



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Select Special
Citizen Initiative Proposal
Review Committee

Wednesday, May 20, 2026
2 p.m.

Transcript No. 31-2-3

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

Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee

Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC), Chair
Sawhney, Rajan, Calgary-North West (UC), Deputy Chair
Glubish, Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC),* Acting Deputy Chair

Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Sawyer, Tara, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC)

* substitution for Rajan Sawhney

Also in Attendance

Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)

Support Staff

Shannon Dean, KC	Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Law Clerk
Vani Govindarajan	Parliamentary Counsel
Adam Quirk	Legal Counsel
Philip Massolin	Clerk Assistant and Executive Director of Parliamentary Services
Nancy Robert	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees
Abdul Bhurgri	Research Officer
Rachel McGraw	Research Officer
Warren Huffman	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Christina Steenbergen	Supervisor of Communications Services
Amanda LeBlanc	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Standing Committee on Citizen Initiative Proposal Review

Participant

Thomas Lukaszuk, Proponent of the Alberta Forever Canada Citizen Initiative Petition

2 p.m.

Wednesday, May 20, 2026

[Mr. Lundy in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Brandon Lundy, MLA for Leduc-Beaumont and chair of the committee. I'd ask that members and those joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record. We'll begin to my right.

Mr. Nixon: Good afternoon, everybody. Jason Nixon, MLA for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services.

Mrs. Sawyer: Tara Sawyer, MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Glubish: Nate Glubish, MLA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park, Minister of Technology and Innovation.

Member Ellingson: Court Ellingson, MLA, Calgary-Foothills.

Ms Pancholi: Good afternoon. Rakhi Pancholi, MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Gray: Good afternoon, everyone. Christina Gray, MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Quirk: Adam Quirk, legal counsel.

Ms Robert: Good afternoon. Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and committees.

Mr. Huffman: Warren Huffman, committee clerk.

The Chair: Thank you, everyone.

I will note that we do not have anyone joining us online today, and for the record I will note the following substitution: the hon. Mr. Glubish for the hon. Mrs. Sawhney.

Before we begin, a few housekeeping items before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*. Committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

With that, we can move to approval of the agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the draft agenda? All right. Seeing none, would someone like to make a motion to approve the agenda? MLA Sawyer. So moved by MLA Sawyer that the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee approve the proposed agenda as distributed for its May 20, 2026, meeting. Any discussion? All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed? That motion is carried.

Moving on to our approval of minutes. Are there any errors or omissions to the draft minutes from our May 11 meeting? All right. Seeing none, would someone like to make a motion to approve the minutes? MLA Sawyer again. Moved by MLA Sawyer that the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee approve the minutes as distributed of its meeting held on May 11, 2026. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed? That motion is carried.

Moving on to our next agenda item, agenda item 4, citizen initiative proposal review, section (a), business from previous meeting. As a reminder at our last meeting on May 11 two motions

that the committee had under consideration were adjourned. Both of those motions included dates in their text that have now passed. Because those dates have now passed, those motions are no longer in order. Specifically, the committee meeting adjourned with the following motion on the floor, moved by Ms Pancholi, that

the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee recommend that the government move a motion by May 14, 2026, in the Legislative Assembly to ask, "Do you agree that Alberta should remain in Canada?"

As I indicated, this motion is no longer in order.

The second motion in question, which was adjourned by the committee at last week's meeting, reads as follows. Moved by Member Ellingson that

the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee invite as part of the committee's review of the Alberta forever Canada citizen initiative policy proposal the following stakeholders to make an oral presentation at the next committee meeting: (a) the petition proponent, and (b) other stakeholders recommended by the committee to be provided to the committee clerk by the 13th of May 2026.

Again, as previously mentioned, this motion is no longer in order.

Moving us on to next steps. With that explained, we will now move on to the next steps item on the agenda. I would like to now offer members the opportunity to move new motions related to these topics or other ideas that members may like to suggest. I will now open the floor to all members.

MLA Sawyer, please go ahead.

Mrs. Sawyer: Yeah. If I could, Mr. Chair, I'd like to move a motion. I move that

the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee (a) invite the proponent of the Alberta forever Canada citizen initiative policy proposal to appear before the committee to provide an oral presentation of up to 10 minutes and (b) following the presentation provide each caucus three segments of up to five minutes each to ask questions and for the presenter to respond.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Sawyer.

Okay. We do have that up on the screen. MLA, do you mind just confirming that that was your motion as moved?

Mrs. Sawyer: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. I will open this up for discussion. Would you like a chance to speak to this motion?

Mrs. Sawyer: Yes. I think that it only makes sense to have the proponent be able to explain to us the intent of his petition, and I think by having the time blocks it makes it equal for each one of us to be able to have equal time to ask questions of the respondent. I think that's a way to keep it fair and transparent that the process has gone through.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, MLA Sawyer.

MLA Pancholi, please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: I would like to move an amendment to this motion, please.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Pancholi: In section (a) strike out "10 minutes" and replace it with "20 minutes".

The Chair: Okay. We're working on getting that amendment on the screen. Should be up shortly.

Okay. MLA Pancholi, is that your proposed amendment?

Ms Pancholi: Yes. That is my proposed amendment. If I may speak to it.

The Chair: Please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: I'm pleased to hear that the government members are finally willing to accept hearing from the petition proponent for the forever Canada petition after two meetings where they successfully stalled on that. I do recall that both the Ministry of Justice representative, Justice Brown, as well as the Chief Electoral Officer of Elections Alberta each had 20 minutes to present and then took questions of an unlimited amount of time from the members of the committee.

I would suggest that we are not hearing from the petition proponent today – if we do hear from him – solely for his own representation, but he is there to represent over 400,000 individuals who signed this petition and the close to, I understand, around 10,000 volunteers who were out there collecting signatures. So it's not really just about the petition proponent but all the Albertans, really, who are part of this process and who signed their names to this petition. I think 20 minutes is fair. It's the same as we've given every other person who's presented to this committee.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Pancholi.

I have Minister Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: The standard process at committee for somebody like a minister who comes here would be a 10-minute opening statement, followed by question blocks to be able to make sure it can be fair to give everybody an opportunity to question the proponent. I will also point out that when we used the separate approach in earlier meetings, it was not very effective because you couldn't get any proper flow with those individuals. I certainly do support the block time. I think it will be easier on the proponent but also more effective to be able to get to a reasonable conversation.

I'll also point out that the other individuals the member is referring to were technical experts. This is not a technical expert, so, I mean if we can as ministers come in and express \$12 billion, \$13 billion budgets in 10 minutes and then get into questions, I think it'll probably work fine for the proponent.

I think we should vote on this, and let's get on with the issues of the day.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, MLA Nixon.

MLA Gray, did I see your hand?

Ms Gray: Yes. Thank you so much. First off, Minister Nixon is referring to a standard process. Nothing about this is a standard process, and nothing has been treated in a standard way. I think the "flow" comment around section (b) is well received. The amendment here is only about 10 minutes to 20 minutes. Through the chair, Thomas Lukaszuk has already received a letter informing him that we would be moving to amend this to 20 minutes so that he could be prepared, so this is not a surprise to anyone in this room.

I think given the number of hours that that individual has spent on these issues across months, the thousands of people he has spoken with, receiving 20 minutes is more than appropriate. I think we want to hear everything because if any decisions are being made today, we should have all the information. This is just a 10-minute block. I don't see why the government would be so worried about hearing someone for an additional 10 minutes.

2:10

I will support this amendment if I could vote, but I can't because I'm a guest at the committee, so I rescind that last comment. I'm

not voting on this, but I do support it, and I hope others will vote for it.

The Chair: Thank you for those comments, MLA Gray.

Is there anyone else wishing to join in on the debate on this amendment?

All right. Seeing none, I'm prepared to call the question on the amendment as proposed. All those in favour of the amendment, please say aye. Any opposed, please say no.

That amendment is defeated.

With that, we can continue deliberations on the main motion once our screen pops back up. Are there any other members looking to join the debate on the main motion?

All right. Seeing none, I am prepared to call that question. All those in favour of the motion as presented, please say aye. Any opposed? All right.

That motion is carried.

With that motion passed, I would now like to invite the hon. Thomas Lukaszuk, the proponent of the Alberta forever Canada petition, to join us at the table. Mr. Lukaszuk, you'll have up to 10 minutes for your presentation, and the timer will be displayed on the screens in the room.

Thank you, sir. Please begin when you are ready.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Good afternoon, hon. members. Thank you for sparing not only five minutes but 10 minutes of your valuable time to allow for a fulsome discussion on the future of Alberta in Canada. I hope that my comments will help to correct some of the confabulations, twists, and turns that the Alberta government engaged in over the last year in order to facilitate a referendum on Alberta separating from Canada.

Let's get the record straight. What was the intention of the Forever Canadian petition? Well, let me tell you so you don't have to wonder anymore. In June 2025 I became aware of the fact that the Premier's office was collaborating with some separatists on a plan to facilitate for them an easier way to proceed to a binding constitutional pro-separation referendum, that the number of required signatures was to be lowered, and more time was to be given to the separatists for collection of signatures. Bill 14 paved the way for separatists to file their petition on July 4, oddly the American Independence Day.

At that time the Citizen Initiative Act also stated that there could only be one question on a given subject matter, and if that petition was successful, another question could not be posed for another five years. To give the Alberta government an off-ramp and avoid an inevitable binding constitutional referendum, I filed a policy question petition that does not compel the government to hold a referendum. It was my and Forever Canadian's position that if a conversation on the future of Canada is to take place, it must be led by loyal Canadians, and it must not result in a binding referendum. However, no one knew then that the Alberta government wanted, it appears, to be compelled to hold a binding referendum on separation. To that end, government again changed the rules and allowed the separatists to file their petition even though the Forever Canadian policy petition garnered nearly half a million signatures.

Why is the Forever Canadian policy question suddenly of interest to the government of Alberta? The government has a dilemma. Elections Alberta, two independent Court of King's Bench decisions, and recently in your committee a retired justice of the Supreme Court of Canada told you that you cannot initiate a binding referendum process on a question that may possibly trigger a process of separating Alberta from Canada without first consulting with First Nations. Also, Albertans must know what the actual consequences of their vote would be if Canada was to break up,

before being asked to vote in a binding referendum. For that reason, an injunction was issued preventing you to proceed with the separatists' question. So instead of accepting reality, through this committee the government is looking for another question to satisfy the promise to separatists to hold a referendum.

The Forever Canadian question, which is "Do you agree that Alberta should remain in Canada?" is a policy question. It does not meet the constitutional referendum requirements, it wasn't filed under that pathway, and it does not meet the Clarity Act test. As the Citizen Initiative Act states, neither I nor Forever Canadian as a movement can be proponents of a referendum on separation. If this committee proposes that the Forever Canadian question is to be put to a referendum, the government will be the proponent of a question on breaking up Canada, not anyone else.

So what are the consequences? If you decide to put forward a question on breaking up Canada to a referendum, be aware of the following. No matter what question you select, the government of Alberta will be the instigator of the process. Neither I nor Forever Canadian are permitted under the act to initiate a referendum or select a question for such a referendum. If the government initiates the referendum and considers it to be binding and intends to honour whatever the outcome of the vote will be, you are afoul with the recent court decision and simply are doing an end run around their requirement to consult with First Nations. However, if the government initiates the referendum under the Referendum Act, which is your only option, and considers it as not binding, as the act intends them to be, then you are misleading separatists and all their petition signatories. As I understand them, they trust that the Alberta government will initiate a binding referendum, so choose and be honest about your intentions. This matter is of national importance and should not be subjected to political games.

Also, we are now confronted with an unprecedented leak of the Alberta voters list, which found its way into the separatists' hands. If the government of Alberta is impartial on the question of separation, do you honestly believe that a fair referendum on any question can be conducted when only one side of the campaign possesses such an instrumental list?

In summary, the government of Alberta was afforded numerous off-ramps to avoid a referendum on breaking up Canada. In court your lawyers argued in both hearings that the Premier and cabinet have a choice not to hold a referendum. Exercise that choice now. Your choice of holding this referendum has real consequences. All major chambers of commerce and business leaders told you that Alberta is already starting to feel investment hesitance. Albertans are more divided now than ever before. Neighbours don't speak with neighbours. Family members don't speak with family members. A six-month-long campaign about breaking up Canada will be devastating to our economy and to our community.

There are problems that need to be corrected in our federation. We all acknowledge that, but breaking up this country is not the answer. Alberta is now working collaboratively with Ottawa. The Premier is scoring many great points for Alberta. Let's build on this collaborative federalism and not disrupt it with a divisive referendum, when our common goal is to grow Alberta's and Canada's economy and resilience.

The choice, members, is yours. You will be held responsible for all its consequences. Our Forever Canadian movement, however, will do what it can to defend Alberta's future in Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, sir, for your presentation.

Committee members will now have an opportunity to ask Mr. Lukaszuk questions related to his presentation. In accordance with the motion we passed earlier today, each caucus will have three

five-minute segments to ask questions and for the presenter to respond. We will go back and forth between caucuses for each five-minute segment. I would remind all members that discussion should always flow through the chair.

With that, we will begin with the Official Opposition caucus. You have five minutes. MLA Pancholi, I believe you wanted to go first.

2:20

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you I'd like to thank Mr. Lukaszuk for appearing today to speak to the committee. As the person who initiated the petition, however, is the face of over 400,000 Albertans who have signed the petition, many of which did so, as we hear from the presentation today, in order to express their commitment to the future of Canada as proud Albertans and proud Canadians, I would like Mr. Lukaszuk to speak to the committee about, you know, the experience of the volunteers who are out in the community gathering signatures, the signatories in communities across the province. In your conversations as you were out there for months collecting those signatures and your volunteers were, what was their sense of their purpose and why they believed they were coming, they were signing the petition, and what they hoped for from the government, in your understanding, from that process?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Hon. member, thank you for that question. Committee members, something wonderful, actually beautiful has happened in our province during the Forever Canadian petition signature-gathering process. For a first time, definitely in my recollection but, I believe, in the history of Alberta, we have had a movement of Albertans of all walks of life and all political affiliations whereas actually most of them were not affiliated to any particular political party or philosophy, and what brought them together was their love for Canada. They knew that there was a possibility of a referendum that could tie this government's hands and be binding and that would initiate a constitutional process that could possibly lead to Alberta's separation from Canada.

These Albertans: you know, we had more than six and a half thousand canvassers, more than 10,000 volunteers, and as you know, nearly half a million Albertans signed this. They signed this because they wanted to see Alberta's future in Canada, and they wanted to prevent a referendum. It was made abundantly clear to signatories that we are giving the government an off-ramp. This was a policy question, and that is why it wasn't tested like the separatist question for a referendum. Albertans were hoping to avert this issue, which at that point in time, based on the rules that were applicable at that time, was imminent, and there was a possibility that separatists, with a much-reduced number of signatures, would push upon us a binding referendum that would not give government an off-ramp.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you.

Through the chair, while you were out there, you obviously saw many different signatories, people in many different communities. Do you believe that their hope was to sort of come together rather than to divide? They saw the potential of a referendum on separation as being divisive, and this was meant to be something a little bit more positive to counter that: do you believe that's what their understanding was?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Hon. member, a hundred per cent, and that was the beauty of the movement. You know, we had members of the UCP Party and the NDP Party and the former Reform Party and Liberal Party all working together to keep this province within Canada and to counter any potential threat that at that time existed – it was an

existential threat – that the separatist question would go forward. This was a very coalescing moment, a very community-building moment. This was a moment where, after a rather divisive period following COVID and convoys and other things where, again, neighbours were not always talking to neighbours, this brought them together. It was a very unifying process.

The only goal of Forever Canadian and the petition-gathering process was to avert the danger of having a binding referendum that will spark a process that could possibly lead to Alberta separation but also to sideline the economic damage that this already is causing to our province. You know, Ms Nancy Southern, CEO of ATCO, will tell you that. All major chambers of commerce will tell you that. It was to minimize any negative impact on Alberta's economy as well.

Ms Pancholi: Then, if I may, what do you think the next steps should be with the petition?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, that petition is in your hands. As you know, the act doesn't allow me to have a choice of whether I want a referendum or not. My preference is and always has been that this question be asked in the Legislature. Now, it shouldn't be a difficult thing to do. As a matter of fact, all MLAs should want to do that. I recall that when I became an MLA four times over and a cabinet minister, I actually swore an oath of allegiance. All of you members have, so I believe that this should be asked in the Legislature.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We'll now turn to the government caucus for their first five-minute block. MLA Sawyer, please proceed.

Mrs. Sawyer: Through you, Mr. Chair, thank you. Mr. Lukaszuk, I'm going to touch on what you just said because it's a little different. In May of last year you were interviewed by CTV twice. There are two points that you made during that time that seem to contradict what you're saying now, so it's very relevant to my question. On May 19, 2025, you stated, and I quote: you can't have two referenda on a similar or opposite question, so if our question gets approved, I firmly believe that that will be the question on the referendum, so the other question, the separatist question, simply falls off the ledge. End quote. Then on May 22, 2025, you stated, and I quote: if we get enough signatures, which I have no doubt in my mind that we will, we will have a referendum in this province. End quote.

What I'm trying to rectify on this is that your current position says that you always preferred a legislative vote, but that totally doesn't go with what you went in front of media and in your socials saying; the exact opposite. Can you explain how those two things align? They don't align for me.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, they may not align for you, but they do align, hon. member. Put yourself in the perspective of the legislation, which you changed over at least four times since, and we're talking within a span of one year. At that point in time – and if you read the first paragraph of my application with Elections Alberta, it says: since a referendum is inevitable. We knew that separatists were going to file on July 4 because that's the agreement that you have made with them, that you will lower the bars for them and they will file. So since a referendum was inevitable, it was the preference to have pro Canadians, loyal Canadians, lead the conversation. If we have to have a referendum, let's put the Forever Canadian question on the referendum.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you. Just to be clear . . .

Mr. Lukaszuk: Member, I'm still speaking.

Mrs. Sawyer: Yeah. No. Just a moment. It's relevant to what I'm trying to ask of you. If I may, through you, Mr. Chair, can I interject just for a moment to get some clarity?

The Chair: Thank you for going through the chair. Please ask the follow-up question.

Mrs. Sawyer: I just want some clarity because it's relevant to what you just said about your application. I'm reading, clear as day, "Therefore, we as represented by the signatory and applicant below propose a referendum on the following question." Again, I asked: how does it align with your direct quote? What you're saying does not align with your direct quote. Maybe you can just . . .

Mr. Lukaszuk: Hon. member . . .

Mrs. Sawyer: How are you – I'm just trying to figure out how you're . . .

Mr. Lukaszuk: Hon. member, you know and I know that you need a question, and you want the Forever Canadian question to go forward on a referendum. First of all, you don't need my permission because I am not the one who can give you that permission. The act clearly says that I don't get to decide what question goes forward, so if you want to put forward the Forever Canadian question to the referendum, you're free to do so. It's your prerogative, but bear in mind that it will be you who will be the proponent, not I, because under the act I cannot do that.

Mrs. Sawyer: I have the next question, if I may, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lukaszuk: So if you choose to be a proponent . . .

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, sir.

Through the chair, I have another question. I just have short time, so . . .

The Chair: There is a limited amount of time, so go ahead.

Mrs. Sawyer: On May 8, 2026, you posted a video on Facebook and Instagram where you emphasized the importance of voter turnout for what you described as an upcoming referendum, and you stated, quote, "to win this referendum, we must get out to vote," end quote, and further indicated that, quote, "when the referendum gets close, we will be able to, as a campaign, contact you and tell you where you're voting." End quote. That public messaging: do you not think that that creates different expectations? We had 400,000 people sign a petition because you told them it was a referendum. All of your language in all your social media and all of your things said "referendum," including in your application, so do you not think you gave them a false representation, that you were telling them it was a referendum?

Mr. Lukaszuk: There was going to be a referendum, and no matter what question is on the referendum, thank you for encouraging voter turnout. We will continue to encourage voter turnout to make sure that a pro-separatism question does not prevail in this province.

But let me go back to my last answer. I do not have a legal standing of either permitting you to put the question to a referendum or stopping you from it. If you choose to put any question you want to a referendum, you will be the proponent of a referendum on breaking up Canada, and you will bear all the consequences of that position.

2:30

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now return to the opposition caucus for the next five-minute block. MLA Ellingson, are you up?

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you again, hon. Mr. Lukaszuk, for being here today. I might start out by saying, with respect, that MLA Sawyer wasn't an MLA at the time that all of this was happening, so there may have been, you know, in recollection of what was going – but I want to ask about the court decisions and the First Nations' position in this decision.

We already know the courts have said that there is a duty to consult at this time with the separatist petition based on what was launched from First Nations communities in Alberta, so I want to ask you about whether or not you think that any question has a duty to consult. As you reflect on what the First Nations have put forward and what the court decision was, do you think that even your question would have a duty to consult?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, you know, both justices in two independent hearings were abundantly clear on this issue. This is where the choice, as I read earlier in my comments, has to be made by the government of Alberta. If the government of Alberta is going to put a question to a referendum on separatism, no matter what the question is, whether it's Forever Canadian or one of their own creation, if they're putting that question with what's known as the honour of the Crown, sincerity that they will act on the outcome of that referendum whatever the vote outcome may be, then by all means they need to have a consultation because they're sparking a process that ultimately will infringe on First Nations' and, frankly, all of us Canadians living in Alberta's rights.

However, if government puts a question on a referendum and is not sincere about it, has no plans to act on it no matter what the outcome of the vote is, then government can argue that this is simply a glorified poll and they have no intention of acting on that referendum. But be clear and open about that because I think separatists would have something to say about that as well.

Member Ellingson: Thank you for that response.

Through the chair, earlier in your presentation you talked about how, like, maybe the proceedings that we're seeing today are kind of like a back-end way of going around those court decisions. Can you maybe elaborate on that a little bit, what you think is happening here to get around the First Nations' position and the court decisions?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, the courts were abundantly clear, but predominantly Justice Feasby. In his first decision he clearly identified, which was then confirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada justice in this room last week, that the Forever Canadian question is not a constitutional question, and it definitely would not clear the Clarity Act. This was a policy question, and that's why it was allowed by Elections Alberta to be filed and proceed.

If we were to file it as a binding constitutional question, we would be in the same position separatists are in right now. The only difference is that we filed it as a policy question because that was the intention of that question. It should proceed as a policy question, but if government wants to convert a policy question into a referendum question, it will have consequences. Government has been forewarned.

Member Ellingson: Maybe, through the chair, if I can just ask kind of like a final, tying up to the questions that I heard from my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud. With respect to the

volunteers and the signatories that you had and the perceptions that they had of why they were getting engaged in all of this, can you maybe add a little bit to that on their perspective of the place of First Nations in all of this and First Nations' role in these decisions and place in Canada?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, you know, polling after polling we know that by far a vast majority of Albertans are proud, loyal Canadians. Some may be unhappy with other parts of Canada from time to time or with Ottawa, but the fact is that they are proud Canadians and cannot imagine themselves being a citizen of any other jurisdiction. It's not where they live; it's who they are that makes them Canadian. They engaged because they saw this existential threat of a binding referendum coming forward, and that is why they engaged in the numbers, because they wanted to prevent a referendum that is binding on government. This option of filing early and pre-empting separatists gave them the option to participate in a positive movement that was a nation-building movement, not a divisive movement.

Also, it gave government an off-ramp. The government could have chosen to ask this question in the Legislature or, frankly, do nothing with this question. The government also has the choice of putting it to a referendum with all its consequences if it chooses.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

We'll return back to the government side. MLA Glubish, I believe you're next.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Chair and through you to the proponent. Your campaign materials and your public appearances have repeatedly referred to winning a referendum and having a referendum on Alberta's place in Canada while references to a legislative vote appeared only later in the process. Was the legislative vote always contemplated, or did your position evolve over time?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Hon. member, what makes this conversation really unusual is the fact that we're not talking about a piece of legislation that was created by some previous government decades ago. This is your piece of legislation that you created, the Citizen Initiative Act, and you very purposely created two pathways in that legislation: one, a constitutional one that, if successful, forces you to have a binding referendum; and then you chose a policy option that could be considered by government and/or legislation and adopted as a policy. I chose the policy option, and that is why my question was allowed to go forward and didn't get any appeals and didn't get stuck with judicial decisions.

Now, I imagine when you were drafting that legislation, you wanted it to be used that way.

Mr. Glubish: May I interject. Through you, Mr. Chair, this is not getting to the root of the question. I'd like to clarify the question.

The Chair: Please ask a clarifying question. Go ahead.

Mr. Glubish: Look, again through you, Mr. Chair, I am very familiar with our legislation. Section 15 of that legislation explicitly states that a policy question could end up either as a vote in the Legislature or as a referendum, so I think that the characterizations that are being made here are not fully accurate, and my question still remains. The proponent was very clear in his public appearances talking about winning a referendum and having a referendum on Alberta's place in Canada and only later in the process began changing their tune with this talk of a legislative vote.

Do you acknowledge that the earliest public messaging from your campaign consistently emphasized a referendum outcome?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Of course, and it will continue to stress a referendum outcome because no matter what question you put to the referendum, the Forever Canadian intention will be to win.

Even though I don't have this act in front of me, I know it well enough. Go back to your section 15 that you quoted and tell us who makes the choice of whether this question goes to the Legislature or to a referendum. Is it the proponent? The answer is no. This committee decides, and then ultimately government decides.

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Chair, I've got another question. I mean, at the end of the day, what we're trying to get to the bottom of here is: what did the 400,000 signatories expect when they signed this? You know, to the proponent through you, Mr. Chair, his public messaging repeatedly referred to the initiative as a referendum effort, including statements such as "The #ForeverCanadian petition and referendum will not be won by money" and references to the, quote: #forevercanadianreferendumpetition. These statements consistently frame this initiative in terms of a referendum outcome. Again through you, Mr. Chair, would the proponent agree that their public communications clearly presented the initiative as one intended to lead to a referendum?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Hon. member, and maybe all three of you: you know, you can ask me the same question a million different times, but you're not going to get a different answer. The answer is that you don't need my permission to put any question on a referendum. As a matter of fact, as a proponent I don't have a legal standing . . .

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Chair, this is just saying the same answer again and again. We're not getting to the root of my question. I'd like to try again.

The Chair: Do you have a follow-up question, Mr. Glubish?

Mr. Glubish: Yes, I do. Clearly, we're not getting an answer here, so let's try a different way. As recent as May 8, 2026, the proponent posted a video on Facebook where he emphasized the importance of voter turnout for what they described as an upcoming referendum. They stated, and I quote, "To win this referendum, we must get out to vote," and further indicated that, and I quote: when the referendum gets close, we will be able to as a campaign contact you and tell you where you are voting. This messaging continues to be clearly oriented towards organizing participation in a referendum process.

2:40

What I'm taking from this and what I'm hearing from all of this messaging from the proponent is that when they were gathering these signatures, they were persuading people to sign in order to lead to a referendum. They weren't gathering signatures in order to lead towards a vote in the Legislature. Again I ask the member through you, Mr. Chair: you know, what's changed?

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

We'll now return to the Official Opposition. MLA Pancholi, please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Chair, it's unfortunate that the government members seem to be treating the petition proponent as some kind of hostile witness when he's representing the views of over 400,000 Albertans. They seem to be making this issue all about the petition proponent when the reality is that all Albertans have known that for about a year now the UCP government has been pretty intent on

having a referendum one way or another. So to act as if the petition proponent was the only person who was talking about that – the entire province has been talking about it, as was the intent from the UCP government, and as it turns out, it seems like the UCP government are going to be the ones to decide whether or not there is going to be a referendum on separatism.

I'll highlight. Through the chair to Mr. Lukaszuk, what do you make of the comments? I think they seem to confirm something that you've said already. This is from the Chief Electoral Officer at the last meeting of this committee. He said:

The only option available for Mr. Lukaszuk's petition was as a policy proposal due to its content . . . The proponents do not get to decide which of these their proposals fall under; rather, the law prescribes [that] . . . Second, the proponent does not get to decide what happens in the event their petition is successful. Section 15 sets out the duties that the government must take once it receives a copy of the successful citizen initiative petition proposal. The decision on how to proceed is the government's.

Would you agree with that, Mr. Lukaszuk?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, I couldn't agree with this any more. This is the way they drafted the legislation. The proponent collects signatures. It is through your committee. Ultimately, Executive Council, cabinet, decides what they want to do, and they have an off-ramp. They have been given an opportunity to do the right thing and resolve this issue in the House, in the Legislature, but if they choose to have a referendum, they can have a referendum. That is not for me to decide. The law doesn't give me the ability to make that decision for the Executive Council, for the Premier's office.

Ms Pancholi: Through the chair, Mr. Lukaszuk, what do you believe is the purpose behind why the UCP intends to put a referendum on separation forward?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, you know, one can have many hypotheses. The key issue with this is that it has become a divisive political matter. The future of our country and the possibility of separating our country and undermining First Nations' treaty rights should be above divisive partisan politics.

The fact is that now, as I mentioned earlier, in a situation where we have the biggest data breach in the history of Canada, where we have more than circumstantial evidence of foreign interference from south of the border, where Alberta is more divided than it ever has been in its past, if there was a good time to step back and do the right thing for our province and our country and say, "This is not the time to have a referendum," that would be the right thing to do.

If the members choose to go ahead and accept the responsibility of the outcomes that come along with a six-month divisive campaign – and who knows what the outcome of the referendum will be? – then all power to them, but then we will focus, as Forever Canadian, on winning that referendum. And yes, the messaging will be that voter turnout will be crucial.

Ms Pancholi: Through the chair, Mr. Lukaszuk, given that inevitably it looks as though the government, the UCP government, has intended to put forward a referendum on separatism for over a year now, as you were speaking to the Albertans that were signing this petition, do they feel as though their views were being properly reflected by this government through its process for dealing with your petition as well as dealing with other petitions? Do you feel that they felt heard by this government?

Mr. Lukaszuk: I firmly believe that the nearly half a million Albertans that took the time to sign this petition: their only goal is to keep Alberta and Alberta's future in Canada. So their expectation

is that this government and this Legislature – it pertains to all of you members in the House – do everything you can in your power to minimize the risk of Alberta separating from Canada. The best way to minimize it is not to hold a binding referendum. This could have been resolved already in the Legislature.

This is the time for leadership, hon. member. We live in unprecedented geopolitical times, where our national security is at risk. Internal divisions within our province and our country are not serving any of us Canadians, no matter where we live across Canada. The Premier is doing a fabulous job attracting MOUs and other agreements with Ottawa. Let's show unity through example, and let's show that collaborative federalism can work. Let's give Canada a chance, and let's not divide Albertans any further at such a critical time in our history.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our final five-minute block belongs to the government caucus. Minister Nixon, I believe you're up.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I very much agree with the fact that this is about the 400,000 people that signed a petition. The question that's put in front of this committee right now is what they were told when they were asked to sign it. It's abundantly clear, despite the revisionist history that we are hearing today, what they were told.

Let's just start off with what the petition itself said. It says, "Therefore, we as represented by the [signatures and application] below propose a referendum on the following question: Do you agree that Alberta should remain in Canada?" Mr. Lukaszuk is right, Mr. Chair. There's a difference between a binding referendum and a referendum on a policy question, but what is clear – and it was made clear by Elections Alberta – is that's the petition that the proponent signed, submitted to the government, and then travelled across the province providing to people.

I will be happy to table in the Legislature photographs at the petition stations that the Forever Canadian petition did across the province in which that exact language was at every portion of when it was signed, making it very, very clear that those 400,000 people were signing a petition because they wanted to have their voices heard and to be able to vote, in this case, to say clearly that they wanted to remain Canadians.

Now, I do agree also with the proponent who said in his opening statement that you need to choose to be honest about your objectives, and I would say that that's what we need to focus on. Which objectives do we have, the objectives that we're hearing today or the objectives that the 400,000 people signed a petition for? That's what matters. I will point out that in not one of these documents – not one of these documents – does it call for a vote inside the Legislature. What it does call for is a referendum.

In fact, the Forever Canadian petition ran ads that said that during this portion of time to be able to successfully get people to sign their petition. I'll just quote one ad, and there are many of them. "Upon confirmation by Elections Alberta of 300,000 signatures currently being gathered by 4,000-plus canvassers Alberta widely, by October 28, the referendum question will be advanced," which is an ad from forever Canada.

Multiple other quotes: some of my colleagues have referred to them. May 20, 2025, "Our referendum question," as you're referring, Mr. Lukaszuk, to your referendum petition. You go on to say, "If we're successful in the signatures, we will have a referendum in this province on this question." You do say, "I think we're going to have a referendum anyway," but you make clear that you think it will be on this question. You go on to say that, "Our question will be the question in the referendum" on May 29, 2025,

on CTV. You also tweeted out on May 30, 2025, "Our Forever Canadian petition and referendum petition." On May 30, 2025, again later in the day, you go on to say, again, "Our referendum petition" in reference to why you're asking people to come out and sign the signatures.

You're right. We have to focus on what the 400,000 Albertans signed a petition thinking that they were going to get. That's what the focus should be, Mr. Chair, and that is what's before this committee right now, not whether to advance a referendum question on our own. It's whether or not 400,000 people successfully called for a referendum question or not. It doesn't matter whether the proponent changed his mind during that period of time. What matters is what he told those proponents. In fact, on his own web page he has a 103-year-old Harold Kearn, a World War II war veteran signing this document. In that same post – happy to table it – you go on to make clear that there's going to be a referendum, and that's why he's signing this petition. This committee has to stand up for people like a 103-year-old war veteran who went out and signed a petition.

2:50

With all due respect, Mr. Chair, through you to the proponent, we didn't advance this question. You did advance this question. You signed a document that said that you want a petition on this question. You travelled this province asking people for a petition on this question. You went on TV repeatedly, over and over, asking for a referendum on this question. At no time did you ask for a vote in the Legislature during the referendum. Not once. In no place inside this application did you do it and ask for a vote in the Legislature. You asked for a referendum. My only question for you is: why do the 400,000 Albertans who signed this petition's voices no longer matter because you changed your mind, and if you never intended for a referendum, why did you mislead them while you did the petition?

Mr. Lukaszuk: That was a long question, hon. member, but good on you. You started with reading a quote, and I can assure you that my sentence did not start with the word "therefore." The first paragraph in that sentence that you neglect to read says: since a referendum in Alberta is inevitable . . .

The Chair: Thank you. To the proponent: we appreciate your attendance today and making yourself available to present and respond to questions on such short notice. We do have some other business to attend to. You are welcome to return to the gallery for the remainder of the meeting if you wish. Otherwise, I hope you enjoy the rest of your day.

All right. Hon. members, having now heard from the petition proponent, it might be beneficial to have some discussion on the direction the committee wishes to take from here. I will now open the floor to members with additional comments.

MLA Glubish, I see your hand. Please go ahead.

Mr. Glubish: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Look, you know, the proponent that we've just heard from talked about the right thing to do, and what I believe the right thing to do is, having heard what we've heard, give the 400,000 Albertans who signed this petition what they asked for when they signed this petition. To that end, I would like to move a motion here. I would like to move that the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee recommend the following: (a) that the Alberta forever Canada citizen initiative policy proposal tabled by the Speaker in the Legislative Assembly on December 2, 2025, Sessional Paper 241/2025, and the committee's report be referred to the Lieutenant Governor in Council for the purpose of a referendum in accordance with the Referendum Act; (b) that the Alberta

forever Canada citizen initiative policy proposal be appended to the committee's report; (c) that the question to be put to the electors in the referendum include an option for Albertans to vote for Alberta to remain in Canada; (d) that the referendum be held in conjunction with the referendum ordered to be held on October 19, 2026.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Glubish. We're going to get that motion up on the screen. Can you just read it through and make sure that that was your motion?

Mr. Glubish: Yes, I confirm that.

The Chair: Okay. I will open this up for discussion. Would you like a chance to . . .

Mr. Glubish: Sure. Yeah.

The Chair: Yeah. Go ahead.

Mr. Glubish: Look, let's be clear. From day one the proponent knew exactly where this process leads. Citizen initiatives are designed to end in a referendum if they hit the threshold of signatures. That shouldn't be a surprise. That's the whole point. As we've heard here today, the proponent said so himself repeatedly while collecting signatures. He told Albertans that this was about getting a province-wide vote. That's how he sold it. That's how he obtained 400,000 signatures asking for this outcome.

At no point did he suggest a different outcome or raise concerns about a referendum. He encouraged Albertans to sign this petition because it would ultimately lead to a referendum, and now that the process is playing out exactly as intended, he's had a change of heart. Well, at the end of the day, I want to be focused on the 400,000 Albertans who made it clear that they want to have a say on staying in Canada. The best way for us to give them that opportunity is to honour their request, honour the petition that they signed, and give Albertans the choice to vote on that option for Alberta to remain in Canada. I believe this is the right thing to do, and I believe this is a good next step given all of the facts we've heard today.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Glubish.
MLA Pancholi, please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think of all of the UCP MLAs that I thought would advance the position of having a referendum on separatism, I did not anticipate that it would be the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park. I am not surprised, though, that the UCP is clearly, as always intended, initiating a referendum on separatism. That has been their objective since last year, when they first changed the Citizen Initiative Act to lower it for their separatist friends. They have made it clear that they want this province to be dragged through a divisive discussion around separatism. They did not campaign on that. They did not run on it. At no point did the UCP put themselves forward as a separatist party in the last election, but here we are. Now it's very obvious, as we have a sitting member of cabinet putting forward a motion to bring forward a referendum on separatism, that the UCP is absolutely, undeniably one hundred per cent a separatist party.

Let us remember that the process under the Citizen Initiative Act, the act that this government brought forward, that they have amended numerous times, does not suggest that the petitioner proponent gets to decide what's going to happen. It does not suggest what was in the mind of the thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of people who signed the petition, many of which may

have signed that petition for various reasons. They cannot say with certainty that they wanted to sign the petition to have a referendum, simply as if it was a separatist petition. The leader of that movement, Mitch Sylvestre, has some pretty bizarre ideas, and simply because he has bizarre ideas doesn't mean that every single person who signed that petition shares those ideas.

This is about an expression that is under the act, and it is up to the government to decide what they're going to do with it. So if the members of this committee, the government members are putting forward a motion to suggest that there is a referendum on any question, it doesn't even matter what question it is related to separatism. It could be the forever Canada petition question. It could be – and let's be clear. The motion as proposed right now just says, "include an option for Albertans to vote for Alberta to remain in Canada," which means there could be wording in that referendum beyond what was in the forever Canada petition, which means, once again, it is the UCP government that is designing, initiating, and is a proponent of a referendum on separatism in Alberta.

There is no doubt now. There can be no hiding behind the separatist friends and whether or not they could get their signatures. There's no hiding behind the people who signed the forever Canada petition. The process in the act says it must be the government that initiates a referendum under the Referendum Act, and that is what the UCP members of this committee are proposing right now.

So let us be very clear. It is officially on the record. The UCP wants to have a referendum on separatism, and they are the proponent of that referendum.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Pancholi.
MLA Nixon, I saw your hand.

Mr. Nixon: Well, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud just proved the point. She said that this isn't about Mr. Lukaszuk; it's about the people who signed the petition, and this committee has a couple of specific responsibilities. One, to determine whether or not the petition had the appropriate signatures and whether or not they were validated by Elections Alberta. Second, what the petition documents actually said and what over 400,000 Albertans signed a document to ask for. And then, with those determined, give the best recommendation they can to cabinet.

I find it startling, frankly, Mr. Chair, that all of a sudden the NDP have taken this massive U-turn and want to disregard over 400,000 Albertans who asked for not a separatist vote but for a vote to say that they want to remain in their country. In fact, the only people here that seem to be trying to advance the separatist agenda seem to be the NDP. To be clear, over 400,000 Albertans signed this petition making clear they wanted to have their voices made clear during a referendum question on this process, and the NDP during that period of time, including the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, made very clear that's what they wanted to take place.

I'll give you a couple of quotes from the Leader of the Official Opposition. April 30, 2025, "Call the referendum," when referring to this. "Put a referendum on the ballot," when referring to this petition. On May 3, 2025: give us the referendum now. That was the Leader of the Official Opposition when referring to this petition. On May 5, 2025, just two days later: give us a referendum now; call the referendum now. That's what the Leader of the Official Opposition said, frankly, before the signatures were even in, asking for a referendum for individuals to be able to have their voices heard.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said on April 21, 2026, "Half a million Albertans deserve to have their voices heard and deserve to have them heard now." I agree completely. It's a significant number of people who signed this petition. So what did

the petition say? That's what matters before this committee. This was signed by the proponent. It said:

Therefore, we as represented by the [signatures] and applicant below propose a referendum . . .

Not a vote in the Legislature, not a vote around this committee table; a referendum.

. . . on the following question:

Do you agree that Alberta should remain in Canada?

3:00

I didn't sign that application. Mr. Lukaszuk did and then went across the province, including running ads. I want to stress this. I said this in my comments to Mr. Lukaszuk, but I think it really matters. I'll give you an ad from September 2025, Mr. Chair. Upon confirmation by Elections Alberta of 300,000 signatures currently being gathered by 4,000-plus canvassers Alberta-wide by October 28, the referendum question will be advanced. Mr. Lukaszuk has dozens of quotes like this that he made to media, on his social media, making clear that he would advance a referendum if he got those signatures.

Now, it does matter, the volunteers that sat inside libraries and collected signatures, the people who stood in line to be able to sign this application, what they were asking for, and there's no doubt they were asking for a referendum. If Mr. Lukaszuk wanted them to ask for something different, he should have been clear about that. Now he wants to go with a different approach. I hear him on that, but he can't speak for the 400,000 people that signed the application. The only people who can speak for them are them, and they spoke when they signed the application asking for the referendum question.

That's our job here today. Was a referendum question asked for? Yes. Is a referendum for a policy question in order? Yes. Were the signatures in order? Yes. This is not advancing a question, as I understand the motion from the hon. member, on whether or not we think there should be a vote on whether or not there should be a referendum on the question, "Do you agree that Alberta should remain in Canada?" It's a question on whether or not we confirm that 400,000 people asked for a referendum on that question. That's what's before this committee today. Now the Official Opposition wants to rechange all their quotes and all their desperate asks to have a referendum, frankly, before the process is even complete and then submit to this table that we ignore almost half a million Albertans who asked for a process to take place. It's outrageous.

You go on and look at the forever Canada social media pages. Look at how many people are asking for this to take place because they stood and signed it. If the proponent did not want that to take place, he shouldn't have travelled across the province and told people that it could take place. I believe we should respect what almost half a million Albertans asked for, who want to have a referendum to express their strong views. It's an extraordinary accomplishment, frankly, that the proponent was able to get that many signatures. But I would suggest to anybody in this committee that to vote to stop them from having what they signed for take place would be highly inappropriate, undemocratic, the opposite of what the NDP campaigned for the last year, and, most importantly, the opposite of what the proponent throughout forever Canada told Albertans when they signed said petition.

So I'm happy to support this though I, frankly, wish they'd never done this process because I don't think that this was probably the best way to go about it. Nonetheless, I'm not the one who travelled around the province promising people a referendum and taking their signatures. That's Mr. Lukaszuk. He was successful in it, and we should respect what those half a million Albertans asked for.

The Chair: MLA Pancholi, please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. This is going to be a little bit awkward for the government members. I understand that the UCP have already issued a release about a referendum being called and that's already been released to media, so a little awkward since we're still debating the motion. Perhaps that is because this committee has always been treated like a sham by the members opposite, who have also delayed significantly in even calling this meeting although they cared so desperately about the 400,000 Albertans yet didn't want to hear from them.

I also want to note for the minister's observance across the way that nothing compels this committee to order a referendum, as has been pointed out several times by both the Chief Electoral Officer, retired justice of the Supreme Court Justice Brown, and, of course, the act, the legislation itself. The decision about whether or not to have a referendum, as awkward as it may be for the government members to accept, is your decision. There is no compulsion here to hold a referendum despite whatever they believe the 400,000 people who signed the petition believed. I can tell you that I personally know many, many, many people – I'm not sure the members on the other side can say the same thing – who signed that who didn't expect a referendum. Regardless, the legislation is crystal clear that it is a choice and that any referendum initiated as a result of a policy proposal under the act is a government-initiated referendum under the Referendum Act. Therefore, I just wanted to make that comment.

I think there will be an amendment that we will be bringing forward as well, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. MLA Nixon, I saw your hand, and then we can entertain that amendment. Please go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: Just to be clear, that's not the question that's before the committee. You're right. The hon. member is right. We could choose to ignore 400,000 people and tell them their signatures don't matter, which is what appears to be being proposed by the Official Opposition, shockingly by the proponent who went across the province asking them to sign the said petition. But that's not what matters. What matters is what the 400,000 people thought when they signed this and what their expectations were on the very first citizen referendum petition. It's important that government gets this right.

Again I'll stress it. It was on the application. It was presented at every signing station. It was signed by Mr. Lukaszuk. It was put out on social media over and over and over by Mr. Lukaszuk. In fact, if you go and look at Mr. Lukaszuk's time in the media during this process, he never misses a moment to ask for a referendum. I've got so many quotes here, Mr. Chair. We'd be here all night. I won't bother with it because I will go back to what he signed and then handed to Albertans. He said, "Therefore, we as represented by the signatory and applicant below are proposing a referendum on the following question: Do you agree that Alberta should remain in Canada?"

They went to every station in the province, had people lining up, and had them sign documents that said that, and now the Official Opposition would like us to ignore those individuals and then make some assumptions on how they might feel because one person who said the exact opposite for almost a year is now trying to tell us that over 400,000 Albertans have changed their mind. That's the question that's before this committee. Nothing else. It's that you're either going to respect what those 400,000 Albertans did or you're not. I'm certainly not not going to respect what 400,000 Albertans said.

Ms Gray: Point of privilege, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am interrupting these proceedings to call a point of privilege because I have just had the opportunity to review an absolutely shocking news release sent out already while this committee is in discussions, that reads that the chair of the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee, Brandon Lundy, issued the following statement on recommending a referendum question to cabinet: the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee established to review Thomas Lukaszuk's forever Canada petition has passed a motion that the select special committee on citizen initiative petition review recommend the government of Alberta include a question on the October 19, 2026, provincial referendum that includes the option for Albertans to vote for Alberta to remain in Canada.

It continues on with quotes from you, Mr. Chair, while we are debating this in this committee. Oftentimes it feels like the politics of the UCP is a stage play to exercise their power to do what they want, but I very seriously raise this point of privilege now because it has been never more apparent than the fact that this committee is still meeting and still debating this motion and a press release from you as the chair has already gone out.

Mr. Chair, points of privilege in a similar vein have been raised in our Legislature before, and raising a point of privilege is extremely sensitive, should be done rarely, and should be treated in a very serious manner. In this case – and I will say that I rise on this point of privilege under standing orders 15(5) and 23(e); I will double-check my references because we are having this discussion live and on the record now – releasing the decision of a committee in advance of that decision being made absolutely breaches our rights as MLAs to engage in this debate and to be able to proceed.

3:10

Now, Mr. Chair, from the practical guide to committees it is my understanding that when an issue of privilege is raised in committee, the appropriate thing to do to ensure that it is dealt with and raised in a timely way: “the Chair . . . will recognize the Member . . . hear the question of privilege or contempt” in the case of this incident, and I would suggest that this is a clear contempt and that the government has done this deliberately to undermine the work of this committee and our Legislature against the rights of MLAs in this process. “The role of the Chair in such instances is to determine whether the matter raised does in fact touch on privilege and is not a point of order, a grievance, or a matter of debate.”

Well, Mr. Chair, I would say that your neutrality here is a bit of a challenge given you are the one who is quoted in these releases; therefore, you have already – what? – approved and sent quotes to be used in future media releases? This is shameful, and now you are the one who is going to decide whether or not this rises to a point of privilege? I would suggest you have very little to decide here, that this should be raised to the Speaker at the earliest opportunity.

The practical guide to committees continues. “If the Chair is of the opinion that the Member’s interjection deals with a point of order, a grievance, or a matter of debate . . . then the Chair will rule accordingly.” However, I would suggest that would be absolutely not an option in this scenario given you yourself have approved a quote about a decision that this committee has not made yet.

“If the Chair agrees that the issue . . . relates to privilege and if the Chair’s decision,” it continues, “then the committee” – this should go to the Speaker. The committee should not consider this

matter any further because of this question of privilege. It should be moved on to the next process or statement.

I can see, Mr. Chair, that you are conferring with the table, so I would suggest, because I would like the opportunity to refine my comments here and to ensure that I have not missed out on any important, relevant parliamentary references, that we should recess to be able to try and determine how we are going to address this, because this is extraordinary. It is insulting to the members of the Official Opposition and all Albertans, and it is serious of nature. So I ask if we might be able to recess so that I can continue my arguments when we return.

The Chair: We’ll agree to the recess.

[The committee adjourned from 3:13 p.m. to 3:38 p.m.]

The Chair: All right. Welcome back, everybody.

The hon. Ms Gray has raised a question of privilege regarding a press release issued by the UCP caucus indicating that the motion that is currently before us regarding a recommendation to refer the Alberta forever Canada petition to the Lieutenant Governor in Council for a referendum has been passed. Ms Gray has argued that the issuing of this press release presupposes a decision of the committee, which she argues is a contempt of the Legislature, which is a category of privilege.

As chair of this committee it is my responsibility to assess if the matter raised by Ms Gray touches on privilege. If the matter does touch on privilege, I will entertain a motion to refer the matter to the Speaker, who can hear arguments to determine if the matter is a prima facie breach of privilege. Until the matter is resolved, the committee would need to adjourn its work.

It is my understanding that a press release as noted above was prematurely released by the UCP caucus and that it has now been removed. Therefore, it is my view that this matter does touch on privilege, and I will entertain a motion to report the matter to the Speaker.

MLA Pancholi.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is a very grave issue, and I would like to propose the following motion. I’d like to move that the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee report the following to the Assembly: (a) that a question of privilege was raised by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods at the committee’s meeting on May 20, 2026; (b) the matter giving rise to the question of privilege is as follows: (i) the chair of the committee obstructed the duties of members by releasing to media a statement that presupposed the outcome of a vote in committee; (c) that the matter referred to in clause (b) may involve privilege; and (d) that the matter be referred to the Speaker for determination of whether there is a prima facie case of privilege.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

This is a debatable motion. Are there any members wishing to join in the debate? Ms Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Because I was in the process of making my arguments when my request to have a recess was granted, I assume that I can continue to make my arguments now. I have had a couple of moments to go and double-check some of my references. Is that correct?

The Chair: Thank you. I would just ask you to argue to the motion, please.

Ms Gray: Mr. Chair, does that mean that I have lost my ability to argue the point of privilege?

The Chair: I have found that what you raised did touch on . . .

Ms Gray: Fair enough. We have the motion ahead of us. I will just say that under standing orders in committees 65(3) a question of privilege in committee is incredibly serious. I did raise under Standing Order 15(1) that a breach of the rights of the Assembly or any parliamentary rights of any member constitutes a question of privilege at the earliest opportunity that I was able to, and I would like to agree with the chair, who has found that this does touch on privilege, the shocking nature and the disrespect to the members of this Legislature to see a press release about the expected outcome of a vote coming out from the UCP caucus given what an offence to the dignity of the Assembly that this is.

From House of Commons patterns and practices chapter 13, for those who maybe are not familiar with the language around a contempt, I will simply read that a contempt of Parliament refers to any action or omission, though not a breach of a specific privilege, that tends to obstruct or impede the House in its performance of its functions, obstructs or impedes any member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties, or is an offence against the authority or dignity of the House. On behalf of all of the Albertans who are represented by 87 members, those 87 members each having an important vote and having taken an oath to represent those constituents, to see that the UCP caucus is already announcing their plan to hold a referendum without this committee even having voted or debated on the issue is an absolute offence to the dignity of our Assembly.

I have reviewed previous points of order from November 2016 as well as other points of order from 2013 where Speakers have ruled, and I think that there is a very clear case here but also one that deserves to be reviewed by the Speaker of our Legislative Assembly with an opportunity for all members to learn from this situation and what has happened. So I've raised it at the earliest opportunity to describe the situation very briefly, as we have in our motion, that the UCP caucus issued a release to members of the public prior to the vote having even taken place, and I would like to highlight in particular, Mr. Chair, that you were quoted in this release, so that implies to me that you approved a quote coming out in your name before this committee even met. That is extremely concerning.

I am fully supportive of this motion, moved by my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud, because the obstruction to us as committee members, the absolute spitting in the face of democracy that this is should be dealt with in the most serious potential way, especially given the damaging nature of what is up for debate at this committee and what Alberta has been going through in this referendum discussion started by the UCP government, facilitated by them in every step of the way and now with complete and flagrant disregard for the citizens of this province and other elected members of this Legislature.

I have incorporated a few of the additional arguments that I was prepared to make, Mr. Chair, in my absolute support for the motion that has been moved. I think to do anything else raises immediate question about the state of our democracy and what this Legislature is doing and how this government treats our Legislature and the important business that it takes into account. I remind all members of their oath.

3:45

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Gray.

Is there anyone else looking to . . .

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Chair, I didn't get a chance to speak to my motion. I introduced the motion, but I didn't get a chance to speak to it.

Ms Gray: To motivate it.

Ms Pancholi: To motivate it.

The Chair: I thought you did, but if you'd like to continue, go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: I didn't. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Some members in this committee have been MLAs for longer than others, some for quite a long time, some relatively new, and in the time period that I've been an MLA, I have watched the rights and privileges as a representative in this place be degraded by the UCP government over and over. It began with limitations on debate and restricting how long we could even represent our constituents in this place on various issues that are very deeply important to them, but it's also extended to the way the government has used its standing orders and its ability to limit debate and pass bills.

Now what we've seen here today is proof, Mr. Chair, that the entire process to the UCP government is a joke. They have treated this process like a foregone conclusion for themselves. They don't even believe that the members of this committee, even of their own caucus, have the right to represent their constituents in a way other than that they've already decided the outcome was going to go.

Let us be very clear. All along we have maintained that a referendum for Alberta is risky, is dangerous, is a terrible idea. It's bad for our economy. It's divisive for Albertans. We've also maintained all along that it is clear that it is the UCP that has been driving this separatist conversation in this province for over a year. It is not something that Albertans voted for. It is not something that even Albertans continue to support in any majority way. The support for separatism has not changed in this province. The only thing that's changed is the rules of the game that the UCP designs to ensure that separatism is going to be on a referendum before Albertans.

What we saw today: this government caucus has put out a release stating that the outcome of this motion is already predetermined, has made a sham of this process from the beginning. They delayed actually ever having this committee meet for almost half of that period of time, and then they've come here and now they've said that it doesn't even matter what we debate in this place, what we vote on this motion, because they've already predetermined the outcome of that. Frankly, Mr. Chair, the quotes from yourself in this press release really question whether or not you're able to continue on in this role, and I would ask that you recuse yourself from this meeting for the remainder of the time that we're here.

The Chair: Does any member wish to join in the debate on this motion? MLA Nixon, please go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: Well, I appreciate the member's comments and certainly agree with your ruling, Mr. Chair. It's certainly a point of privilege.

I do want to clarify two things for the record. First of all, there's no statement that has come from the government. It came from government caucus. I think individuals – well, I mean, it's important. There is a difference. I think members attacking you specifically, saying you released a motion when you've been clear you did not and have acknowledged that there was a point of privilege – I very much feel this is a matter that has been dealt with. Said motion has been withdrawn. The employees that were involved have apologized for it. I think it's probably best if we move on with the business of Albertans, and we should call the question on the member's motion.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Nixon.

Any other members wishing to join in on this motion? MLA Gray, go ahead.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can you please, in plain language, explain what this motion does and what will happen if this motion passes or what will happen if this motion does not pass? I want to make sure that I and anyone else watching these proceedings understand what this is.

A point of privilege has been raised. You have ruled – and I do not want to put words in your mouth – essentially that this does touch on questions of privilege, so recognizing that there is a serious nature. We are entertaining now this motion that will refer the matter, as per the standing orders, to the Speaker, I believe. Would you please just help us to understand what are the things that are likely to happen?

The Chair: Sure. I might ask the table clerk if we could have a brief summary just so everyone is clear on the process. Thank you.

Ms Robert: Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The process in this situation is – as everybody has heard and the chair has indicated, this matter does touch on privilege. That’s as far as he can go with it, so now the committee is considering a motion to report the matter to the Speaker, which is the normal course of things. If the committee agrees to that motion, the committee will adjourn and the matter would have to be dealt with by the Speaker. The Speaker would hear evidence, as he normally does during a question of privilege, and he would then rule if the matter was found to be a prima facie case of privilege. I think you’re all familiar with how that process works. If the motion before the committee today were to be defeated, the matter would come to an end and the committee would carry on with its work.

The Chair: Thank you for that information.

Are there any other members wishing to join the debate on this motion?

All right. Seeing none, I’m prepared to call the question. All those in favour of the motion as proposed on the screen, please say aye. Any opposed? All right.

That motion has been defeated.

Ms Gray: Mr. Chair.

Ms Pancholi: Recorded vote.

The Chair: A recorded vote has been requested, so I will ask those in the room who are in favour of the motion to please raise your hands.

Mr. Huffman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ms Pancholi, Member Ellingson.

The Chair: All right. Those in the room who are opposed to the motion, please raise your hands.

Mr. Huffman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hon. Mr. Nixon, Mrs. Sawyer, hon. Mr. Glubish.

Mr. Chair, for the motion, two; against, three.

The Chair: Thank you.

That motion has been defeated.

All right. As that motion has been defeated, we can return to debate on the motion as presented. Before we continue on to resuming this motion, we are seeking unanimous consent to extend the meeting to consider this motion.

All right. Unanimous consent has not been granted, and this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 3:53 p.m.]

