show. It's a great trade show. I would invite the member. Actually, I'd invite all the members of the NDP caucus up there. We have it every year in September. It's a great event. We learn all about oil and how important it is to the people of Alberta, how many jobs it creates, how many hospitals it builds. It's an amazing product, and we have it and we own it. I'm not going to apologize for that.

## Electoral Boundaries Committee Report

**Member Kayande:** Mr. Speaker, the recommendations of the legitimate Electoral Boundaries Commission led by Justice Miller were clear: 89 seats, a fair map prioritizing communities of interest instead of vulnerable UCP cabinet ministers. So, of course, the UCP were appalled. To dissuade them from forcing through their unconstitutional minority map, Justice Miller offered a personal comment to restore two rural seats subject to no changes south of Airdrie. The UCP twisted his commentary to justify gerrymandering. Why does the UCP continue to disrespect Justice Miller?

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, what a ridiculous question, and the line of questioning makes it clear what the NDP priorities are, which are focusing on fabricating outrage and getting thrown out of this Chamber, disrespecting traditions instead of focusing on what we're focusing on, which is jobs, affordability, and balancing a budget. The members opposite could never balance a budget on their best day. They couldn't create anywhere near the jobs we have. The 300,000 are the Premier. I can tell you that we have the lowest cost of living in this country, and that's not going to change. That's what we're focused on.

***2:40***

**Member Kayande:** Given that the gerrymandered map from the UCP's unprecedented do-over panel tramples all over the recommendations of Justice Miller and given that the UCP's do-it-yourself map ignores the wishes of Calgarians who told Justice Miller that they did not want their communities to be hybridized and instead delivers wish fulfillment for this government's weakest ministers and given that this map weights the votes of some Albertans more than twice as much as others, does the UCP really think Albertans will fall for this sham of a process?

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the members opposite for recommending 91 seats and for recommending hybrid ridings because that's what's in the report. I also can tell the members that we're focused on things like affordability, jobs, and a balanced budget, and this government has delivered consecutive balanced budgets because of the fiscal prudence of our Premier and consecutive Finance ministers. I'm grateful and so are Albertans, and because of that we continue to attract investment, billions of dollars of it, which is also creating jobs, something the members

opposite drove out of this province for four years while they were in government.

**Member Kayande:** Given that the ridiculous report from the UCP's sham panel expounds on the importance of golf courses for communities of interest while ignoring Calgary's municipal boundaries and given that the ones who stand to benefit most from this electoral Etch A Sketch are precisely the three UCP ministers who barely held onto their seats in the last election and given that this map clearly does not benefit Calgarians but clearly helps the UCP, will the government just come clean like their MAGA Republican cousins and admit that they're trying to steal the next election?

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker: a bit dramatic. I'll leave the theatrics to the opposition. On this side of the House we're focused on jobs, affordability, and balancing the budget, and those three important things matter to all Albertans because right now they're very conscientious of what they're having to spend and when they spend it. That is why we cut the fuel tax, 13 cents a litre, and we now have the cheapest gas in the entire country by a landslide. You can thank the government for that because we listened, something the members opposite – they call consultation a sham. We call it listening to our bosses. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order.

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

## Notices of Motions

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

**Mr. Schow:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 47 there will be no evening sitting today.

## Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** Are there tablings? The Justice minister.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of the 2026 Electoral Boundaries Commission public hearing transcript that I referenced today.

**The Speaker:** Calgary-Buffalo.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of letters to my office from constituents concerned about the hyperscale data centre proposal outside of Indus, on the east border of Calgary.

**The Speaker:** Sherwood Park.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I've got the copies of letters to my constituency from people opposed to AI hyperscale data centres.

## Orders of the Day

### Government Bills and Orders
### Third Reading

### Bill 40
### Electoral Divisions Act

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 40, the Electoral Divisions Act.

There's been a lot of robust debate in this Assembly; but as I've said in previous debates, Bill 40 is about ensuring that Albertans continue to have fair and meaningful and effective representation in this Legislature. The proposed Electoral Divisions Act would repeal the existing electoral divisions and replace them with 91 new divisions approved in a resolution passed by the Legislative Assembly. This increase in the number of electoral divisions reflects Alberta's population growth, but it also reflects the effective representation that is needed to make sure that Albertans have access to their elected representatives no matter where they live.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to address one of the themes of the debate that we've had over the electoral divisions, namely the divisions that combine urban and rural ridings, which we have commonly referred to here in this Assembly as hybrid ridings. They already exist in Alberta, and they've existed for a very long time. There are also places across Canada where they exist, at both the provincial and federal level. Both the majority and the minority of the independent advisory panel recognize that hybrid ridings are a legitimate means of ensuring effective representation. Hybrid ridings have also been upheld by the courts, where they preserve the right to effective representation guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We believe that hybrid ridings proposed in this act preserve the right to effective representation.

Mr. Speaker, we know full well that our communities are more integrated and interconnected than ever. We know that part of that was done, not by choice necessarily, through the pandemic where connectivity, Teams meetings, and work from home became commonplace. Members of this Assembly have had plenty of time and plenty of opportunities to debate the proposed boundaries as the bill proceeded through its various stages. But one theme that continues to appear to be problematic for the opposition are these hybrid ridings. We think that it's important to have communities of interest share in their ability to access and reach their elected representatives. And there has been plenty of input, especially from Albertans, from an independent commission and an independent panel and from members of this Assembly on the proposed boundaries and effective representation for all Albertans.

This conversation is important, and I welcome and value the contributions of every single member in this Assembly, who have had the opportunity to weigh in on it. It's essential to our democracy, and I'm certainly happy that there has been such robust participation. But now, Mr. Speaker, it is time to move forward. It is time to give Elections Alberta the opportunity and the time to set up for the next election because the next election is fixed and scheduled for October 18, 2027. Albertans need and deserve to have certainty on the electoral divisions that will be in place for that election, and passing Bill 40 will give Albertans that certainty.

Mr. Speaker, I'm confident that the divisions in the proposed Electoral Divisions Act reflect population growth, communities of interest, effective representation, and making sure that no matter where you live in Alberta, you have reasonable access to your member of this Assembly, and that is important, I think, to all of us.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I encourage everyone to vote in favour of the passing of this bill and, once again, I move third reading of Bill 40, the Electoral Divisions Act. Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Member for the Official Opposition.

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, at third reading, allow me to rebut the minister directly because there were a number of things he said there that were ridiculous, including that there has been robust debate on this issue. He thanked and welcomed and appreciated the members who have spoken, which I can tell you that you can count them on one hand. Because they have time allocated this, they have not had the opportunity to participate, and there has not been robust debate.

Now, the minister is also wrong about this report and this bill respecting the voting rights of Albertans. It does not represent effective representation, and, in fact, effective representation is undermined in this panel report that the government is intent on passing in a number of ways, some of which we have had time to unpack, many of which we have not had the time because there has been no opportunity for debate, Mr. Speaker. The difference between the majority and the minority panel reports here are on who supports gerrymandered ridings and who does not. That is the difference. The minister would love to say that there is some discussion about hybrid ridings that is happening. That is not true. The conversation has been and is around gerrymandering. The conversation has been and is about the mandate of the panel and whether the panel completely exceeded the mandate.

***2:50***

Let us remind everyone that the mandate was one set by this government, espoused by this Premier and this minister, promised to media, to Albertans, to this Chamber that the mandate would be of importance. They used the excuse of Justice Miller's addendum but said that they would follow his recommendations, which included no changes south of Airdrie. Then their panel appointees very deliberately and very wilfully went out and did the exact opposite. The government to this day has never addressed why they have no concern with the fact that the mandate was fully exceeded, why their guarantees to Albertans were fully ignored. Perhaps because it was at their behest and because their panel appointees were told something different than what Albertans were told about what was happening and why it was happening.

We will not know that for sure, Mr. Speaker, because, of course, this panel was a black box, and who they spoke to and who they consulted with and how they operated is all information that has been prevented from being shared with Albertans. The Official Opposition tried through multiple motions in the subcommittee and in the work that was happening, but that was not allowed to come forward. What we see is a report where communities of interest were literally split apart to allow for gerrymandering and to allow for partisan benefits to UCP cabinet ministers.

Mr. Speaker, the panel was not independent. The panel was partisan. The majority members were UCP donors, and they went far, far beyond and exceeded the mandate.

Now, I will draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to earlier in question period. We were all here when the Premier started worrying about who would win new seats as if that kind of logic would justify the maps that are before this House. Worrying about who would win potential seats shows that the Premier's entire approach to this process is partisan and flawed. Who should win or would win has no impact on creating maps that provide effective representation, maps that respect communities of interest, but gerrymandered maps sure do. Yet the Premier is the only one talking about who wins certain seats, and that is because that has been their focus from the very beginning.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful that I had the opportunity to speak to this bill at second and at committee. That only came about because, of course, my caucus colleagues supported my ability to speak multiple times under time allocation because of the work that I did sitting on the committee that this government invented to start off this whole new process. But I can tell you that none of this should have happened up until this point.

During my debate in second reading and at Committee of the Whole I talked a lot about the original mandate, the original majority report and what it stood for. I have to say once again quite clearly, because the government is not listening and has not heard but it remains incredibly important, that there was a majority report tabled in this House in March of this year that had the input of hundreds of Albertans, thousands of submissions, the support of a majority, and provided effective representation. That was the map that the Premier likes to describe where probably nobody's happy; put a little water in your wine. There were negotiations that were had, and it was a reflection of what Albertans asked for. That was the map that should have been adopted by this Legislature and could still be adopted.

I encourage the government to not support Bill 40 and to go back to the original, truly independent commission and support that legitimate process. Instead, what the government has done is pointed to an addendum written by a single member of the original commission that did not have majority support. The government has then gone on to mischaracterize what they were doing and talk about it having majority support over and over and over, including when the minister was moving second reading of this bill, in an attempt to muddy the waters
and to confuse what is happening.

Mr. Speaker, a single member offered an alternative because he was so worried about the partisan nature of the minority report that was put forward by the UCP appointees on the commission at the last minute. He referred to it as unconstitutional. He referred to it as something that brought him deep concern regarding the unconstitutionality and administrative law problems of the minority report, and it was because of that deep concern that he felt it necessary to make this recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, it is shocking that on the very first page of the panel report when it is tabled, we see them doing an acknowledgements page on page 1, that says, "The advisory panel was also assisted by the recommendations of the much-maligned Minority Commissioners." Let's remember that Justice Miller referred to those minority reports as deeply concerning with unconstitutionality and administrative law problems. The only reason the door was opened even a little bit was to avoid massive issues with unconstitutional recommendations in the minority report, and the first thing that the panel does on page 1 of the report is refer to those minority commissioners as "much-maligned." As soon as you see that, you know what this panel report is about to do. That is gerrymandering. That is unconstitutional changes, and that is going against the best interests of Albertans, about the community interests, and their right to vote. When we say unconstitutional, that is what we're talking about, Albertans' right to vote and have their say.

Now, the government continues to talk about Justice Miller's addendum while ignoring his original intent, ignoring the restrictions that he put on it – i.e. do not make any changes south of Airdrie – and ignoring his concerns about the unconstitutionality and administrative law problems. Instead, they are now driving full force towards a gerrymandered map, ignoring all of the above.

Those are not the only things concerning in this report, Mr. Speaker. There are shocking things throughout; the praise for the "much-maligned Minority Commissioners" – shocking – on page 1. On page 4, they start calling people who were worried about the Constitution and democratic norms "sanctimonious." We have literal name-calling happening in this report on page 4. Shocking. What are we reading here? On page 64 they justify the gerrymandering in Calgary-Bow because of golf courses. On page 68 they justify the

gerrymandering of Calgary-West because of golf courses. What are we reading in this document?

When you run the majority report through an AI detection tool, parts of this come up as if written by AI. It's not conclusive, but I believe it. Mr. Speaker, what has this government done to our democracy in ramming through a map that is so deeply concerning that we know that the Canadian Bar Association and the Acting Chief Justice didn't even want to participate in a consulting way because what was happening here was so deeply out of the norms?

Mr. Speaker, I would point you to the multiple sections on Lethbridge for additional concerning content here. The fact that we have a report that ignores the public submissions that were made in the original commission, given that the panel was supposed to take the work the commission did, the majority maps, make minor changes, and review all of the consultation that had taken place, and instead we see a map that goes against what the majority of the people who participated from Lethbridge said on a 5 to 1 basis. The government continues to mischaracterize what people said, when they said it, to do anything to justify their gerrymandering of these maps to win the next election.

Taking away Albertans' right to vote, the constitutionally protected right to vote, to ram these maps through is stealing the next election, Mr. Speaker, and we see the behaviour from this government repeatedly.

***3:00***

Not only does the Premier use partisan language and try to defend who would win or who would not, we see that from the Premier's chief of staff on Twitter, and we see that from the panel when they've requested from our committee to be able to talk to a pollster and a political scientist who had knowledge about voting behaviour. These are the things that tell us what went into this absolutely irregular process that was made up by the government, that we couldn't even get advice on because, of course, they just wrote a motion that made sense to them. And after telling us repeatedly in this House that the recommendation from Justice Miller would be followed, we now have a majority report that absolutely does the opposite, and the government won't talk about that or justify it because it gives them the partisan gains that they wanted from the beginning.

This is a shocking trampling of democracy, and, Mr. Speaker, the public sees it. Reporters and experts see it. We just saw a letter signed by 63 academics, from universities across this province, absolutely concerned about not only what is happening here in Alberta – and I encourage all to review. If you just Google "63 experts Alberta boundaries", you will find it. But it's concerned about the precedent that this sets going forward and what will happen not just here in Alberta but across Canada. It reads:

> Allowing a government to replace an independent commission's recommendations with boundaries that appear to favour its own re-election ... sets a dangerous precedent. Future governments in Alberta and potentially across Canada will face pressure to do the same, and will be able to point to this government's precedent in doing so. Each new map could become an opportunity to secure a partisan advantage or undo the advantage claimed by a predecessor. This risks reversing progress for over five decades of arms-length map making in this country.

That arm's-length map-making, that taking out the partisan nature, that is not what we had. On the panel we had three UCP appointees who had all made partisan donations and one who made donations while he was on the panel. It's ridiculous, Mr. Speaker. It does harm to Alberta. It does harm to Alberta voters because these maps are not good for anyone. They're not good for rural voters or urban voters. It takes away rights throughout, and it's incredibly frustrating to me.

On page 91, the majority panel complains that "far too much of the . . . panel's time and energy was spent debating the panel's mandate." The thing that the Premier and the minister promised would be followed and was the only – they were just going to do some minor changes, Mr. Speaker, don't you know? We're going to take the majority. It'll be mostly the majority. We're just going to add two ridings back in, two rural ridings. Instead, we have the worst gerrymandering in Canadian history when there is no close second; instead, we have changes made throughout south of Airdrie; and instead, we have something that disrespects Albertans. It disrespects every Albertan who participated in the process, and it disrespects every Albertan who wants to vote in the next election and to be able to have a say in who their government is.

It is ridiculous, Mr. Speaker, and for the minister to move third reading and to tell us that there has been robust debate. Ridiculous. It continues a pattern of that minister willing to say the exact opposite of whatever is happening. And I think that that kind of disrespectful behaviour should stop. I think that we need to follow the original boundary commission work that was done over years that included consultation with Albertans and of which there was a clear majority report put forward in this Chamber, like governments in Alberta's history have done throughout the past several decades. The fact that the government broke norms, lied to voters about what they were doing and why, and brought forward a gerrymandered map is absolutely shameful on them. I am in opposition to Bill 40 and I encourage all members to vote against it.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Official Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You'll be relieved to know that the one good thing about time allocation is that I can't take my full 90 minutes, so I will be briefer than normal. But I do rise to debate Bill 40, and in so debating, I want to issue a thought for the members opposite, indeed to all members of this House. Each of us stands here elected by the will of our constituents, elected by our neighbours. Every single vote that was cast in our ridings, whether for us or against us, meant something. Somebody stood in line, they gave up an afternoon or an evening, and they said: this is important enough to me that I want to mark a ballot. That act means so much more than just the X on the ballot. Every single vote represents the sum total of a citizen's hopes and dreams and fears for themselves, for their families, for their community, and for their province. Every single vote is a statement on the kind of Alberta that they want.

Every single one of us is meant to come here, carrying those hopes and dreams with us. I've been in public life for a long time, Mr. Speaker, 16 years, and every single morning I remind myself that today, even for a second, I get to hold those hopes and dreams in the palm of my hand. It's a daunting responsibility, but it's a responsibility that I take seriously every single day. I'm so sad that in the two years that I've been in this – well, two years since I've been in this job, a year since I've been in this Chamber. I know it's only been a year to see this government violate that trust over and over and over again, to throw away the desires and needs of their constituents, to throw away any desire to make their constituents' lives better in preference for political games, for scoring points, for gamesmanship, and for anything that will keep them in power. All politicians want to be in power. That's part of the point of the game. But what makes this government unique is that they don't seem to want to do anything with that power. They don't seem to want to make life better for anyone.

Yesterday, in all this drama, we almost overlooked the fact that it's the worst day of the year. It is the day that the office of the Child and Youth Advocate releases their report. Every year without fail we hear about children who are the victims of abuse in care. Every

year without fail we see the numbers of children dying in care growing and growing, and every year without fail the government does nothing.

If we can't look after the most vulnerable people in our community, if we are so focused on games that maintain power, what kind of government are we? Why do we come here? Why do we stand in this House? To me it is both sad and shameful that this bill before us dares us to disrespect and break trust with Albertans, the very Albertans who elected each and every one of us. Make no mistake, that is what Bill 40 does. It's asking us to accept that politicians, the people in this room, have the power to diminish Albertans' right to vote, a right that is so sacred that it is granted a special place in our Charter of Rights, a special place in our Constitution, a place, by the way, that cannot be overridden by the Premier's favourite get-out-of-jail card, the notwithstanding clause. It's so important that the drafters of the Constitution did not allow it to ever be overridden. Parliamentary supremacy does not apply in this case. It's a right that many people around the world have died for.

It's been a crazy few weeks, but I want to remind folks that it was only two weeks ago today that many of us were in our constituencies on Remembrance Day. Some of us may have mouthed platitudes on that day but remember what we said. We had a moment of silence. At the end of the moment of silence, there was an act of remembrance, and at the end of that act of remembrance we vowed that we will remember.

Remembering is false and empty if it doesn't come with action. Young women and men from across this country died so that people in other countries could have just a taste, just a flavor of the freedoms that we enjoy today, and for this government to act so shamelessly and act like these rights are so light and so unimportant is something that should make us all nervous.

I know many of the members opposite. I knew many of them before politics. I knew them to be good people. I knew them to want to get into politics to do the right thing, and almost every day as I sit in this beautiful chair, I think: how do you sit there every day? How do you sit there every day as part of a government that takes that sacred trust so lightly, so shamelessly, a government that does not care about accountability?

***3:10***

So let's make no mistake; let's not play games here. This is all about one thing. This is about this government always wanting a gerrymandered map. When I first started in this job, it was the beginning of the independent Electoral Boundaries Commission, and I remember the Minister of Justice standing up and passing a very odd bill. Usually independent boundaries commissions have the right to determine how many seats they want to add once they do the math, once they develop the maps within a certain range.

It was very strange to me as a newcomer to this place that the minister was standing up and prescribing a number of constituencies that had to come out in the new map. What was even more surprising was that despite the fact that the Premier had not yet learned on Twitter that Alberta's population was, in fact, growing – she was still asking for Red Deer to be a million people and for doubling Alberta's population – we all knew, and certainly in my old job I certainly knew, that the population was growing and that, certainly, Calgary and Edmonton required new seats, but the government said no.

The government was scared of adding extra seats to Calgary and Edmonton, so they said: "We can probably get away with it. Albertans won't notice if we add two seats – one to Calgary, one to Edmonton – and we'll change the boundaries so that those aren't strictly urban seats." But the commission did the math. The commission did the work and realized that wouldn't work, that constitutionally the urban seats would be too high in population and the vote would be too diluted, so they had to move some things around. They ended up adding two seats to Calgary and – I hope someone has finally told the Premier – only one seat to Edmonton. We're just within the range of what is legally and constitutionally allowed for the dilution of those votes.

I remember sitting here in the House that day, the day the interim report came out. We were really nervous. We thought that it would have been gerrymandered, but we also paid attention to the public hearings where thousands of Albertans came. We were thrilled to see that it was a unanimous report where the conservatives and the New Democrats and the justice all agreed. I remember asking the Minister of Justice a question just before the report was tabled in the House, and he said the commission has done, quote, great work, unquote. He said, "the commission is independent and we are going to respect the independence of the report."

Just a few minutes later the report was handed out in this House. I was flipping through it, and I was like, "Oh, this isn't so bad. Oh, I don't like that, but this isn't so bad." I saw the minister flipping through it and I saw his face fall. It wasn't even an hour later that he started casting doubts on the report that he had called great work just an hour earlier because those maps did not show what the minister wanted them to show. This is a very real problem, Mr. Speaker. They have a bad poker face over there. They're bad at covering their tracks, and it became very, very clear what the intent of this government was right then and right there.

I don't need to relitigate everything that happened after that. We had a second round of public hearings in which hundreds of Albertans took their time, which never happens. Listen, I've been to a gabillion public hearings, and it is extremely rare for members of the public to take their time and come to a public hearing and say: I like this. Usually people come when they have something to complain about. Hundreds of Albertans came and said, "This is good; this is good," except for a few who came with maps that we now know were using taxpayer resources, were drawn up by this government.

We know they did. The Premier's own staffer bragged about it. He should know by now that in northeast Calgary there are no secrets. We know everything that happens in northeast Calgary, and he went around and bragged about it over and over and over again. We know this happened. We know that those members of the UCP who had voted for the interim report voted against the final report even though it was almost exactly the same. They brought up these same maps, the Happy Mann maps, I call them, that were clearly written using taxpayer resources, yet the government expects us to believe there was no interference.

But the government still didn't get what they wanted. They seized on Justice Miller's recommendation – it wasn't a recommendation. It was his addendum, in which he said that if the government is not going to do what they must do by law, please don't adopt the minority report; here's an escape clause if you must adopt the minority report. And the government has been pretending for almost a year that those were the recommendations of the commission, which they were not. No matter how many times the Minister of Justice and the Premier say it, they were not the recommendations of the majority report. The justice clearly says that not one of the other commission members agreed with this outcome.

So that's where we are. We've gone through the creation of a sham process, a process where the UCP is pretending that they appointed an independent panel, but of course they appointed UCP donors not for two positions but for all three. I would have trouble remembering the names – no disrespect to the members – of the members we appointed because I stayed out of this process. The government clearly, clearly did not.

Let's be extremely clear. As much as the Minister of Justice wants to pretend this is about disparaging the reputation of a justice

in the chair, it's about disparaging his work. It's about disparaging when he calls people who disagree with him "sanctimonious." He would not have gotten away with that on the bench. And let me tell you that this is also a justice who is not an active justice. He is retired, and the moment he retired from the bench, he started donating to the UCP, and he never stopped. So the UCP's sham that this is somehow independent: we know it's not true. Albertans know it's not true.

Let's just take a really quick look at what is actually in the bill before us. First of all, the government has carved up the third-largest city in Alberta, Lethbridge, into four ridings. They stuff 60,000 people, one of the largest ridings in Alberta, into a downtown Lethbridge riding, and they take the rest of Lethbridge – that's 50,000 people; that is more people than in most of the ridings represented by the members opposite – and split them into three rural ridings that stretch to the Rocky Mountains, the U.S. border, the Saskatchewan border, and my house, just north of the Trans-Canada highway. I don't think I live that close to Lethbridge. But this is what they did.

Remember, this is what Justice Miller – let's remember. Where did Justice Miller sit on the bench for 16 years? Yeah, Lethbridge. And Justice Miller says that that is radical surgery. Lethbridgians came out in droves to say, "Don't carve up our city," 5 to 1. They said: don't do this. Yet this government did this anyway.

Let's just quickly turn to Calgary. There are several seats in Calgary where the government barely won the last election, very vulnerable ministers who, if an election were held today, would not just lose but lose very badly.

**An Hon. Member:** Sure about that?

**Mr. Nenshi:** Oh, yes. Look at Calgary-Shaw.

They shore up only those ridings, only the ridings of vulnerable ministers. They weren't even smart enough to cover their tracks. They do it only for vulnerable ministers. This is really the critical issue. When you read it, they use golf courses as justification. You know, Mr. Speaker, I used to run the municipal golf courses, and we know that while it's a very valuable service, it is a service that is used by a very small number of citizens. [interjection] But they use golf courses as their primary justification for why they want to do this. There is no other justification.

I encourage the Government House Leader – he's got lots of spare time – to read the report, and you'll be shocked at what the justice has written about how golf courses define communities not once, not twice but over and over and over. As a result, each riding in Calgary and Edmonton – each riding in Calgary and Edmonton – has 7,000 more voters than a riding outside of Calgary and Edmonton. Seven thousand more voters. A voter in the new riding that was put in by this independent panel of Rocky Mountain House-Sundre: their vote is worth almost three times as much as a voter in the most populous riding in the province.

I need to highlight that this is not normal. The government makes it sound like this is just business as usual. It reminds me of Brian Mulroney and Karlheinz Schreiber, if anyone is old enough to remember that, when Brian Mulroney's argument for accepting envelopes stuffed with cash was: this is how he thought business was done.

***3:20***

This government seems to think that this is how business is done, but it is not how business is done, and this is the critical thing that I want to leave this House with. This is unprecedented in Canadian history. This is not how business is done. When the Premier smugly says, "the maps drawn by Rachel Notley," when at least two if not five ministers of the Crown walk around in their constituencies and say, "We drew you a great map," or tell us that cabinet had direct input on the lines drawn on the map: this is not done. This is not normal. This is illegal. It is unprecedented, and it is unconstitutional.

At the end of the day, I say to the members opposite: you're going to lose the election anyway, but do you want your legacy to be that you lost as cheaters? I encourage everyone to vote against this.

**The Acting Speaker:** I encourage the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to apologize and withdraw for using comments that have been determined . . .

**Mr. Nenshi:** I'll apologize and withdraw for the last one.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

Are there others who are wishing to speak? The Member for St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, rising to speak to Bill 40 right before it gets sent out of this place is a place I never thought I would be at the cusp of, watching something so awful and degrading to our democracy happen right in front of our faces. What has been more insulting even has been having to listen to the greatest hits of their poor excuses about why they had to do this. It has been ridiculous. Now, maybe you've spent too much time in this place. You think it's funny? You like it? Albertans see right through it. They see what you're doing. They see what this government is doing. They know what gerrymandering means. They understand why this desperate government, that sees the writing on the wall, has to gerrymander in order to give themselves an advantage to win the election.

When my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition says that this is the worst case of gerrymandering in Canadian history, it's because it is. It is so incredibly embarrassing that this beautiful, strong province is engaged in this garbage of attempting to rig an election. It is beneath this place. It is beneath the norms of this place. It's insulting that these members continue to get up and spew their ridiculous – ridiculous – assumptions and decisions when we all know what the facts are, Mr. Speaker. They're right here. They're online, the reports. The committee that was struck: they tried so hard to at least make tiny changes so that this could be palatable or at least align with what the independent – the real independent – committee said, and no after no.

Then they show up in this place and they say: "Well, we all got to debate it. We all got to vote on it. What's the problem?" After an hour there's a problem. There are 87 of us, and we all have constituents. I know you don't like it, but we have a lot of constituents, and they're pissed off. Now, they like to talk about: we totally went through it all in this place; I don't know what the opposition is talking about. Well, in government speak all that means is that we hated the bill, we hated the changes because we knew it was gerrymandering, but they have more votes than us, so they jammed it through, just like they do on all the other things. They turned that into an opportunity – oh, I'm really sorry about that. It was my hand. Sorry. Lost my train of thought now. They turn that into an opportunity – I forgot where I was going, so let me just move on.

Now, in plain language I'm just going to say it for the people I know that are watching that understand what's happening in this place despite the fact that they don't have a legal background or they aren't sitting members or, you know, they don't know a lot about democracy. What they do know a lot about is cheating. Oh, I'm sorry. I apologize and withdraw. Rigging.

**The Acting Speaker:** You may sit down now, please.

**Ms Renaud:** Sorry?

**The Acting Speaker:** You may sit down.

**Ms Renaud:** For what reason?

**The Acting Speaker:** Because I'm standing.

**Ms Renaud:** Oh, okay.

**The Acting Speaker:** That was intentional. I view that as an intentional comment.

**Ms Renaud:** It wasn't.

**The Acting Speaker:** I will not allow that to be going forward. The apology and the withdrawal are acknowledged. But if it is to happen again, I will have to interject and essentially rule at that time again.

The Member for St. Albert can continue.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you. Now, this is really just another activity. It's kind of like the cherry on top, Mr. Speaker, of the work that this government has been doing to give themselves an advantage in the upcoming election. The voter suppression that we have seen over the last few years is nutty. I mean, I sometimes watch American news because I like to see the nuttiness that's going on over there. I don't like to see it – it's actually quite alarming – but I watch it. And then it's almost like: I see them do it there; I know it's coming here. It's like a MAGA playbook: the voter suppression, the gerrymandering, the gaslighting. You know, if I say that this was not independent, they're saying: yes, it was. I'm saying that the majority of people in Alberta don't agree with it; yes, they did, because we have a majority.

It has been ridiculous because in this place we're not actually listening to all of our constituents. My constituents don't all like me. They don't all agree with me, but I represent all of them, every single one of them. You know what they think, Mr. Speaker? It's not hard because I get flooded with e-mails and calls and texts and messages and online, and they tell me that they're appalled. They're appalled by the fact that tabulators were removed and then, you know, a million dollars to municipalities to deal with their conspiracy theories. And then we see the voter places, all of the confusion there and the hours, when you have the Election Commissioner tell you that they didn't have enough money to do the job you asked them to do, so you're setting them up for failure. All of these things added together eventually tipped the scale.

Gerrymandering is just the cherry on top, Mr. Speaker, but here's the thing that we know. I mentioned I watch American news. Did y'all see what happened in the midterms? Not too much longer. It's going to happen here. Albertans see what's happening. They're not stupid. They watch, and they know that the people that they elect are elected to actually represent them, not the party. And that is what we have seen from this government. I know their constituents are telling them otherwise because they e-mail me. They copied me. So the minister for red tape reduction: the new maps, the gerrymandered maps for that, literally have the St. Albert riding almost 7,000 voters more than the Morinville-St. Albert riding. Why? The reason is because of a data centre that's coming. That's only 300 permanent jobs. You don't leave that kind of gap for a reason like that, but that's because their greatest hits of excuses are ridiculous.

I can't believe that we are in this place actually talking about such a deeply serious foundation of our democracy, and that is free and fair elections.

Can I get a time check, Mr. Speaker?

**The Acting Speaker:** There are eight minutes left.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to touch on before I wrap up and just talk about one of my colleagues' new maps. You know, I did a member's statement a little bit earlier today, and I talked about, particularly, the Member for Lethbridge-East because that's really the area that is such a good example of the gerrymandering that we're referring to. Then I think about all of the time and energy that has gone into protecting or explaining these ridiculous, gerrymandered maps instead of doing his job. You know what his job is? To represent the people of Lethbridge. He has got to know that the people in Lethbridge are going to be different and their needs are going to be different from people 150 kilometres away. Yet that's what the maps look like. Do you think a disabled person in Lethbridge, who has access to emergency funding, who has access to perhaps accessible doctors' offices, who has access to employment perhaps – their needs are far different from someone who lives in a rural community 150 kilometres away, and we need them to have their needs heard and represented properly. If you jam them together with the city, that's not going to happen, Mr. Speaker. We know that. We know that.

***3:30***

We all know that, yet still these members choose to: don't make eye contact; look away. You know what, though? Karma is – well, you know what it is. It goes around, comes around, and when this election finally does come, Albertans will be heard. They will be heard. What this government will hear is that you should have listened. You should have listened to your constituents. Had you listened, you would not be okay with this gerrymandering. Not at all.

I just want to add one more comment. Sorry about that. What this does is that it also dilutes the power of one vote – we know that, just the sheer numbers alone – but what it also does is dilute the representation for people outside of the big cities. For anyone that lives outside of a big city, you know, you probably know that you go to the big city for some services but things are very different, and you know that the MLAs for, let's say, Edmonton are not going to understand the challenges of St. Albert or Spruce Grove or Stony Plain or Leduc or Beaumont. We know that. We know that they're only jamming them together to give themselves an advantage.

I'm going to wrap up. I urge everyone to just vote this down. Kill it.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A lot has been said about this process: about the results, the outcome, the panel, the way they operated, the donations the chair made to the UCP, the absurd cost of this entire process. I think, in closing, what I would like to leave Albertans with are the pieces of evidence, the pieces of evidence that I think paint an incredibly clear picture of a government that is stealing the next election. My apologies. I started writing these a couple of days ago under a different set of rules about what we are and are not allowed to say in this room.

The evidence. First, we have a government that comes in and changes the legislation, removing municipal boundaries, and at the time they claimed: "Oh, don't worry. Don't worry. They'll still be captured by communities of interest." Like so many other things, they were apparently hoping to sneak attack Albertans with this one. Next, the commission process starts. At first everything runs normally. The commission does consultation, hundreds of people make submissions. The record, the opinions of the voters of this province, is so clear that we get a unanimous interim report. The commission goes back, as they normally do. They do more consultation to ensure that their unanimous

report is correct and give the public an opportunity to have input because, after all, that's who this process is about. It's about the public.

Here's where things, Mr. Speaker, begin to get very curious. UCP cabinet ministers start turning up and arguing for hybrids. The UCP commissioners start peppering NDP members with questions about hybrid ridings. In my case, actually, it was quite delightful because I got to repeat the entire argument I had just made to the UCP commissioner. It was almost like he wasn't listening and was just awaiting his turn to try and catch me out. And, oh, look, the members of this House are suddenly having their words twisted by members on the other side, answers to those very same questions put by UCP commissioners. Of course, the one thing has nothing to do with the other, does it? We have our members being misquoted repeatedly in this House. I guess it's a good thing for the Justice minister that he went right ahead and exempted himself from those pesky ethics and competence requirements that bind the rest of us lawyers, isn't it?

Then we start seeing the same maps show up over and over before the commission. Unfortunately, one person forgets to remove an identifier that says "protected A," which is a known government classification, clearly identifying these maps, that suddenly start appearing through random citizens, as having been generated by the government of Alberta, in this case the UCP. We get submissions from a failed UCP cabinet minister that come to mysteriously form part of the UCP minority report.

Then, after such an agreeable and evidence-based interim report, a sudden reversal by the UCP minority commissioners, just randomly, for no reason at all, I'm sure. But when Justice Miller, a UCP appointee I might add, sticks to his ethics and refuses to take direction, when he raises the really obvious questions and concerns about the unexpected and sudden position reversal by the UCP members, well, ultimately, in the end, the UCP sends some hyperpartisans to call him names and accuse him of maligning the minority while simultaneously arguing that if he can be nuanced and put water in his wine, then, you know, why have rules at all, right? Anyway, I digress.

We get a report, a report from the majority of the commission. What should have happened next is that it came into the House, it was concurred with by the Assembly, we got a chance to debate it. We never got a chance to debate it. The UCP shut it down with their motion. This government does what no other government has done before and rejects a recommendation that came from a majority of a commission. That's a real problem.

Mr. Speaker, the UCP have misinformation bots all over the Internet about this, trying to tell people that because the boundaries have been redrawn by previous governments, it's just the same. It's a little like saying that because the court system can put someone in jail, it's okay to lock someone up in your basement. Those things are just not the same. One of them is based on rules and one of them is not. That's how we govern ourselves in this society. So it isn't just the same.

In fact, when Rachel Notley was faced with a commission report that was not ideal for her, that was not ideal for her Speaker, that drew her Justice and Finance ministers together, do you know what she did? She accepted it. That's what someone who cares about Albertans and the rights of Albertans would do. But not the UCP. They never consider putting anyone else's interests first. They put themselves first. They forget about Albertans, the people they are supposed to represent.

This sudden right turn by the UCP minority is so jarring that the justice chairing the panel throws a desperate Hail Mary to try and protect the right to vote of Albertans. That's kind of what judges do. He suggests a third path. Now, the government brings that third path into the House and claims that they were just going to implement that, just the addendum. Of course, they also claim the majority wrote the addendum in the same breath despite the fact that Justice Miller literally says the words, "I am alone in making this recommendation." We were, I think understandably, skeptical.

Now, I didn't love the addendum. I thought that we had the process, we had an outcome, Albertans got to have their input. Like, fair is fair. Let's all move forward. I didn't agree with it but maybe. I think our real concern wasn't the addendum. I mean, the addendum itself was a bit of a concern, but the real concern was that the government up to this point had not demonstrated any particular reason to think that they were trustworthy on this matter.

We got a made-up process, we participated, and we tried to defend the rights of Albertans. Oh, Mr. Speaker, there were so many motions – so many motions – to bring transparency, to allow Albertans to know who the panel spoke to, to protect their right to vote, to access the costs of this whole ridiculous debacle. I think in this argument what I want to highlight is one in particular, and that is a motion that we brought to make the panel members disclose who they spoke to. The commission was on the record. Not only did they consult with Albertans, but it was transcribed. There is a record. The public can access it. They can see who said what and what the basis of the decision was.

***3:40***

Incidentally, we do this in court proceedings. We do this in the Legislature. This is how public process works. It is done in the light of day. Despite that fact, despite that norm, the UCP members used their majority to vote that down. Albertans are not allowed to know who the panel spoke to.

I think it's worth adding at this point who the panel are. I mean, we all know about the UCP commissioners. The government keeps coming in here and suggesting that we're maligning the whole justice system by criticizing the reasoning of one former Court of Appeal justice. First, I will say that I think most lawyers and most judges think it's very reasonable to be held to a standard of reasonable competence – not the Justice minister but everyone else – and I think it's okay to criticize based on relevant factors. They're also well aware of conflict of interest, so I don't think that anyone will be surprised to hear me make the argument that the fact that the courts, the Canadian Bar Association, and the Law Society all refused to participate and we get only one retired justice to put his name forward is curious. One might wonder where he heard about this. He's also made extensive donations to the UCP.

So what we get is a completely closed process, and out the other end comes a report, and we are left to infer. We are left to infer from that report, and I think we can draw some inferences. I want to highlight in particular that the changes that are made, the ones on the northwest edge of Calgary and the ones around Lethbridge and including knock-on effects in Banff-Kananaskis – they sort of defend them by way of saying, like: in light of the thing I've already done, this needs to be done as well. You never needed to do the thing in the first place. No justification is given for why it is that we need to carve up Lethbridge in the first place. After that they're like, "Oh, we can use the people as spare population," but there's no justification for doing the packing and cracking in the first place.

One in particular that is worth noting is Cochrane. Cochrane has Springbank in it in the commission maps, and that riding is already 14 per cent below the average population. Somewhat inexplicably, they have to remove Springbank from Cochrane for reasons that are, like, clearly trumped up. The idea that Springbank has everything to do with Calgary but nothing to do with Cochrane is – I would dare you to go say that in Springbank, is all I'm saying here. The justification is,

apparently, golf courses. It makes no sense. So Cochrane goes from 9 per cent below to 14 per cent below, and then they have to split Springbank and put it into two different ridings to protect two different UCP ministers.

I am going to suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the protecting of the cabinet ministers seems like the far more obvious explanation. The UCP are asking us to hear hoofbeats and think zebras here. This is strained reasoning. The same applies to Lethbridge. It's also worth noting that while these six specific UCP cabinet ministers are being protected, we also get this, like, peculiar section of the report that is signed by only two commissioners. It's not really sure why it exists, but in it someone accidentally says the quiet part out loud, that the argument reached them late. Again, I will point out that there were no public submissions. We are not allowed to know who the panel spoke to, so I'm pretty curious where the argument to gerrymander another section of the city reached them from.

I think that all of these things taken together paint a very clear picture, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, but pursuant to Government Motion 48, agreed to on November 24, 2026, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must be decided to conclude debate on Bill 40, Electoral Divisions Act, I must now put the following question to conclude debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:45 p.m.]

[Three minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

***3:50***

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 44 Against – 36

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a third time]

## Government Bills and Orders
### Second Reading

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

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Technology and Innovation to move second reading of Bill 42, the Energy, Environment and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

If passed, this bill will strengthen protections for communities, farmland, power, and water. Now, Mr. Speaker, it's no secret that our province has seen incredible interest from the emerging data centre industry as well as an overall growth in power demand. Now, that's a huge credit to our province.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

We have abundant natural resources, a highly skilled workforce, and a strong economy, the strongest in all of Canada. We are a province rich with opportunity. More than that, Alberta is the best province to live, work, and raise a family, which makes us a destination of choice for so many.

Now, Albertans care deeply about this province and want to make sure that future generations can enjoy all that we have to offer. That's why the rules put in place for the data centre industry need to reflect the best interests of the people who call Alberta home. Our government has watched closely as projects have advanced, and we saw how Albertans reacted to those projects and the potential impacts to their communities.

Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that the only projects that proceed are the ones that meet the highest standards and provide benefits for our communities. This bill, if passed, will help us do exactly that. The changes we are proposing through this legislation, together with supporting regulations, will restrict data centres 10 megawatts or larger from being built within 600 metres of the nearest home and on Alberta's highest quality farmland. This distance would be measured from the project's boundary to the edge of the nearest dwelling.

Many have asked us why we settled on this number. It's important to note that this setback distance is comparable to the Calgary Energy Centre's combined-cycle power plant in northeast Calgary, which is similar to that distance and is right on the edge of the city of Calgary; thus, why we decided 600 metres. Now, these setback requirements would work alongside existing noise requirements, providing communities with consistent protection while giving developers greater certainty about where projects can be located.

But we also recognize that some locations are better suited for data centres than others. The changes we're proposing would guide data centres towards developing in designated industrial areas, brownfield sites, and existing power generation sites that are already meant for major industrial activity.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We also recognize, Madam Speaker, that municipalities have their own unique local interests that need to be considered. That's

why where local planning supports compatible development, municipalities could request alternate setbacks.

Of course, provincial standards need to be accompanied by consistent provincial oversight. As such, the proposed changes would make AUC the primary provincial regulator for data centres 10 megawatts or larger. Madam Speaker, this is an important change as large data centres can have effects that extend beyond the boundaries of a single municipality, including the electrical system, land, and water. A consistent provincial process means that these are addressed through one regulator, providing clarity and certainty for communities and investors around these projects. This change would enable the AUC to apply existing noise requirements for power generation to data centres and ensure consistent regulatory oversight and clear expectations for data centre development. Environment and Protected Areas would stay responsible for water licences and environmental approvals.

Now, if passed, Madam Speaker, this legislation will also create a new data centre designation. This ensures that data centres will pay for the cost of the wires within their projects and make it clear that they cannot pass those costs on to ratepayers. You can recall that we brought forward similar measures a year ago through Bill 8, the Utility Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. The changes being made through this legislation, if passed, reaffirm and build on that work, accounting for new pathways data centres may use to meet their energy needs, all while keeping a clear focus on protecting Alberta ratepayers.

Madam Speaker, beyond data centres, this legislation builds on our government's work to address affordability on every aspect of Albertans' electricity bills. The proposed changes would provide new tools such as rebates to address disproportionately high distribution costs faced by some Alberta residents. We'll have more details on that to share in the future.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to remind the members opposite that their time in government was defined by costly tax and spending policies that drove up the price of utilities. Their reckless coal phase-out is still costing Albertans $100 million a year and will cost $2 billion overall. We will still be paying that till 2030. They took reliable, dispatchable baseload power off the grid, opened the Wild West for intermittent renewables, and drastically drove up Albertans' utility bills by increasing the need for many more transmission lines.

Now, our government has taken action to address these issues that were created by the previous government and to restore the balance between reliability, affordability, and sustainability, as well as investor confidence. We brought in the rate of last resort, lowering the default rate by 68 per cent from its peak. We lowered and stabilized local access fees on power bills by up to 35 per cent, helping Calgarians alone save more than $32 million in 2025.

As well, with that, Madam Speaker, wholesale electricity prices have dropped 53 per cent in 2024 and another 30 per cent in 2025 as a result of the dramatic increase in baseload power, including 6,000 megawatts of new generation that has been added since 2023. We've also updated transmission policies to protect ratepayers from rising fees and ensure Albertans will no longer be burdened with the full cost of building unnecessary new transmission lines. Alberta is the only province in the entire country that is debt free from power generation builds.

***4:00***

Now, this bill, if passed, will be just the latest step in our efforts to protect affordability for all Albertans, all of our ratepayers here in the province of Alberta. These changes we're proposing in this legislation are about putting Albertans, families, communities, and the land they care about first. They will strengthen our existing rules for data centre development to ensure that projects are only built if they can be built responsibly and only to the benefit of Albertans and their communities. At the same time amendments proposed would protect ratepayers from bearing project-specific infrastructure costs and create new tools to help address long-standing disparity in electricity distribution costs. I encourage all members of this House to vote in favour of this bill.

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

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

**Mr. Ip:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 42, Energy, Environment and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, particularly in my capacity as the shadow minister of Tech and Innovation. On December 4, 2024, nearly two years ago, this government announced its AI data centre strategy, and it set out at that time an ambitious target of attracting $100 billion in investment over five years. But just weeks ago we learned from the minister's own deputy that his ministry is not keeping track of jobs, monitoring water usage or environmental impact, or verifying the economic impact of these projects.

So nearly two years later, where are we? What we see before us with Bill 42 is an omnibus piece of legislation dealing with everything from forest management to oil sands emissions to well reclamation, and buried within that legislation are provisions that are supposed to address the very legitimate concerns Albertans have about AI data centres in their communities.

Madam Speaker, it's too little, too late. The government has had nearly 24 months to develop a comprehensive regulatory framework for this industry. They didn't do that. It knew from the outset that electricity capacity and water consumption were going to be significant issues. All they had to do was look south of the border. In fact, in the initial strategy the government identified those as chief concerns. What the government also knew and took no action on until maybe now, or are trying to take action now, is that they knew these developments would have significant implications for municipalities, agricultural producers, landowners, and electricity consumers. Yet it proceeded aggressively to solicit investment without first talking to Albertans and establishing comprehensive safeguards.

And here we are. The government is responding after considerable public opposition, after Albertans have basically said very clearly to this government, "We don't want data centres in our communities," certainly not in this particular way without appropriate regulations, without clarity in terms of how it's going to impact communities, without the safeguards that Albertans certainly deserve.

I want to just point out, Madam Speaker, and ask my colleagues in this Assembly to distinguish between what the government announced at its press conference last week and what is actually in Bill 42 because it's not the same thing. Now, the government is touting this somehow as legislation that is going to address the concerns of Albertans, and that isn't actually true because there is no mandatory comprehensive impact assessment of any kind for data centres in this legislation. Environmental impact assessments, other kinds of impact assessments that would be helpful and critical, frankly, in regulating this industry are not in there. There is no explicit mechanism that guarantees protection for Albertans against higher wholesale electricity prices. We know – the government has already admitted to this months ago – that electricity prices are going to go up due in part to the government's very aggressive pursuit of AI data centres.

Instead, what we're seeing is something that this government does often, which is that they're scant on details in legislation, but

what they like to do is give cabinet and the executive branch broad latitude to be able to establish these requirements. There is no prescribed numerical water consumption standard in the legislation. The government talks about the 600-metre setback, but it's actually not written into the legislation, Madam Speaker. The legislation itself is truly lacking, and after two years Albertans are once again being asked to wait for the details because it's going to come in regulation. It's going to be up to the executive branch and the minister to decide what that is.

This is not the way that you run a government. If this government was actually serious about their own AI data centre strategy, it's not the way to provide certainty for proponents, for industry, and certainly not the way to guarantee and to assure Albertans that their concerns are taken seriously.

You know, while this government was busy hobnobbing with billionaires south of the border, because clearly that's who they're advocating for in this case, on this side of the House over the summer and, frankly, over the past year or so my colleagues and I have been talking to Albertans. Myself and several of my colleagues have travelled across the province to listen to Albertans about data centre development. We heard from rural landowners. We heard from farmers, municipal leaders, business owners, people working in technology, and frankly, ordinary Albertans who are concerned about what these developments would mean for their communities.

You know, what struck me is that many of the people that we spoke to were not fundamentally opposed to technology or economic development in the way that this government likes to make it out to seem, that this is really an issue of NIMBYism, or they like to call us the no development party, things like that. That's absolutely not the case. In fact, everyday Albertans were asking very reasonable questions. They were asking: what does this mean for my community to have a data centre nearby? Will my electricity bill go up? What will happen to my water supply, particularly in regions where there are droughtlike conditions already? What will the noise be like? If there's a data centre close to my community, what will happen to the value of my property? What are the implications for my health? And how many permanent jobs will actually be created?

These are very reasonable questions, Madam Speaker, considering what's been the experience south of the border. Might I remind this House that just weeks ago there has been a resounding rejection of unfettered AI development in the United States. In fact, I believe 37 of the 38 states that had AI data centre plebiscites or some sort of provision on the ballot, the vast majority of them, in fact nearly all of them, came out against the further development of AI data centres.

I think the most fundamental question that I've been hearing across Alberta is: who is going to look out for my interests? And what I've heard very, very clearly is that they do not trust this UCP government to be looking out for their interests. They don't trust this UCP government to have their backs when it comes to data centres, among other things, Madam Speaker. It's very clear that when this government pursued or launched their AI data centre strategy, it was not with the benefit of Albertans in mind. It was very much for the benefit of their billionaire friends and how to in fact make it easier for AI data centres to come in without the appropriate regulations or safeguards to protect Albertans.

***4:10***

In August, following our consultations, the Alberta New Democrats released our AI data centre blueprint. Madam Speaker, we called for a pause on further approvals until a comprehensive impact assessment framework was in place, something that, you know, despite having two years – and, frankly, even with this piece of legislation it's a missed opportunity because this government doesn't introduce a comprehensive impact assessment framework or really any sort of regulatory framework that is cohesive. It really is a bit of window dressing. I like to call it kind of moving the deck chairs around and making it seem like they're actually doing something to address very real concerns around AI data centres.

It is an omnibus bill. There are so many pieces to it. Frankly, many do not pertain to data centres specifically.

Madam Speaker, I think there is an opportunity for this government to still do the right thing, to simply adopt the blueprint that we've established that we created in consultation with Albertans in which we laid out seven very clear standards of what needs to be met before a data centre can be built and what needs to be considered, things that I think are currently not addressed.

There's one particular concern, a significant concern that I've been hearing from Albertans about data centres that is absolutely not addressed anywhere by this government other than the minister and members of this government saying, you know, "Just trust us; everything is going to be okay," and that concern is what it will do to electricity bills.

This government has repeatedly made assurances that data centres would have to bring their own power and that ordinary Albertans would not be left paying for these developments, but there is something incredibly misleading about that because what the government did is that they created, essentially, a loophole allowing companies or proponents that request under 75 megawatts of power to actually be connected to the grid. It's not entirely clear, Madam Speaker, if the safeguards are in place to ensure that we don't overwhelm our electrical grid system, that we are preserving grid stability. That certainly is not clear in this piece of legislation either.

Might I remind you that the Pembina Institute released an analysis back in August that identified projections from companies including Capital Power and TransAlta suggesting that wholesale electricity prices could reach $100 per megawatt hour. For context, Alberta's wholesale electricity price averaged approximately $32 per megawatt hour over the first nine months of this year. You know, we're talking about the potential for wholesale electricity prices to triple. Madam Speaker, there is not a single provision in this legislation that will protect Albertans from that kind of spike largely due to AI data centre energy consumption.

Now, the government would like to tell us that additional large energy consumers could reduce transmission charges by spreading the cost of infrastructure across a larger customer base, but that as well, Madam Speaker: it's very important that Albertans understand what that means because on an average Albertan's or a family's power bill, that only represents a very, very small portion of it. In fact, only about 2 per cent of the bill is attributed to transmission costs, so this idea that somehow this will address affordability is simply incorrect. With the Pembina Institute projection they projected an estimated increase of approximately 15 to 25 per cent compared to its baseline scenario even in the most sort of conservative projections.

Madam Speaker, the average Albertan – right now we're in the middle of an affordability crisis – they're worried about power bills; they're worried about how to put food on the table. Many of the Albertans I talked to are wondering, you know: what is this going to do to my bills? There's nothing in this legislation that really protects them from that.

Also, given that we already have dozens of developments getting ready or about to connect to Alberta's electricity grid, it's unclear whether the government has done sufficient analysis to assure Albertans that it's not only sustainable but their prices are going to be protected, so that they won't see a sudden spike in electricity.

I want to bring us back to the 75-megawatt provision that currently is essentially a loophole that many companies are using as a way to not actually have to build their own power generation, that if they come just under, they can connect to the grid. *Canada's National Observer* recently examined applications for electricity capacity in Alberta and identified 20 proposed data centre developments seeking allocations just below the government's 75-megawatt threshold.

Eleven of those developments requested, Madam Speaker, interestingly, 74.9 megawatts. In one instance three neighbouring projects east of Calgary had originally been proposed at 450 megawatts each and two of them subsequently reduced their requested allocations to 74.9 megawatts to avoid having to bring their own power.

Madam Speaker, if this is not a loophole, if this is not something that needs to be fixed in legislation, I really question whether this government is serious about addressing the concerns that have been raised for months and months by everyday Albertans.

Collectively these 20 projects are seeking more than 1,200 megawatts of electricity and 16 of those projects are seeking that electricity within the next three years. This is an enormous amount of additional electricity capacity during the very period when electricity producers are anticipating significant upward pressure on prices. None of this is addressed.

I also want to actually take a moment to address the government's strategy on AI development overall. It's a strategy that I think is fundamentally lacking. The members opposite like to talk about how they're a pro-economic development party, that they're all about the economy, but there isn't really much here, frankly, in their AI data centre strategy that's going to benefit Albertans.

We don't know exactly how many jobs each of these projects will produce. It is not verified by any independent body at any time. The $100 billion that the government is throwing out is just a number that they're pulling from thin air. Frankly, the economic impact of this is unclear.

I think there are some missed opportunities here as well. This government is not leveraging the fact that here in Alberta we have some incredible bench strengths. In Edmonton, for example, at the University of Alberta we're a world-class centre on AI research and machine learning.

When the Meta project was announced in Sturgeon county, I was surprised, Madam Speaker, that this government did not take the opportunity to negotiate with Meta for a research and development office here in Alberta. You know, we're not taking advantage of the type of economic development that would be the highest on the value chain.

What we're doing in fact is allowing companies to come in, potentially take advantage of our water, of our natural resources, for very little benefit by way of jobs, by way of economic spinoffs over time, and there are significant costs, Madam Speaker, significant costs in terms of water, in terms of electricity prices that Albertans will be stuck paying, in terms of environmental impact. This, I think, is truly the missed opportunity here.

***4:20***

I'm also going to address, in the minute that I have left, their approach to setbacks. You know, I've asked the question to the minister and of this government: who did they consult? Who did they consult to come up with now a 600-metre setback? Or are they just drawing it on the back of the napkin and making it up as they go? That seems like how the government does things, is to sort of just make it up as they go. I just want to point out that, in fact, when you look at solar farms, the setback for that technology, which is actually very nonintrusive in terms of noise and impact on land, is actually more than that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to stand and speak to Bill 42, Energy, Environment and Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. I want to focus my remarks on something fundamental to the future of this province, something that is fundamental, that sustains every community, every industry, every ecosystem, and every generation that will come after us. That's nipiy, water. I want to be clear about my concerns. We're not opposed to technology, we're not opposed to innovation or artificial intelligence or economic development; my concerns are strictly based on science, on hydrology, and on climate research, particularly the cumulative environmental impacts of industrial water consumption and on the responsibility that each of us have in this Legislature to ensure that economic development does not undermine the ecological systems to which all life – all life – depends.

The government is presenting Bill 42 as legislation that strengthens environmental protection, while in actuality it's facilitating large-scale artificial intelligence data centres. As I have gone through the bill, what's evident is that this framework is for a major new industrial sector, but it's leaving out really crucial and critical details about water protection and water regulations. There are no established limits on water consumptions in the bill. There are no mandatory assessments of cumulative impacts on our watersheds. There are no enforceable safeguards when there's a severe drought. We know what happens down south. We know what the farmers and ranchers have gone through. There are no requirements in this bill to protect the ecological flows before authorizing the new industrial demands. And there are no binding requirements in this bill that has said that First Nations have been meaningfully consulted. In fact, there are First Nations taking this government to court because they are impacting inherent treaty rights with data centres.

Water is essential to AI data centres. It requires substantial computing capacity. That generates heat, the AI data centres. The technology is that the heat must be removed in order to maintain safe operation of the servers and other infrastructure of the AI data centres. Depending on the cooling technology of the data centres, they can submit significant quantities of water.

In 2021 researcher David Mytton published a peer-reviewed paper entitled Data Centre Water Consumption. His research examined water consumption on the data centre industry and identified serious limitations in the industry's water use transparency. One of the important findings was that fewer than one-third of the data centre operators were measuring water consumption. Think about what that means for Alberta. We are talking about expanding an industrial sector in which water use information has historically been inadequate, and now this government wants to develop a regulatory system for these facilities while leaving out essential water use standards and regulations that this Assembly has not examined because they don't exist. Madam Speaker, how can this government assure Albertans that the water is going to be protected when the legislation itself doesn't even establish measurable consumption limits? It completely negates it, as the minister yells out "regulation, regulation." You don't even have any standards at this point today. Show them. Talk about them. Bring them up. Let's hear them.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, may I caution you to direct your comments through the chair.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. How can we evaluate the environmental consequences when we don't know the standards to which the applications will be assessed, and how can communities meaningfully participate in

these environmental protections when they are undefined? They are not in the bill.

In 2024 the United States Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory published a comprehensive report on data centre energy consumption. That report estimated that American data centres directly consumed approximately 66 to 67 billion litres of water in 2023. Madam Speaker, that is an extraordinary amount of water, and that figure is deeply concerning and it should concern all of us. The broader environmental footprint includes water – consumed water – and generating electricity so that they can power the data centres that is also going to use water.

A peer-reviewed research paper published in 2025, The Water Use of Data Centre Workloads, examined the factors influencing water consumption associated with computing workloads. The researchers identified differences in water use intensity exceeding a factor of 10,000 across the scenarios that they studied. In other words, the environmental impacts of data centre operations can vary enormously. It depends on the technology, the cooling system, the electrical supply, the operating conditions, and that is precisely why regulations cannot rely on the generic assumption about the industry. A facility using evaporative cooling may have a very different water footprint from a facility using a cooling technology designed to minimize freshwater consumption. There are two different systems, one that will use the water consistently to cool the system and then it will release it, and one that continuously uses fresh water and uses fresh water to cool their system.

The differences matter on these AI data centres and their cooling systems. They are going to matter to municipalities because municipalities are responsible for delivering drinking water. They are going to matter to the agricultural producers relying on irrigation. They are going to matter to the farmers and ranchers who are reliant on groundwater. And they especially matter to the aquatic ecosystems whose very survival depend on river and watershed flows.

Madam Speaker, I want the minister to explain to each of us whether the government intends to require every major data centre to disclose its projected and actual annual freshwater consumption. Will these figures be publicly available? Is there a projection? What will each of these centres use for water? Will they distinguish freshwater withdrawal versus water actually consumed? Will they include an indirect water footprint associated with the electricity that's needed to generate the AI data centre? Because the water isn't just going to be used to cool the AI data centre. The water is going to be needed to power the AI data centre, so what is the footprint of each of these systems going to be? Will this government establish measurable water efficiency standards before they approve these facilities? All of the science and research is telling us that these are essential considerations if you look at what has happened in America, particularly when Alberta's watersheds are already experiencing climate stresses.

***4:30***

It's so important that we are discussing industrial development with water demand. We have to understand the relationship of hydrological realities in this province. Irrigation in the south is critical for those farmers down there. It is absolutely fundamental to their economy and to their livestock, and when you are proposing an industry that is going to infringe on their water source, there needs to be some serious consultation done. I would be willing to put money on it that this government has not done that.

You know, ironically, water is not distributed equally across our province. Our river systems are geographically distinct. The precipitation patterns vary. Our groundwater resources have different capacities for replenishment, and many of our watersheds already – I've said this before – are experiencing the effects of climate change. We have seen rivers with lower flow. We've seen lakes and watersheds that are lower than they've ever been in my lifetime.

Two scientists in Alberta who did research together, John Pomeroy and Xing Fang, have studied the effects of climate change. They've also studied hydrological systems of the Canadian Rocky Mountains, including the Bow River headwaters. Their research published in the *Journal of Hydrology* in 2023 examined how projected climate change and glacier retreat will affect river flow in these watersheds. Their work demonstrates the importance of understanding the relationship among the snow accumulation, glacier melt, groundwater precipitation, and the river discharge. This is critical information because water availability is not simply because the government decides they're going to give water licences. We do not have the ability to generate water.

You may know that in the springtime the water runoff varies. Sometimes in the springtime the rivers are really high, and sometimes they're moving so quickly because the water precipitation is coming faster, the snow is melting faster. What happens in the face of a dry summer? What happens when we don't have enough water, when the annual flow that we experienced is shorter than it has been previously? We have seen seven years or more of drought in our own province. What is that going to mean to the agriculture industry and to the aquifers? I'm deeply concerned about the aquifers, particularly growing up on the land around fishing and around water.

You know, I think a lot about Dr. David Schindler's research. He talks about that it's not the big decisions that we make around water; it is the small, incremental decisions that we make that are going to have the devastating impacts. We've already, through previous bills, brought forward two watersheds, two rivers to combine them into one for an AI data centre. That's going to have detrimental impacts on ecosystems, and now we're giving carte blanche here to how much consumption without measuring or being able to assess the environmental impacts that it's going to have. Water is critical to all of our economies, to everything that survives on this land.

Data centre operators must be required to reduce their consumption. You know, we talk about innovation and technology, yet we haven't held the AI data centre industry to those same standards. Get innovative around your water consumption. Get innovative about the way in which you're going to use less water and cause less harm to the ecosystems and the diversity.

Communities are going to discover after these investments have been made that water demand is going to be more difficult to manage, and it's going to fall on the municipalities' shoulders, it's going to fall on the farmers and ranchers, it's going to fall on First Nations when they aren't able to uphold their inherent rights because the watersheds aren't able to keep up with the demand.

Operating a data cooling system, water evaporates during cooling, and it's not returned to the watershed. You know, there are serious concerns about water that is going to be returned into the watershed. What are the standards going to be to measure if there are going to be any contaminants? I think about the polycyclical aro hydrocarbons that are released from the coker stacks that we have. In those are arsenic, cadmium, methyl, mercury, zinc – all carcinogens – yet we have no system to measure those, and that was from an industry that we developed in the 1980s. Here we're creating another industry, and we're not using any of the science or lessons we learned from the previous industry.

We have real messes to clean up from our previous decision-making. We have orphan wells we haven't cleaned up, we have the tailings ponds we haven't cleaned up, and all around water because those orphan wells contaminate arsenic on many people's lands, as we've heard, as science has shown us, which contaminates the moose, the birds. And here we are ready to take a deep dive into AI

data centres because somebody is going to make a lot of money, and we haven't put in safeguards.

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

**Mr. Kasawski:** Thanks, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the chance to get up and speak on Bill 42. An anecdote just to start, though. A couple of years back in budget estimates there was already the initiative coming forward for AI, a data centre initiative in the province being led by the Minister of Technology and Innovation. At that estimates the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, quite an expert in electricity and energy, wanted to ask questions in the budget estimates about electricity. It was extraordinary in those budget estimates that the chair shut the Member for Calgary-Glenmore down, said: this is not the time to ask about electricity.

Madam Speaker, the act that's been brought forward, related to AI data centres that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore was told she could not ask questions about AI data centres related to electricity: this Bill 42 amends nine acts. They include the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, the Electric Utilities Act, the Hydro and Electric Energy Act, and the Utility Commodity Rebate Act. In so many ways AI data centres are related to electricity. It's how they power their massive warehouses full of computers and compute power, and to not be able to ask questions about it in budget estimates a couple of years ago was a very strange occurrence.

I'm glad before the House now we have legislation that addresses head-on the real concerns that Albertans have about their electricity bills and about how their electricity bills are going up because of the moves by this government. It's been reported now because companies like TransAlta and Capital Power, some of our largest generators in this province, are saying that they expect power prices to triple in 2027 and 2028 because of demand coming on from AI data centres, an AI data centre initiative being driven by this government. Most Albertans should expect a raise of about $460 a year on their power bills in order for AI data centres to come into this province.

This government sent a minister down to visit with the tech bros down in Silicon Valley. Some of those tech bros included the one that just recently got fired and then rehired by his board. He went down there to sell the advantages that Alberta has with our abundant natural gas, and they said: we are eager to come and build. I suppose one question Albertans are asking is: why are these U.S. tech billionaires so anxious to set up in Alberta? Their President has even said in so many ways not to trade with Canada and as recently as last week has said that he doesn't want any AI data centres set up outside of the United States. So why are they so anxious and interested in coming here? We should ask questions about that and maybe not roll out a red carpet for them.

***4:40***

Madam Speaker, when I look at this, at the monopolies, at the concentrated wealth, and the handful of people that are stealing our data, that have little oversight, that are sleeping with China's spies and are preying on our children and bringing these data centres here to Alberta, which are building warehouses that are about the size of West Edmonton Mall and will consume as much electricity as the city of Edmonton or Calgary, why do they want to locate here, and why do we want them here?

I'm happy the government has finally brought forward legislation to at least address many of the concerns that Albertans brought up this summer at town halls. The thing we learned from those town halls: they are not proponents of this. There isn't a pro AI data centre lobby group. Albertans are opposed to this in so many ways, and they have great concerns about that.

Madam Speaker, I think one of the things I am concerned about is that I don't see how the economics are good. If we talk about the one example we have of the Meta data centre, the government came out and said that we should expect about $250 million a year in annual benefits for Albertans from the building of a $13 billion AI data centre. First off, that $13 billion is not all being spent in Alberta. We get to build a large warehouse, a warehouse the size of about West Edmonton Mall. Important. Great work for Alberta. We're good at building things. Two hundred million of that $250 million annual benefit is transmission fees. The government is promoting that as a benefit, but transmission fees do not pay for schools; they do not pay for hospitals; they do not pay for roads. Transmission fees pay for use of the transmission system. There's another $40 million that's going to come from property taxes for the county that's hosting the AI data centre. For them that's meaningful. It's an industrial zone, and it's the right place to be locating an industrial building like an AI data centre. But the province has negotiated about a $10 million benefit for the province for royalties and a tech fee.

So of a $13 billion investment for one AI data centre, the province is expecting to have an annual benefit from royalties and technology of $10 million. This company will not be paying any corporate income tax in the province. There will be jobs for about 300 people to manage the site once it's running, and there are jobs for people to build it right now. But once it's running, we should not expect that there will be any corporate profits paid in Alberta. This is a different kind of business. It's not like traditional businesses which we have tried to recruit into Alberta for wealth creation for Albertans. The incentives that have been put in place, where we try to attract these AI data centres and roll up the red carpet for them: I'm having trouble understanding why we're putting so much effort into trying to get these here when I haven't seen the economic benefits long term for Alberta. We need robust, reliable governance.

Madam Speaker, when I look at an AI data centre and we're inviting this business to come here, I would – let's say that it was a different technology. Imagine it was pocket-sized nuclear weapons. We are being invited to have someone come build pocket-sized nuclear weapons here in Alberta. It is going to require a lot of energy. That's what they're going to be building. We might pause for a second and decide whether this is technology that we want built on our shores, inside our province. Is it what we want to have built here?

When you hear the tech billionaires talk about AI data centres and the future of AI as a technology, they talk about things that are quite alarming and not really warming of the heart and things that worry the youth. The youth of today hear about AI, get afraid for what the future might look like. What they're building is technology that is going to be taking away work. What I would invite this House to discuss is what the future looks like for Albertans in a world with AI as a driving technology.

Instead, we've had this government bring in some old technology discussions like libraries and what books should be on the shelves whereas we probably could be having a larger discussion about a technology that is going to change the way we live and work.

One of the most interesting things, Madam Speaker, about this technology and the ways that it's going to affect the future of life is that often what the tech billionaires talk about when they talk about this is that we can all expect a high universal income. They're talking about an end of work. We're inviting this technology to come into our province, and we're not having a real discussion about what this technology means for Albertans. I actually think it's what we were elected here to have, those kinds of discussions.

We have before us the legislation of Bill 42, and there actually are some interesting things in this. One of the most interesting things the minister talked about, the Minister of Affordability and

Utilities, is that there is an opportunity that this bill will enable an ability to lower distribution costs for some Albertans. I think it's worthy of having an honest discussion about what that means. There are locations – you can imagine if you were in a densely populated part of the province like Grande Prairie and you were paying your distribution fees and you knew that for the whole of the ATCO territory around Grande Prairie you were paying for all of the wires and distribution services for the area that is within the city, you might feel a little bothered that you're paying a high distribution fee to subsidize the great distances.

When the government talks about socializing distribution fees, let's have an open and honest conversation about it. We socialize transmission fees in this province, so if you want to have a discussion about socializing distribution fees, let's have an open discussion about it. Are you talking about, you know, having the ratepayers and voters in Calgary pay for the distribution fees and subsidize the distribution fees for the northern parts of the province? If that's what you're going to do, let's just talk about it. If you want to socialize distribution fees across the province, have that discussion.

Another idea for the minister to consider is that you have these AI data centres coming in. The act has openings for this. The AI data centres are coming in. You can charge a surcharge to the AI data centres, which can pay for the distribution fees in the rural parts of Alberta because these data centres will be hosted in the rural parts of Alberta. If the minister wants to consider an idea like that, I think that would be a worthy thing. This act opens up the opportunity to say: we know that rates are going up in this province because AI data centres are coming here, and if they're going to be raising the rates for everybody else, the AI data centres, then how can we use the AI data centres coming here to help pay for the distribution fees for the more remote parts of Alberta and for the areas where we are locating the AI data centres? That's something that I think is worthy of consideration.

Madam Speaker, overall, I think this bill was long overdue. It does some great things, and I'm glad to have more discussions about it. Bringing forward the oversight of the Utilities Commission is very important, and it's the right direction to take when we're looking at data centres. We cannot treat these as just a warehouse that's being located in a municipality. These are somewhat of a noxious building that is being located in parts of this province. It's going to be consuming a great amount of our energy. It's going to be using our water, it's going to be using our resources, and we need to make sure that we protect our natural environments and get the best deal we can for all Albertans.

I look forward to further debate in Committee of the Whole.

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

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour, I guess I could say, to rise and speak to this bill. I have a lot of thoughts and a lot of ideas around what we're actually doing here and how the government has once again managed to write a piece of legislation that talks about a lot of things but actually doesn't do a lot of things because everything will eventually just be in regulation. Because of that, there are a lot of questions that I know my constituents have and that I think many folks across the province have.

***4:50***

I'm going to preface this conversation with that this is not just a rural Alberta issue; this is very much an issue around Edmonton and an issue around Calgary. Calgary has an area that has been already set aside for what was going to be one major hyperscale. That has now been divided into four smaller scale AI data centres because of the fact that this government has introduced a watt cap, so they've managed to create a loophole, I guess, to allow for this company to come in and be able to pull from the grid. Instead of having to be held accountable for the amount of wattage they're actually going to pull, they've now been able to divide into four so that they can get under the loophole this government has created.

The same issue is going to be happening in northeast Edmonton. As many folks around know, the Meta hyperscale is being built in the Industrial Heartland, which I share the boundary with for my riding. There are three more proposed around that area, one including right within the industrial park across the Anthony Henday from my riding, my communities, like, across the street, basically. What I would say is that there are consultations happening right now around the rezoning of that industrial park to allow for the increased industrial zoning that would be required to build that hyperscale. But I would say that even with what the government has decided to say are appropriate buffer zones for residential, it will not equate to where they want to locate it in my riding. Then on top of that, there will be more, four more.

So as much as the government says, you know, that it's not that big of a deal, I would counter that for those folks that are going to see these massive facilities being built in their backyards, it is a very big deal, and it isn't just in rural Alberta. It is happening close to our urban centres, and it is a problem.

I'm going to talk about three key things through my time: obviously, the first being the concentration, which I've already highlighted around my riding specifically; the second being that, obviously, there's going to be a significant drain on electricity and the utilities; then, obviously, the lack of innovation that this government has when it comes to AI. I say that because it's pretty clear. R and D, job creation, anything outside of, like, let's just build the infrastructure: this government has no initiative, has demonstrated no strategic plan, I would say, in relation to job creation and value-add outside of just building hyperscales. It's kind of sad, actually, partly because there are just so many opportunities that should be adopted yet are not.

Obviously, we've seen that the government has promoted Alberta as: "Welcome. The doors are open. Let's build these facilities, specifically in the Industrial Heartland area." I understand why. I'm not naive to the fact that transmission infrastructure exists there. Industrial land exists there. Natural gas is there. That's a major transportation corridor and at some level a workforce. I would say, though, that if you speak to the industries in the Industrial Heartland, workforce is actually a big question mark, not just around hyperscale but around just the ability to attract the trade workers that are going to be required to build this infrastructure.

One hyperscale, the Meta: they're able to adjust. I mean, holes in the ground. They're building it up. It's happening. It's very clear that you can see it. But if they're going to expand past that and we're going to allow three more to be entering into that zone plus the expansion that is happening in the Industrial Heartland as it is now, we are going to have a trade shortage. That is just the reality of it. I would challenge that some of the decisions that this government has made recently around immigration and allowing people to come here and work here are going to create some challenges around those pieces.

Again, short-sightedness on this government's piece to say, you know: "We want people to come here. We want people to come here. Please come here." Then they do, and then we're like: "No, no, no. Don't come here because we don't have the infrastructure to support you being here. We don't have schools. We don't have hospitals. We don't have all of those things." And then they say: "Oh, no, no. We want to build these big facilities. Please come here." Like, what's the message? It's so inconsistent. It's typical of the UCP government. We say one thing; we change our mind. Tomorrow we'll say something else, and then we'll change our

mind again. The most consistent thing about the UCP government is the inconsistency. So, I mean, that's consistent.

I think that on paper I would say that what this government is doing makes sense. Their argument is, obviously, billions of dollars in investment. There are going to be construction jobs, property taxes. I would argue that that is not the case. Potential economic diversification: I would argue that we haven't seen that plan yet. And all of these benefits definitely sound promising for my area, for across the province, but I think the fundamental question that this government has continuously been unable to answer is: what is in it for Albertans? How do they benefit?

The reality of it is that data centres, although they may create jobs at the beginning, are not long-sustaining jobs. It takes very few people to actually run a data centre. They are not long-term AI jobs. There's a ton of opportunity in AI. A ton of it. You could be doing R and D. You can be doing agriculture research and innovation. You can be doing health. You can be doing all of these things. There's a ton of programming, a ton of opportunities in it. Yet we haven't seen this government introduce a piece of legislation that says: we're going to build hyperscales and infrastructure, but also – guess what – here's our job-creation strategy about how we're going to do more, how we're going to incentivize these companies to come to Alberta and to establish the secondary components that require these hyperscales.

Instead, what's going to happen is we're going to continue to see jobs in Silicon and in the United States in different areas where there are these AI hubs, and the infrastructure in Alberta is going to help support those jobs, but none of those jobs are going to exist in this province. Once again, that is a failure of this government.

It could have been an offer. There's a strategy that could have been attached to this conversation around AI. Like, Meta creates a ton of jobs when it comes to its other opportunities, but they're all based in the United States. When you offer and you encourage someone to invest in your province and say, "We'll help you build the infrastructure that you need, and we're going to give you the energy, and we're going to have the feedstock that you need to drive that infrastructure," why wasn't the second part of that conversation to also please, as part of that negotiation, build a campus, and within that campus we're going to run R and D, and we're going to support our postsecondary students, and we're going to create innovation hubs, and we're going to be the powerhouse of AI in Alberta, that's going to create long-term sustainable jobs from university all the way down the line? Why wasn't that part of the offer or the negotiation or the discussion?

What this government is really good at doing is giving away our resources and not thinking about what the long-term strategy can be about the return for Albertans. You know, one of the biggest failures that I think that this government has is that it's growth for the sake of growth with zero economic strategy. They can say they're growing AI. "Look at us. We're building all these data centres. There's going to be four in Calgary and four around Edmonton, and there's going to be one in the north and a couple in the south. Look at what we've done. We've built all this infrastructure." And then it's like: great; now what? Who's using it? Where is it going? What are we getting back on the return for that investment? I would say that the government hasn't given us the business plan. They haven't actually shown Alberta what the ROI is in relation to this investment, so it seems short sighted, I would say, and definitely short sighted at a time when Albertans are already dealing with their affordability issues.

We know that families are having a hard time paying their monthly bills. We know seniors are struggling to pay their monthly bills. We know small businesses are now trying to factor in what they're going to do if their utilities go up. Yet the government hasn't done anything in relation to how they can address or bring down what's going to be an electricity issue. It just will. Capital Power came out and told their shareholders that there's a great opportunity here. There's going to be a ton of power that's going to be needed from the grid. We're going to do really well in the next two to three years, right? They were open and transparent in the report. Everybody else knows. I don't know why the government doesn't know.

***5:00***

What the government could have done – because, of course, they're like: you have to bring your own power. If you're an AI data centre, you have to be behind the fence, but you only have to be behind the fence, like, two to three years from now. For the first two to three years, if you've built the infrastructure, we'll let you access the grid, but we're going to cap what you can access. What they could have said is either, one, you're not going to get turned on until you bring your own power. Period. In other words, you don't get access to the grid at all. You will become active as a hyperscale when your power is active. When your power plant is built, which you should build first, then you build your infrastructure. That was one opportunity that the government had.

The other opportunity that the government had was to use the Balancing Pool, which I recognize they're renaming in this bill, and to say: "You know what? We know this is going to cost Albertans more." It's going to drive up electricity prices. We're going to have some form of electricity pricing for hyperscales. They're going to pay a little bit more, and we're going to take that money that they're going to pay a little bit more, and we're going to put it in the Balancing Pool. Then we're going to set a rate that says if the price goes above a certain price for Albertans, the AI data centres are going to off-set that price. Ultimately, what it does is it incentivizes them to get off the grid faster. It tells them to get their power plant built. It encourages them to build the infrastructure that was in the contract that they committed to doing, which is, "We will be behind the fence," and it will get them motivated to build faster. Then the power plant is built, and then we've addressed the affordability issue.

If you don't do that, then all of a sudden: what's the motivation? What encourages these folks to build the power plant? We've already said: "You're on. You're allowed to operate." There's no incentive now to get that project finished, so they can delay that project. You know, it might be for operational reasons. It might be because we don't have enough people to be able to help build it out. Like, we might have trade issues. Whatever it is, all of a sudden this AI data centre is like: well, we can't get the power plant built, so we'll just have to stay on the grid one year longer or two years longer.

Instead, we say that you're going to pay a premium rate. Your rate is going to be this, and then we're going to use that rate to off-set the costs that we need, whether it be some kind of program to help off-set the rates, whatever it is. We'll do that, but we're also doing it because we're motivating you to get off the grid, and they should be.

I am disappointed that the government couldn't come up with some simple economic incentives that would protect Albertans. This incentivizes companies to build their own power, to bring their power. It's a simple solution. Or they could have put a clause in the bill that says that if you don't get behind the fence and build your own power within a period of time, you are automatically kicked off the grid. Then they're really motivated because then they have zero power access. We haven't seen that either.

We also haven't seen the government come forward to address what could be potentially brownouts. What happens if we have a surge in power demand? Who gets kicked off the grid first? Is it the people of Edmonton or Grande Prairie, or does the hyperscale get priority over the power because it's infrastructure? Who decides? How do you determine that? What does that look like? I am very

disappointed in this government's response or lack of, I would guess. To say it's all going to be in regulation: a lot of what I'm talking about wouldn't be in regulation. You actually need a legal framework.

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

**Mr. Jean:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill. I was listening to the member from the other side, and I thought to myself that that story has more holes in it than the Calgary water main. There's no question that when we make promises, we actually keep them. I've listened to all of the members on the other side talk about data centres, and I just wanted to draw to their attention that there's more to this bill than just data centres. I know that's important to a lot of Albertans, but again, you know, that dog won't hunt. The truth is that they're out to lunch on data centres. There's new technology. There are new things that are happening. This government has taken a very positive and important, responsible position on this for Albertans.

But let's talk about what else is in the bill because I knew the NDP wouldn't want to talk about it. You know, we had the first well drilled in this province in 1902, Madam Speaker; 1902. In fact, it was drilled in Waterton Park at the time, and there were some – Waterton wasn't a park, but it was drilled then. We've had thousands upon thousands of drills drilled since then, and do you know that when the NDP were in power for four years here in Alberta, they did absolutely nothing on cleaning up wells?

Now, what have we done on this bill, and why did they ignore it and not talk about it? Well, Madam Speaker, we are actually putting forward a couple of changes. The first is that no well will be drilled in Alberta in the future. In about six months no well will be drilled from that point forward without having a fund that's adequate to clean up that well. We're requiring companies to put forward 1 per cent into an account of the cost of drilling that well, somewhere around $6 million, give or take, so, you know, $50,000 minimum or $60,000 in that case. We're asking them to put 1 per cent away and then, over the next 10 years, equal payments of about another 1 per cent. Now, using compound interest, that is our friend, there should be at that point in time in 15, 20, 25 years, when that well is finished, enough money put aside to clean up that well and the site.

Now, Madam Speaker, we're even making it so the money actually follows the well. It doesn't matter how many times it's sold, to who it's sold. We've heard of bad actors – and there are some; very few, but there are a few – and we're trying to make sure that they don't have bad actors. Now, we're going to make sure that when that changes hands, the money stays with it so that we can clean up that well and that taxpayers' dollars aren't used for funding these types of projects. We believe that private money needs to be used to clean up private wells, and we're going to make sure that happens.

But, Madam Speaker, we saw clearly that previous governments didn't do anything about it, not just in Alberta but previous governments everywhere. This is a first-in-the-world legislation designed to deal with it before it's a problem, not after it's a problem. We've talked to industry. They think it's affordable: 1 per cent and another 1 per cent over 10 years and then using compound interest to pay it. They like this, and in fact we saw under the NDP that they spent about $50 million per year cleaning up orphan wells. We're spending about $155 million now, well, actually in 2026, for orphan wells, to clean them up. We also saw that because of our regulations we're spending somewhere around, as industry, about another $800 million, $900 million. A billion dollars a year in Alberta is going to clean up old wells. We found some innovative, creative ways to actually fast-track that, and we're trying to do it as much as we can while keeping the integrity of the cleanup itself.

Madam Speaker, I will say that I did have some consternation with some of the responses as a result of this pitch, and I want to make sure that Albertans know that this pitch was done by the Premier. She told me herself that this is one of her favourite pieces of legislation, and she wants it passed.

**An Hon. Member:** Wow.

**Mr. Jean:** I heard "wow" from the other side. They're right. I think she's going to go down in history as one of the greatest environmentalists that Alberta has ever had, and I'm proud to be part of it.

Let me quote the Pembina Institute while the other folks make fun. Let me quote their left-leaning Pembina Institute, which declared – and this isn't about what they did in government. This is about what we did in government with our Premier. This piece of legislation "is an important and positive step toward ensuring industry meets its legal responsibility to clean up after itself." They fund that organization. You'd think they'd listen to it, but they don't.

[The Speaker in the chair]

And I know if they had another 50 years, they actually would have done something to solve the problem, but, Mr. Speaker, we can't wait. Albertans expect us to clean up these wells, and we're doing that.

Thank you.

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

**Member Hoyle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Bill 42. I want to start by being very clear that Alberta needs a plan for data centre development. As Alberta's New Democrat shadow minister of jobs, economy, and trade I want Alberta to compete for investment in the economy. I want young people to be able to build technology careers here. I want Alberta businesses to win contracts, grow, and sell what they build to the rest of Canada and the world. When a company asks to build a major data centre in Alberta, I want this government to be able to answer a basic question. What are Albertans getting in return? How many people will have a good job when the site is up and running? What will the project mean for the power bills of households and businesses already here? And will the people who live near it have a say before the decision is made?

***5:10***

Those are questions that any government should be able to answer before it approves a project of this size. Alberta New Democrats support innovation, job creation, strategic participation in the AI economy but only when projects are in the public's interest and supported by local communities. We need investment, we need good jobs – good, long-term, paying jobs – and we need to remain competitive in an economy that is increasingly being shaped by AI.

But economic development shouldn't come at any cost and definitely not at the cost of Albertans' lives. It shouldn't mean asking for families to pay higher electricity bills so that some of the largest tech companies in the world can expand their operations or put pressure on our water supply without proper safeguards, and it certainly can't mean putting taxpayers on the hook for risky infrastructure projects while the UCP claims it's protecting Albertans. This isn't the question of whether Alberta should welcome innovation but whether this government is prepared to make sure that innovation actually benefits Albertans.

Bill 42 does not answer that question. In fact, this bill is an admission that the UCP got it wrong from the beginning. This

government rushed ahead with data centre approvals, listened too closely to the interests of big tech companies, and failed to put a fair and transparent process in place before these projects were approved. Now, after Albertans have raised serious concerns about electricity prices, water use, land use, and the impact on their neighbourhoods, this UCP government is coming forward with the bill and asking Albertans to trust that it's finally gotten it right. But they haven't earned that trust, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans have every reason to ask why they should trust this government that created this problem in the first place. Bill 42 comes after this government spent considerable time promoting Alberta as a destination for data centres. Now the UCP is proposing a 600-metre setback from homes for data centres of 10 megawatts or more, a larger role for the Alberta Utilities Commission, and rules covering noise, water use, and farmland. Those are issues Albertans were right to raise.

The question before this House is who will actually benefit from those protections. According to the government's own materials projects already operating or under construction when the rules take effect would be treated as approved. Those proposed setbacks and farmland rules would also exempt certain projects that have reached milestones such as an Alberta Utilities Commission review already under way, a signed transmission service agreement, or a municipal development permit. The exact milestones are to be set in regulation, so I'd like to ask the minister to table a project-by-project list. Which developments does the government expect to qualify for those exemptions? How much power will they need, which communities will host them, and what protections will those communities have?

A family living near a proposed site deserves a clear answer about that site. A municipality planning roads, emergency services, and water infrastructure needs that answer, too. An investor deciding where to put hundreds of millions of dollars needs to know what rules will apply before committing their investment.

This government absolutely refuses to listen to the very real concerns of Albertans or enact policies that Albertans can trust, and that's why Alberta's New Democrats called for a pause on AI data centre projects until a comprehensive, community-supported plan is in place. This will give time to actually establish clear rules before more projects are approved, rather than trying to retrofit protections after the fact. Our AI data centre blueprint is grounded in what Albertans told us at town halls and through public feedback. It sets out a clear standard for responsible economic development. There must be real community benefits, including good, permanent jobs. There must be certainty for investors and neighbours about the regulatory process, and the benefits of a project must outweigh its financial and environmental costs. Those aren't unreasonable expectations and should be basic conditions for development that actually serves Albertans and our province.

We have called for a robust impact assessment before any project is approved. This includes properly zoned land, meaningful setbacks from homes, and protection of prime agricultural land, limits on freshwater use, safeguards against higher utility prices, emissions mitigation, privacy and data sovereignty protections, and meaningful consultation with nearby residents, businesses, and Indigenous communities. That is what a comprehensive plan looks like, and Bill 42 does not even come close to that.

When the Alberta NDP consulted Albertans on AI data centres, not a single person told us they wanted to pay higher electricity bills, yet that's exactly what this government is setting us up for. Albertans deserve a government that actually cares about affordability for Albertans. Families are already struggling with the cost of living. They're opening their utility bills and wondering: how much higher can they go? Small businesses are trying to manage rising operating costs. Seniors on fixed incomes are making difficult choices about what they can afford.

Under this UCP government household electricity prices have risen even higher in Alberta compared to anywhere else in Canada, and now the UCP is approving projects that will require enormous amounts of electricity. These facilities are not ordinary commercial buildings but centres that demand substantial and reliable power, often around the clock. The government's own budget acknowledges that increased natural gas demands from data centres is expected to put upward pressure on natural gas prices, and electricity providers and industry experts have warned that growing data centre demand could drive average electricity prices significantly higher in the coming years.

So it's clear, Mr. Speaker, that the UCP intends for Albertans to pay for this growth, and that brings me to electricity. When I speak with business owners, they want to know what it will cost to operate here next year and each year after that. A manufacturer deciding whether to add a shift or to expand a production line has to make that calculation. A family in Edmonton-South trying to cover the mortgage, groceries, and insurance is making its own calculation at the kitchen table. Both have a stake in the decisions this government makes about power.

Large data centres can draw substantial amounts of electricity around the clock, and the government's own Budget 2026 identifies higher power demand from data centres as one of the factors expected to increase domestic demand for natural gas. The government should show Albertans how it's accounted for that demand, and when assessing the cost of these projects especially. The government says developers will pay for wires within their project footprint. It also points to existing requirements for data centres to pay for the transmission upgrades they need, so I'd like to ask the minister to show us how those protections work across the system. Who pays if a project requires new infrastructure beyond its site? Who carries the cost if that infrastructure is built and the project is delayed, downsized, or cancelled? And what happens to the price of power if several major projects come online before enough new supply is available? Those are different costs, and each needs an answer. A developer can pay for its connection while additional demand still puts pressure on power prices.

***5:20***

Before approval Albertans should be able to see an independent assessment of both the direct infrastructure costs and the potential effect on electricity prices. The province should also require developers to put up financial security where needed so households and existing businesses are protected if a project falls through. And when the province allocates scarce power capacity, it should consider what else Alberta could do with it. A food processor, a steel fabricator, and a data centre can all bring investment. How many lasting jobs will each create? What will each contribute to Alberta's supply chains? How much public infrastructure will each need? That is the kind of comparison that I expect a government to make when it says that it has a plan for the economy. Albertans should not be expected to absorb higher energy costs so that global tech companies can operate in this province. We need to protect the grid, focus on reliability, and make sure we protect Albertans who are already struggling to pay their bills. A government that is serious about affordability would make those protections enforceable and transparent.

In addition, we can't overlook that data centres can require significant quantities of water. Water use depends on how a facility is designed and cooled. A community should know how much fresh water a project expects to draw, where will it come from, and what limits will apply in a drought. Those limits should be enforceable, and actual use should be reported publicly. The assessment should

also consider the combined demands from multiple projects drawing on the same water supply. Farmers, municipalities, and businesses all need to know what they can count on in a dry year. Good siting can resolve some of these problems early. Start with properly zoned industry sites where the infrastructure can support the project. Protect prime farmland. Give neighbours a meaningful say about noise, setbacks, and operating conditions while the project can still be changed, and engage Indigenous communities early enough for their concerns and priorities to shape the decision.

We should take the same care with privacy and Canadian data sovereignty. If public institutions or Canadian businesses are going to rely on these facilities, they need to know who controls their data, who can access it, and what legal protections apply. Those questions matter to the companies we want to attract and to all Albertans whose information may be stored there.

Our caucus heard directly from Albertans through town halls and public feedback. They asked practical and smart questions. Will my power bill go up? What happens to our water supply? Will my kids have a chance at one of those jobs? They deserve answers while their input can still influence the outcome, Mr. Speaker. That is why the Alberta New Democrats are calling for this pause on AI data centre approvals while Alberta puts a comprehensive plan and community-supported assessment framework in place.

Our AI data centre blueprint sets out what every proponent should be able to demonstrate. There should be measurable community benefits, including good permanent jobs. There should be a clear process and decision timelines that residents and municipalities and investors can count on. And the benefits to Alberta should outweigh the financial and social environmental costs. An Alberta NDP government will apply that test before projects are approved. We would insist on enforceable protections for ratepayers and water supplies, meaningful consultation, and public reporting on jobs and community commitments. We would welcome projects that meet those standards and give investors a clear process for getting to a decision. Mr. Speaker, the UCP has had the chance to set those terms.

**The Speaker:** Seeing no more speakers, would the mover of the motion like to close?

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a second time]

## Government Bills and Orders
### Third Reading
*(continued)*

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

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise this evening on behalf of the Minister of Finance and the President of Treasury Board to move third reading of Bill 41, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2).

Now, Mr. Speaker, as members examine the legislation in greater detail, I want to provide additional clarity on its key provisions and why they matter. Bill 41 contains practical, targeted changes to legislation governing pensions, securities, insurance, taxes, financial reporting, and government programs. While these changes cover several areas, they share a common purpose: ensuring Alberta's laws remain clear, effective, and responsive to the needs of Albertans and Alberta businesses.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments to the Employment Pension Plans Act would modernize Alberta's pension legislation and give pension plan members more choice and flexibility. The changes would also define contribution pension plans to offer variable life benefits as another way for eligible retirees to receive income for life. Currently, retirees can turn their pension savings into an annuity, handing over a lump sum to an insurance company in exchange for a fixed payment for life. Variable life benefits would let Albertans keep their funds invested after retirement, providing them with a flexible monthly income rather than being fixed for life. This gives our retirees another way to turn their pension savings into valuable income while reducing their risk of outliving those savings.

The amendments would also allow some pension plan members to make additional voluntary contributions to build on existing retirement savings. By pooling participating retirees, it also helps lower the volatility of pension funds from fluctuating market performance and lowers the administrative costs for plan administrators. These changes would align Alberta's pension system with other jurisdictions such as federally and in B.C., Ontario, and Quebec, where variable life benefits are already offered. By expanding our pension legislation, we are making sure Albertans have access to those same retirement options, benefits, and flexible returns as other Canadians right here at home.

Now, to be clear, this legislation is about expanding options. When plan administrators offer variable life benefits it will be one hundred per cent up to Albertans to decide whether they want to participate in this type of plan or not. After a lifetime of hard work these are Albertans' pensions, and they should have every option available to them to receive the benefits in a way that works best for them. That's exactly what this legislation works to do.

Bill 41 would also strengthen Alberta's securities laws to protect investors while keeping our capital markets competitive. The amendments would establish an independent dispute resolution body, giving retail investors a more accessible and less costly alternative to resolving disputes through the courts. They would also give the Alberta Securities Commission authority to resolve a broader range of disputes between companies and shareholders, including certain proxy contests, and provide additional tools to improve compliance. Efficient dispute resolution protects investors, reduces uncertainty, and reinforces confidence in Alberta's capital markets.

Bill 41 would also modernize the Captive Insurance Companies Act, giving businesses another way to manage risk when traditional commercial insurance is difficult or too expensive to obtain for their specific business structure. The amendments would allow a parent company to own or have a controlling interest in a captive, either on its own or with other affiliated entities. They would also clarify that captives can cover risks associated with contractors and subcontractors, which is particularly relevant to sectors such as construction. Licensed captives in Alberta serve many industries, including real estate, agriculture, hospitality, construction, manufacturing, and energy. The proposed changes would make captives more accessible to businesses across these other sectors.

***5:30***

Now, expanding access does not mean reducing oversight, Mr. Speaker. The bill would strengthen safeguards for all captive types and clarify how captive owners manage risks associated with contractors. These changes would make the framework more practical and competitive while maintaining oversight, helping Alberta remain an attractive place to invest and to grow a business.

Mr. Speaker, this bill also includes amendments needed to support the implementation of care-first auto insurance on January 1 of 2027. Provisions governing auto insurance contracts, policies, premiums, and insurer rating programs would simply move from the Insurance Act to the Automobile Insurance Act. This would enable Albertans and industry to easily find all the information they

need about auto insurance in one place. Bringing these rules together would make the framework easier to understand and administer, reduce gaps or inconsistencies between statutes, and help ensure the new system works as intended when it takes effect.

Amendments to the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act would also align the program with care-first. It would provide a last resort safety net with the same level of care and benefits as care-first for innocent victims who are injured in a collision and have no other source of insurance coverage. Under care-first Albertans would have the highest level of accident benefits in the country with enhanced medical treatment, accessibility supports, income replacement, and other benefits to support faster recovery from the start. More broadly, care-first will reduce costs for Albertans on January 1, 2027, and, most importantly, support more stable and predictable premiums long term.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments to the Tobacco Tax Act would simply clarify the current legislation on the existing tax treatments of smokeless tobacco products, including oral tobacco pouches. These products would continue to be taxed based on their total weight, just like they are today. It will still be the same tax at the same rate and applied in the exact same way as it is already today, and it would not impact the prices of associated tobacco products. By more clearly setting out the current tax treatment in legislation, we would give manufacturers and distributors clarity and certainty on their obligations, support consistent administration, and reduce the risk of costly disputes.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 41 also includes several targeted amendments that would improve the administration of government programs, reduce unnecessary duplication, and strengthen existing legislation. Amendments would streamline audit and financial reporting requirements for provincial health organizations, helping them reduce unnecessary duplication while maintaining firm financial oversight and accountability.

Rather than provincial health corporations and the agency they report to both spending time and resources to produce two identical financial audit reports, this amendment would allow for just one copy of the exact same report to be completed and released. The singular report would continue to include all the same comprehensive details that are currently made available, and, Mr. Speaker, it would maintain full oversight and complete transparency in reporting for Albertans that they have today. That is not changing. By streamlining this process, these amendments would also help ensure annual government reports continue to be delivered on time and without future delays.

Finally, Bill 41 includes targeted amendments to the legislation administered by Assisted Living and Social Services. These changes would modernize and clarify provisions in the Income and Employment Supports Act without – without, I emphasize – changing existing benefits, programs, or appeal rights.

**An Hon. Member:** Did you say without?

**Mr. Schow:** I did indeed say without, Mr. Speaker.

They also strengthen the legislative framework under the Public Trustee Act by putting an existing investment requirement directly into legislation while maintaining the requirement that decisions be made in the best interests of clients. These are practical, targeted changes that would make government programs easier to administer, reduce unnecessary administrative burden, and provide greater clarity and certainty in legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 41 is about making Alberta's laws work better in practical, tangible ways. For retirees that means more choice and flexibility in how they save for retirement and receive income for life. For investors it would mean stronger protections and more accessible ways to resolve disputes. For businesses it means more flexibility to manage risk and clear rules to support confidence, investment, and growth. Our targeted amendments improve clarity and consistency across government programs while maintaining the services and protections Albertans rely on. Taken together, Bill 41 would modernize Alberta's legislative framework, strengthen protections, and give Albertans and businesses greater choice, greater clarity, and greater certainty. These are changes that respond to how Albertans live, work, and invest and do business today in the modern world while ensuring our legislation is ready for the future.

I look forward to this Chamber's continued debate, Mr. Speaker, robust debate, I'm certain, and constructive debate.

With that, I move third reading of Bill 41, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2).

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

**Member Kayande:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to participate in, hopefully, this very robust and constructive debate regarding the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2), Bill 41. Now, the insurance is too darned high. It's really expensive. You know, this government has a way of – it goes up by 100 bucks, goes up by 200 bucks, goes up by 500 bucks, and then: ooh, ooh, ooh; okay; we hit a tipping point; time to knock it back about 100 bucks, right? You don't get back to where you started, and there's nothing in this bill that's going to get us back to where we started on auto insurance. Where we started was in 2019, when average written premiums were about $1,300. Now it's closer to $1,800. That means a lot of people are paying more than $2,000 a year.

I absolutely feel for the tradespeople who have to buy a truck, probably not a great truck, and pay $5,000, $6,000, $7,000 a year to insure that thing. I think that's awful. Above all, I think it's shocking how we now have a brand new what they call a made-in-Alberta solution. Made in Alberta means experimental. This is an experiment. This is a government that is experimenting on the people of Alberta with a never created, never delivered, never implemented insurance solution and making important legislative changes to it a month before it's going live.

I mean, let's think about that a little bit. Like, it's as if, you know, on the space shuttle they're looking at – okay; I'm a little older now. Back when we built spacecraft that was meant to come back, it's as if they looked at those O-rings and said: "You know what? They don't do so well in the cold. I'm sure it'll be fine." This is a month from launch. So good luck. This is a government that didn't realize: "Hey, whoa, schools don't have two flagpoles. Who knew?" Can't get the number of flagpoles right, and now they're making legislative changes a month away from our auto insurance entirely being rebuilt from scratch.

***5:40***

I know there's a lot of jocularity on this side of the House about that, but what I'm terrified about is what this does to the constituents of Calgary-Elbow. I feel like the cake is not entirely baked. The funny thing is that when a cake is not entirely baked, you can't just put it back in the oven and bake it a little longer and hope it'll come out the same. When the ice cream has been left on the shelf and it's kind of melted through, you can't put it back in the freezer and get back ice cream. It doesn't work that way. I wish it did.

You know, I'm really hoping that every family that has a teenager, which includes my family, everybody who needs a particular vehicle to drive to work with, everybody who – by the way, I do hope everybody gets a chance to renew their driver's licence in a reasonable amount of time. I hope that the insurance

system works the way that this government says it does, but I have a lot of fear in my heart. Good luck. It's too expensive. On January 2 it will still be too expensive. Don't forget, this is the government that's responsible. They're the ones who are fussing around the flagpoles rather than actually delivering something that will reduce the costs of Albertans.

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

**Member Ellingson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 41. This legislation reveals the government's priorities or maybe I should say lack of priorities, reveals what the government thinks about what they think matters, what the UCP believes deserves attention or perhaps, most importantly, what problems they'd rather avoid talking about. You see, as we heard for about 12 minutes, while Bill 41 does contain a long list of amendments to pension legislation, securities legislation, captive insurance rules, tobacco taxes, automobile insurance administration, various financial statutes, the bill is completely disconnected from the realities that Albertans are facing.

Albertans are worried about affordability. Albertans are worried about emergency wait times. Albertans are worried about whether or not their kids can afford to buy a home. Albertans are worried about whether the next generation will have good, mortgage-paying jobs and if they'll have the money to raise their children the way they were raised. Yet here we have another UCP bill dedicated largely to moving responsibilities around, changing authorities, creating new administrative processes, making technical amendments.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is the legislative version of rearranging the furniture when the roof is leaking. The government points proudly to where the couch is now located. Meanwhile Albertans are standing there with buckets collecting rainwater dripping through the roof. Bill 41 introduces variable life benefits and allows greater flexibility for certain pension contributions and retirement income options, similar to models that exist in other provinces. Many retirees may appreciate having more options, but the question that the government doesn't seem to ask is: what good is retirement flexibility if people can't save for retirement in the first place? Who is thinking about pension flexibility when they can't pay their rent, afford prescription drugs, or they're worried about access to health care without pulling out their credit card?

The UCP spends their time on actuarial spreadsheets, but on this side of the House we're spending our time with people. When the Alberta NDP were in government, we increased minimum wage for workers. We created the Alberta child benefit and Alberta family employment tax credit, cutting child poverty in half. We froze tuition for postsecondary students. We made major investments in schools and health care facilities and put Albertans to work improving public services. We funded 244 school projects and completed 180 of them in only four years. We built the Arthur Child cancer centre in Calgary.

Those were actions that built security for Albertans from the ground up, Mr. Speaker. One thing the UCP government consistently gets wrong is treating economic growth as a number, but economic growth isn't just about numbers; it's about people. It's about people having jobs that allow them to pay for their life. You know, during this UCP's tenure Alberta used to have a wage advantage over the rest of the country, but that wage advantage has evaporated under this UCP government.

The economy is about small and medium-sized enterprises getting access to capital. It's about infrastructure to deliver excellent public services. It's about access to health care and world-class public education. Unfortunately, Bill 41 doesn't address any of this. It doesn't make life better for Albertans, contrary to what the minister said. Bill 41 does propose securities regulation changes, but the real challenge we should be solving is access to capital for small and medium enterprise. Bill 41 changes governance structures. It reorganizes bureaucracy. The government focus seems to be on amendments to existing regulations, but the UCP is missing the point, Mr. Speaker. The goal isn't administrative changes; it's helping small and medium-sized enterprise grow.

I'm thankful to my colleague from Edmonton-Manning pointing out that this bill doesn't really address the challenges faced by small and medium-sized enterprise gaining access to capital. You see, Mr. Speaker, small and medium-sized enterprises create good-paying jobs. They diversify the economy. They innovate. But companies tell us every day that they struggle to access capital to grow, and Bill 41 doesn't help them with that. The Alberta NDP supports efforts to genuinely help entrepreneurs grow their businesses, hire workers, and attract investment.

Improving dispute resolution is not an economic strategy, Mr. Speaker. The UCP too often treats technical amendments as substitutes for leadership. Albertans look forward to a government that brings forward legislation that addresses the challenges that they face. Albertans are looking forward to an Alberta NDP government, a government that, you know, perhaps talks about the most important issue that they consistently talk about day after day, and that is health care.

It's remarkable, Mr. Speaker, that the government can spend years restructuring health care, splitting agencies, creating agencies, renaming agencies, reorganizing agencies, and then creating new agencies to oversee the agencies. Yet somehow, through all of this, Albertans are still struggling to get access to a doctor and are seeing longer wait times in emergency rooms. The UCP seems to approach health care as a problem with the org chart. That's what's evident in this bill. Instead of improving public health care in Alberta, Bill 41 reduces transparency.

Bill 41 allows the minister to eliminate stand-alone public reporting for health care subsidiaries like EMS and fold them into larger agencies like Acute Care Alberta. This bill lets the minister have the power to decide which entities report independently, which are consolidated, what information is disclosed, how reporting is structured, without returning to the Legislature for approval. This makes it harder for MLAs, media, health care workers, and the public to track performance spending, staffing pressures, and outcomes of individual services like EMS laboratories, surgical services, or cancer care.

Mr. Speaker, I'll remind this House that the NDP brought forward a bill that would actually look at health care outcomes for Albertans. With Bill 41, instead of reducing emergency room wait times, we get administrative changes to cloud decision-making and financial reporting, all while this government is still embroiled in the worst corruption scandal in Canadian history.

***5:50***

The Alberta NDP sees health care through the patients. We know that health care is the number one issue raised by Albertans. They can't access specialists, surgeons, or hospital beds. They're going to be waiting a while for these challenges to be addressed. They're waiting for the next general election to be called.

The UCP cannot claim that it has the strongest economy in Canada while simultaneously driving physicians, nurses, and health professionals from the system. When our government negotiated stable agreements with health care professionals invested in front-line care, we understood that public services aren't just social infrastructure; public services are also economic infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 41 also contains administrative changes related to the government's incoming automobile insurance framework, which my colleague from Calgary-Elbow just talked about. These

amendments establish authorities and information-sharing systems to support the implementation of the new no-fault model. Albertans have heard many promises from this government about insurance. After years of skyrocketing premiums Albertans have become experts in disappointment. Every year drivers open their renewal notices like participants in a reality television competition. Will they survive this season? Will their premium increase by $100, $500, $1,000? Nobody knows. Suspense is apparently a part of the program. The government promises their new model will reduce rates. Well, let's see. As my colleague just said, good luck.

What we might also see from the implementation of Bill 41 is independent insurance brokers from across the province closing their offices in rural communities. The UCP talks a lot about what they're doing for rural Albertans. Maybe they can explain to rural Albertans why they chose to make amendments in Bill 41 that will make it more difficult for independent insurance brokers, with many of them saying that they may not survive these changes and close their businesses.

There's another theme to Bill 41, the UCP government's continued tendency to centralize authority. Over the last several years we've seen legislation affecting municipalities, postsecondary institutions, public agencies, health governance, and independent organizations consistently move authority upward towards ministers and cabinet. Again and again when faced with a challenge, this government concludes that what Alberta really needs are fewer independent, impartial decisions and more ministerial direction. It's almost impressive. If there were an Olympic medal for concentrating authority in cabinet, this government would be competing for gold.

They would also be vying for the gold medal for the most number of ministers in government, with almost every member over there either in government caucus holding a ministry, an associate ministry, or a parliamentary secretary position. Maybe that's why they need to centralize decision-making. It's a make-work project for just the sheer size of the cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, the phrase that keeps coming to mind with Bill 41 and extended other work of this government is "sleight of hand." Over there: watch that technical amendment; watch that restructuring; watch this procedural update; watch this governance adjustment. Meanwhile, while governments are distracted, their real questions aren't being answered.

Why is affordability worse now than when the UCP was elected? Why are public services stretched? Why are young families struggling to get ahead? Why do more Albertans feel economically insecure despite living in one of the wealthiest jurisdictions in the world? The UCP hopes that if they keep moving chairs around quickly enough, Albertans will mistake movement for progress, but this movement is not progress. Reorganization is not progress. Announcements are not progress. Press releases are not progress. Progress is when people can afford to buy groceries. Progress is when they have a family doctor. Progress is when they have wages keeping up with the cost of living. Progress is when small and medium enterprise can invest and share benefits with workers.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta NDP has a different vision. We would focus relentlessly on affordability, on housing that is affordable. We would strengthen health care instead of endlessly restructuring it. We would support workers and collective bargaining rights. We would invest in training and apprenticeship opportunities. We would help Alberta businesses grow by improving access to skilled labour, infrastructure, investment, and export opportunities. We would grow Alberta's energy industry while expanding opportunities in petrochemicals, technology, agriculture, manufacturing, and emerging sectors.

Mr. Speaker, some of the provisions of Bill 41 could be seen as reasonable, but it still misses the point. This bill moves pieces around on the board, but what Albertans really want is something that actually makes their lives better. The difference between the UCP and the Alberta NDP is that while the government is busy rearranging deck chairs, we're focused on where the ship is moving: toward a society where everyone can live with dignity and respect, where parents know their children will receive the best public education in the world, where everyone knows the health care system will be there when they need it and they don't need their credit card to pay for it, an economy that works for everyone, not just billionaires. That is the future Albertans deserve. That is the future they will get when they elect an NDP government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Seeing no more speakers, the hon. Government House Leader has moved third reading of Bill 41, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2), a money bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a third time]

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

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

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]

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