



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Select Special
Citizen Initiative Proposal
Review Committee

Thursday, May 21, 2026
2 p.m.

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Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee

Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC), Chair
Sawhney, Rajan, Calgary-North West (UC), 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)

Also in Attendance

Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC)

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>

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[Mr. Lundy in the chair]

The Chair: All right. 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. I will begin to my right.

Mr. Schow: Joseph Schow, MLA for Cardston-Siksika, Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration and Government House Leader.

Mr. Nixon: Jason Nixon, MLA for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mrs. Sawyer: Good afternoon, everyone. Tara Sawyer, MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Rowswell: Garth Rowswell, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Member Ellingson: Court Ellingson. I'm the MLA for Calgary-Foothills, and I'm the shadow minister of Finance.

Ms Pancholi: Good afternoon. Rakhi Pancholi, MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud and deputy leader of the Alberta NDP.

Ms Gray: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Christina Gray, MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods and the Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Quirk: Good afternoon. Adam Quirk, legal counsel.

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

Mr. Huffman: Warren Huffman, committee clerk.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, everyone.
We will now go to those joining us online.

Mrs. Sawhney: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Rajan Sawhney, MLA for Calgary-North West and Minister of Indigenous Relations.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Sawhney.

A few housekeeping items before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*. Members participating remotely should ensure they are prepared to speak or vote when called upon. Videoconference participants are encouraged to have their cameras on, if possible, when speaking. 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.

We can now move to approval of our agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the draft agenda? Seeing none, I would ask for a motion to approve the agenda. MLA Sawyer. Moved by MLA Sawyer that the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee approve the proposed agenda as distributed for its May 21, 2026, meeting. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed? That motion is carried.

Moving on to our next agenda item, which is item 3, the citizen initiative proposal review, section (a) business from previous meeting, which was a motion under discussion, the committee had

a motion on the floor when our previous meeting adjourned. I would now turn committee members' attention to the motion moved by the hon. Mr. Glubish yesterday.

Perfect. That is now available for all members to review. I will open the floor for further discussions on the motion. MLA Ellingson, I see your hand. Please go ahead.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. With respect to the motion that was under discussion yesterday, obviously, there was a flurry of activity when we were in the midst of discussing that motion. This is my first term as an MLA. I have sat on a couple of committees, but yesterday was a new experience for me. I'm hoping that as we discuss this motion, you can, you know, speak and clarify a couple of things for me.

When we were discussing the motion yesterday, Mr. Chair, the United Conservative caucus did release, as we know, a press release with quotes from you as the chair. A point of privilege was called by the opposition. You as the chair agreed that it did touch on matters of privilege. We also know that yesterday Minister Nixon acknowledged both in the committee and in media that it was a point of privilege, yet the government members voted against it being treated as a point of privilege and decided that it should not be sent to the Speaker. So the Speaker is not going to hear that point of privilege that the government members voted against, and I think that that, you know, might be relevant with respect to even discussing this motion.

Mr. Chair, I do have a couple of questions that I hope you might be able to respond to regarding what happened and relevant to this motion and that you didn't get a chance to respond to yesterday. Did you approve the release before you came to committee yesterday?

The Chair: Well, thank you, MLA Ellingson. I would like to point out that this matter has been dealt with and concluded and ruled on, and it's something the committee has already addressed. I would certainly welcome your comments on the motion that we have on the floor.

Member Ellingson: I think that there are, like, questions that a lot of people have that were not dealt with yesterday and there wasn't an acknowledgement. I think that it's important when we're discussing the motion because the matter yesterday was directly related to this motion that we are debating, so I think as we debate this motion, we should have some clarification on if you did indeed approve quotes in a press release before we came into this meeting to debate the motion that – the members of the opposition had not seen this motion before we came into the meeting. I think it's fair to ask that question.

The Chair: I'll just repeat that this committee has addressed that point of privilege. It's been dealt with and concluded. Again, I certainly would welcome your thoughts on the motion that we have in front of us.

Member Ellingson: Again, as we consider discussing this motion, knowing that the members of the opposition didn't have the motion in front of us when we came into the meeting, I think it probably should be expected that, obviously, the members of the government caucus did have that motion because they brought it forward. But did the members of the caucus in the meeting – were they aware that the press release had already been drafted on the motion that we were yet to discuss?

The Chair: You're certainly free, Member, to use your time to make any comments or points on the motion in front of us, and I

would certainly encourage you to do so. If the government members choose to participate in this debate and in their knowledge or actions, they are certainly free to do so as well.

Member Ellingson: Well, I think it is – yeah. I think that people would like to hear responses to these questions and that we would love to hear these responses to these questions because I think it brings some level of kind of honesty and decorum and respect to the debate that we're having about the motion. There are a lot of questions about that motion. You know, certainly, I guess, maybe I should take a moment to . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: A point of order has been called.

Mr. Schow: Yeah. Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Chair. While I do appreciate the assertions from Member Ellingson, this is not germane at all to the motion that we see on the screen. You yourself ruled yesterday on the point of privilege, and I believe that there is a weak connection trying to be made here between the motion on the screen and the point of privilege. We have a finite amount of time today to address the motion on the screen, which is of importance to all Albertans, and I think that, under 23(b), the member is continuing the debate that is not under question here. I think this is a point of order, and if the member is going to continue on this vein, I'm going to continue to call points of order because you're going to waste the committee's time.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, MLA Gray.

Ms Gray: This is not a point of order, Mr. Chair. We have before us a motion that, if passed, would launch our province into a referendum process. How we get here and what we do next are all relevant to this. Specifically about this motion, events occurred yesterday to which the chair has never responded. Part of the functioning of this committee – and the Government House Leader referred to a limited amount of time. I will note that we do have two and a half hours, so I think my colleague opening up with some questions of the chair when confidence in the chair may have been shaken a little bit yesterday and given that the chair did not have any opportunity to respond to these things is relevant to how members might vote on this motion, assuming that members are not, of course, just voting along party lines, which I think we know that they likely are.

I don't think that this is a point of order, Mr. Chair. I think that the member should be allowed to inquire, and I will note that his last question was not to you but to the government members on this committee in an active debate, so rather than calling a point of order, the government members could respond to these questions.

2:10

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

I'll just reiterate that we made a ruling on this yesterday. The committee has dealt with it, and I would again ask that the members opposite proceed forward to discuss the merits of our motion. Maybe we'll say: one last chance here on this point of order. I won't rule it a point of order now. I will say that if that line of questioning is continued for much further, it may in fact be a point of order.

Once again, I would invite conversation on the motion that we have in front of us. Thank you.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will just reiterate that when we come into this place to have open debates on motions and the discussions at hand, I think that all of us would, you know, like to have a level playing field and knowing that we're all working towards the same objective, that we're all drawing from some similar points of knowledge and information in what we're bringing to the table. Again, if we're going to have an honest debate about the motion, which is a motion to put to a referendum the very question of the future of this province, the place of this province in this country that I think we all love so much, I will say that I think it's fair that, in having that conversation and opening up debate on this motion, we know whether or not in advance of discussing this motion if you had approved those quotes in that press release, if you yourself already knew the content of the motion that we had not yet discussed and that we're still discussing today.

The Chair: Member, if I may, I think I provided my comments on this. I appreciate that maybe you want to continue asking, but the ruling was made yesterday. The committee has addressed that issue, so I would ask that you move on and pursue a different line of questioning or relevance to our motion here.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Chair, under 13(2), please.

The Chair: Thank you. Just a little clarity. So 13(2) is not applicable in committee, but you are welcome to challenge the ruling of the chair. Is it your intent to challenge the ruling asking MLA Ellingson to move on from that line of questioning? Is that your intent?

Ms Pancholi: Actually, Mr. Chair, it's to seek reasons for your ruling yesterday. We never got an opportunity. The entire point of this conversation is that, well, we thought there would be more time, but we ran out of time yesterday and moved right to a vote. This is the question that we're asking for an explanation on. I think Albertans deserve to understand why you found there to be grounds that this touched on privilege, why Minister Nixon said twice in this committee that there was a point of privilege that was found. He also said outside to media that there was a point of privilege, but we've never gotten reasons.

Now, this does directly relate to this motion because the context in which that point of privilege was raised was because the UCP issued a press release with quotes from the chair of this committee specifically relating to the motion that's on the floor right now. That is why this continues to be a live issue. It's directly connected to this motion, so we are looking for an explanation for the reasons for your decision that this touched on privilege, and I think that's just in order to ensure that there is some understanding from the committee members here as to how the rules are being applied, what implications there are if there was a point of privilege, a fact which is acknowledged, so . . .

The Chair: So, Member, is there a . . .

Mr. Schow: Mr. Chair, if I may. Yesterday the members had time, if they were granting the committee unanimous consent to extend the debate period of this committee yesterday. They chose not to. That was their opportunity to get more of an explanation. You have ruled on this. We are now chewing into time that we could be debating the motion on the screen. The members of the NDP caucus know exactly what they're doing here. There is a motion that is of great importance, which is why we're here today, and I believe that any further comments that are not made specifically directed to the motion before us are out of order because they are trying to go back to a ruling that was made yesterday. If they wanted more time, then

the members opposite could have granted unanimous consent for this committee to extend its time.

Mr. Chair, you've given your ruling. I believe that ruling is sufficient. It's time to move to the business of the day.

The Chair: MLA Gray, go ahead.

Ms Gray: Only to say that the Government House Leader is completely incorrect because essentially we are at the same point we would have been if we had extended time yesterday, which is that a ruling has been made, yet there are questions unanswered, specifically from you, Mr. Chair. Yesterday at no point during the committee meeting did you address the release that went out in your name. At no point did you offer any explanation for how that came to happen, whether it was something you had approved or whether it was something your caucus was sending out in your name without your approval, which would shock me if that was a practice of your caucus, or whether the government members were aware. But the moment in time we're in right now is the exact same moment that we would have been in yesterday, so the idea that something has changed between yesterday and today is incorrect.

We have two and a half hours to be able to discuss this motion, and the Official Opposition has come in in a very calm and reasonable way to simply say that the Alberta public deserves answers, that we in the Official Opposition deserve a few answers, and to ask some clarifying questions about how yesterday happened and how we can still have faith in the chair going forward. Mr. Chair, I'm interested to hear your response to those questions.

The Chair: Well, thank you, members.

I will say that I think we've taken probably more than an appropriate amount of time to discuss the events yesterday. I've made clear on the ruling that was made and that the committee has addressed this issue, and I will ask that all committee members move on, and the line of questioning on this will be considered out of order.

MLA Pancholi, do you have something to add to our discussion?

Ms Pancholi: Yes, I do. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that the chair continues to not want to provide an explanation for what happened yesterday. Aligned with this . . .

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Pancholi: Excuse me; I just started speaking.

Mr. Nixon: You're struggling with standing orders today.

The Chair: We have a point of order.

Mr. Nixon: I've called a point of order, which means you stop speaking while I speak on a point of order.

Standing Order 13(2), which is what the member called, is not applicable in committee, which you attempted to make clear to this committee, Mr. Chair, then were interrupted over and over, which is ridiculous for a member of this committee to do that to a chair. First of all, now we're going down a road that would be highly inappropriate.

You've also now ruled, Mr. Chair, multiple times that this issue is concluded. If we end up in a spot inside either standing committees or the Legislature where we could rehash concluded points of order or points of privilege, we would never get anything passed inside this Legislature. [interjection] Again the member is interrupting. You can see they're not focused on this motion. The line of questioning is irrelevant. What you have ruled on has been ruled on, and they are going out of their way to not obey your ruling. This is going to create disorder inside this committee, and I would

ask that you rule firmly and make clear to the members opposite that they need to work on this motion, or let's call the question.

Ms Gray: Under this point of order, Mr. Chair, first off, the member opposite provided no citation for his point of order. He began with insults by suggesting that our members are struggling with the standing orders. If anything is going to cause disorder, it's the government in trying to defend their reputation acting like bullies. I think that's inappropriate.

He also accused our members of interrupting the chair, which has not occurred a single instance in this meeting, Mr. Chair. We continue to engage in good faith. Although this has been completely unsatisfactory, as we proceed in these meetings, it is absolutely not the Official Opposition's goal to filibuster this meeting, but it was our goal to hear from our chair the role that he played in yesterday's clear breach of privilege.

2:20

And, to be clear, the only word that the chair has had is to agree that there was a breach of privilege and that the arguments we made touched on that issue. That's the only thing that's been said by you on something where a press release with your quotes was provided. I think that Albertans are embarrassed by the continued procedural wrangling by the ministers as we are here to discuss these very serious issues, that the chair could provide answers to his role's serious breach yesterday and put the matter to bed. He appears to continue to refuse to do so.

I don't believe this is a point of order. Again, given the minister had no citations from the standing orders when he made it, I believe this is a matter of debate and that the only disorder being caused is by the government members in their approach to this committee meeting.

The Chair: Thank you, members. I will say that, like all proceedings in the Legislature and committee, decorum is important, so I trust both sides will continue on in that manner.

I will also say that in terms of today's meeting I have now made this ruling. We need to move on from this line of questioning. I've given multiple explanations about the committee addressing this issue and the ruling that was made yesterday. I do think it is time for us to move on as a committee, so I look forward to that happening and ask if any other members would like to join in on the debate on the motion.

MLA Pancholi, please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Chair, for the proper functioning of this committee I asked a question yesterday, and I will ask it again, which is that I believe that there is a concern about the confidence of the members of this committee in the chair, particularly because he did not just now take the opportunity to explain what has happened. So I'm going to seek you to answer the question I asked yesterday, which is: will the chair recuse himself given that he has lost the confidence, I believe, of the members of this committee, the opposition members of this committee?

The Chair: Just for clarity, MLA Pancholi, are you making a motion under . . .

Ms Pancholi: No, I'm not. I'm seeking to ask you if you will recuse yourself.

The Chair: Okay. Then I think we've covered this topic already. I don't think that's a relevant comment to this motion at hand, and I would ask you to please move on.

MLA Ellingson, go ahead.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do have some questions regarding the motion. I think we have some discussion around this motion. I would like to speak, first of all, to point (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.” This is curious wording to me. Regrettably, the member who brought the motion forward isn’t here today, so presumably others know why that choice was put in this.

We heard a lot in conversation yesterday about how the government members felt that it was pretty clear that the Forever Canadian petition was about a referendum question to remain, Alberta to remain in Canada, and that that was the justification for bringing us to this moment. That was the justification for us to reconvene this committee. After it had been stalled for weeks and weeks and weeks, all of a sudden we needed to come back in some emergency fashion, with very little warning. There was considerable conversation about the justification of the Forever Canadian petition, the wording of the Forever Canadian petition, the question there, and now to come here and see that it’s relegated to point (c) and that it is simply an option: I’m curious at that selection.

If it was so critical to the members of the government that on that petition, again, that we come forward and, you know, conclude the proceedings of this committee after having stalled it, that it was so critical to the members of the government that we abide by the in excess of 400,000 signatures of the Forever Canadian petition but that they’re not actually committed to the spirit of that petition, I’m curious if we can hear why the government, in putting forward their motion, isn’t committed to the spirit of that petition.

The Chair: Thank you for your comments, MLA Ellingson.

MLA Nixon, I saw your hand. Please go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: This was discussed at length yesterday, but I will answer the hon. member’s question with a couple of comments just to make it clear for the record. Again, as we established yesterday, there was a petition that was signed, as the member just acknowledged, by over 400,000 Albertans that asked the question about staying in Canada. You can use different words, “remaining in Canada” and other different aspects that would mean the same thing. I think we would agree that remaining in Canada, staying in Canada would be in the same vein of thought.

I will be very clear on what the proponent asked for using just a May 22, 2025, CTV interview in which Mr. Lukaszuk, the proponent of the forever Canada petition, said, and I quote: I have filed an application with Elections Alberta to have a petition in Alberta on this question, and if we get enough signatures, which I have no doubt in my mind that we will, we will have a referendum in this province. I want to stress that. Mr. Lukaszuk said that we will have a referendum in this province if he completed those signatures, and he said that referendum would be about staying in Canada. Those were his words.

I would submit that remaining in Canada is the same point. The point still stands; 400,000 Albertans signed a petition underneath a law in Alberta that a proponent told them would result in a referendum. This is the first time that a citizen referendum has made it this far, and this respects exactly what they asked for, which is why that language was chosen.

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

I see a couple of hands over here. MLA Gray, I saw yours first, so please go ahead.

Ms Gray: Just a clarifying question. Given the minister’s commitment to respect for the 400,000 who signed this petition,

why does section (c) not use the same language that was in that petition? I believe it was: do you believe Alberta should remain in Canada? Instead, we see “include an option,” and that word “option” gives a huge amount of latitude to the government to insert any question of their choosing. So just to follow up on my colleague’s question, why do we not see a question here, and what is the government likely to choose to be the question going forward? To the members.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, MLA.

Are there any other MLAs looking to join debate? MLA Ellingson, I saw you before, so go ahead.

Member Ellingson: I’ll be brief, just to reinforce, not to be repetitious, what my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods just said. That’s, for me, that you’re not really honouring the spirit of that petition and those 400,000 signatures when it is relegated to an option. It is specifically the words “include an option” that I find very curious in this motion. If the members of the government were really honestly committed to those 400,000 signatures, I don’t think they would make it: include as an option. That was my question.

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

MLA Pancholi, are you looking to join?

Ms Pancholi: Yeah.

The Chair: Please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: I find it really amusing to hear the fiction that is being drawn up right now by the government members about the way that they are responding to the forever Canada petition. They suddenly have a strong sense of urgency, apparently, to hear from and respond to the over 400,000 Albertans who signed the forever Canada petition. I want to go through a little bit of a history of this petition to remind the Albertans who are listening and watching about how deeply this government actually cares about the 400,000 people who signed the forever Canada petition.

This petition was completed, verified, and tabled with the Legislature almost six months ago, on December 2, 2025. At that time the Legislature was sitting, and it was completely within the realm of the government’s power to appoint the committee to review that petition immediately. If they cared about those voices and taking action, they could have done that right away, but they didn’t. We’ve seen them do that with other things they care deeply about, other government motions to appoint committees when, say, for example, it is for their caucus members to be able to rewrite electoral boundaries. But when it came to this petition, they did nothing. They did nothing until March of 2026. Conveniently, then, that meant that the 90-day clock started ticking on the committee’s period of time to review this petition, yet they still did nothing.

2:30

You as the chair, Mr. Chair, did not even begin the committee’s work by setting the first meeting date until the 42nd day of the 90-day period. Then, when this committee finally met – and once again, we’re saying that these petitioners, the people who signed this, want to be heard – this government slow rolled it. We had members – MLA Sawyer, MLA Sawhney, MLA Nixon – that all stood in this House – we have quotes from *Hansard* – stating how they really wanted to be very thorough about this process, how they wanted to hear. We heard from MLA Sawyer last time that she felt that she did not have enough time to ask all the questions of Elections Alberta and she wanted to have them back. They delayed, delayed, delayed.

This is now the same group of people that suddenly this week have had an epiphany and said that they care deeply about the voices and the concerns of almost half a million Albertans. I'm trying to rack my mind, Mr. Chair, to think about what has changed between every action that this government has taken in response to this petition up until this week. What could have changed? I think we know the answer, and Albertans know the answer. It's because last week the separatist petition was struck down by the courts. All of a sudden the promise that the Premier made to the separatists in her base and in her party to give them a referendum on separatism was in question. The Premier knows quite well, as do the members of her cabinet and her caucus, that her political fortunes depend on keeping that group of people happy.

She made a promise that there'd be a separatism referendum even though this party, this Premier did not campaign on that issue. They never put forward to Albertans in 2023 that they were going to initiate a referendum on separatism. Separatism remains a deeply unpopular idea in Alberta, and the support for separatism has not increased over the last year despite the government's efforts to make this a priority, yet here we are today and they're saying that they suddenly care about the 400,000 Albertans who are proud Albertans and proud Canadians. No, Mr. Chair. It is quite clear that this motion that's on the table right now has nothing to do with listening to the 400,000 people who signed the petition.

This motion is on the floor right now because the government needs cover. They need a justification to fulfill the promise that the Premier made to her separatist friends who got her elected as leader of the UCP, and that promise was a referendum. When they couldn't get the question that they wanted on the floor because of the courts, because of the Constitution and the duty to consult, that is when this government suddenly cares.

Now, I will tell you, Mr. Chair, that I know many, many people who signed the forever Canada petition, and many of them signed it for many different reasons. I will tell you that many of them are deeply insulted to hear the members on that side now claim to know what was in their heads, because the members on that side are the ones who have been determined since last year to get a referendum on separatism, and the whole purpose, why hundreds of thousands of Albertans signed this petition, was to stop that from happening. That was their primary motivation, and the number of e-mails, even since yesterday, from Albertans saying how insulting it is that any of those members seem to know what was in their heads when they signed this petition is something that those members should take note of.

I also ask them to once again take note of their very own legislation, the legislation that they have amended multiple times to bend the rules for the separatists in their party. Their legislation makes it clear that there's no number of signatures on this petition that requires the government to hold a referendum on this issue, because it is a policy proposal. It is not a constitutional amendment.

Therefore, at every point, section 15(2) of the act makes it incredibly clear that it is the government's choice what to do with this petition. Not only is it clear in their legislation, very clear, that it would be a government-initiated referendum if they decide to go ahead with it, not a citizen initiative referendum – it would be a UCP government referendum if they decide to go forward – but that message was confirmed multiple times by both retired Justice Brown when he appeared on behalf of Alberta Justice and by the Chief Electoral Officer with Elections Alberta. They made it clear.

Again, Mr. Chair, this is the quote from Elections Alberta when they appeared at this committee just a few weeks ago. They said that

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.

So let us be clear that with this motion the UCP government's choice to proceed is to hold a UCP-led referendum on separatism. That is what is happening here. They cannot blame the signatories to forever Canada. They cannot blame Thomas Lukaszuk. They cannot blame the opposition. They've got to do what they claim that they should be doing all along, which is to take personal accountability.

As of in a few hours from now, Mr. Chair, we all know that the Premier is going to announce a referendum that she is initiating. It will likely, as we know from this motion, probably not even use the same language as in the forever Canada petition. Even if it did, it doesn't matter what it says; it is her referendum. That is what is happening right now. The UCP is making a decision to launch their referendum on separatism. They did not campaign on this, they did not get elected on this, but they're doing it anyways. The fact that this committee's work is suddenly being rushed so that they can have some sort of cover for an announcement that has probably already been recorded and is going to be released in a matter of hours is just a continuation of the sham that this government treats democracy with. They treat this with such disregard and disrespect.

Albertans see through this, Mr. Chair. With this motion this government, those members across the way, are confirming that the UCP is a separatist party and the Premier is the first Premier in Alberta's history to bring in a separatist referendum. We know who they are, we know what they're doing, and we see through this charade.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Pancholi.

MLA Nixon, I saw your hand. Please go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: Just briefly to correct a few things – I think they're important to be corrected in *Hansard* – from significant misrepresentation in some of those comments. First of all, nobody on this side of the committee is guessing what was asked for in the referendum petition because it was spelled out in the referendum petition. I will point you to a couple of quotes and social media posts that actually clearly illustrate exactly that language that is inside the motion.

First off, Kathy Michaud – I hope I didn't pronounce her name wrong; I'm also happy to table this, Mr. Chair, in the Legislature when we get back – who tweeted out pictures on social media with forever Canada's logo on it, as they were going around getting signatures, and said, "And the question is: do you agree that Alberta should remain in Canada?" which is exactly what the language is that is up there. Interestingly enough, Kathy also said at the time: just to make sure everyone knows what the actual referendum question will be if we get the signatures. There are dozens of these.

There's a Dave King, same thing, registered with forever Canada, collecting petitions, "Yes... we signed the petition to get... a referendum," and puts out the question with forever Canada's logo on it: do you agree that Alberta should remain in Canada?

The examples of this are significant. They were led by the leader of forever Canada, Mr. Lukaszuk, who also said similar comments. I put most of them on the record yesterday, Mr. Chair, so I won't repeat myself other than to say that that was the question that was made clear.

The question before this committee is whether or not the petition met the signature threshold – I think we all agreed that it does; I haven't heard anything different from the other members; in fact, they've confirmed over and over that it has – what the petition asked for, and then it's up to us to decide whether we want to respect the

ask of those 400,000 Albertans who, despite what the Official Opposition keep talking about, didn't sign a petition asking to separate. They actually signed a petition asking to have a vote to remain in Canada. So I don't know why we would want to change the language in regard to their petition in that context.

I will close the comments here, Mr. Chair, with just re-emphasizing again what the Leader of the Official Opposition said when it comes to referendums. He says, in a press conference on May 3, 2025: give us a referendum now. May 5, "Why doesn't she just call," referring to the Premier, "a referendum now and let Albertans decide?" March 21, 2025: she should just call a referendum now. Leader of the Opposition, April 30, 2025: "Put a referendum on the ballot now," he says to the Premier. He goes on the same day to say: put your money where your mouth is; call a referendum. "We need to have democratic outlets," he says, "like possible referendums to allow people to voice their opinions" in reference to the forever Canada petition. There are pages and pages of these quotes, Mr. Chair, from the Leader of the Opposition, whose caucus seems to have changed their mind about supporting the 400,000 Albertans who signed the petition.

That's not the question, though, that's before the committee. The question that's before the committee is whether or not they met the threshold, whether or not they were asking for a referendum, and whether or not the province is going to respect their democratic right to be able to speak. I think it's clearly something that we should do, respect that right, and we should also listen to the Official Opposition, who at the time said that we should respect that right. I don't know why they've changed their mind. Any vote to do so different would be going against the 400,000 Albertans, who are also Canadians, who signed that petition.

2:40

The member is right, Mr. Chair. In closing, there's no way that this committee could know exactly what all 400,000-plus people were thinking. All that we can know is what the proponent said, what the sheets said that were signed, and what the organizers that were involved told people, including in their own placards and documentation. I think this makes sense because it respects those 400,000 Albertans and what they've asked for, and we should not go out of our way to break their democratic rights. We should respect the fact that they were successful in their petition.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Nixon.

MLA Ellingson, I saw your hand. Go ahead.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah. I would like to bring us back as we're discussing this motion to remind us all that, right there in point (a), this citizen initiative policy proposal was tabled to the Speaker and that this was tabled in such a way, as we have heard on many occasions, as we heard from Elections Alberta, as we heard from the representative who was not actually a representative of the Ministry of Justice, which was what was asked for.

Moving past that, it is the choice of the committee, the Legislature, ultimately the Premier and the government in determining whether or not this would be referred to as a policy proposal, a vote in the Legislature, or a referendum. We heard very clearly from the petition proponent yesterday that their intention was to, you know, move forward in advance of a potential petition on separation. They were very clear that the goal was for Alberta to stay in Canada, not that there would be a referendum on that question, that it is very clear that it is the government and the Premier at this time that are choosing to make it a referendum, that that was not the specific intent.

I've had a chance to have one-on-one conversations with a lot of those 400,000 people in my constituency of Calgary-Foothills.

When I'm not in this fine city and I am in the beautiful constituency of Calgary-Foothills and it's not snowing, I am out there door-knocking and talking with constituents. Mr. Chair, the constituents are clear. The conversation is that they want Alberta to stay in Canada. They didn't want any of this to be happening. They didn't want there to be petitions. They didn't want for the Premier to be removing, you know, any perceived blockades for the separatists to move forward. They want to be able to move forward with their lives: dealing with the affordability crisis, dealing with the ability to pay their mortgage, dealing with their kids to get jobs. They want Alberta to stay in Canada. The petition that they signed was an expression of them for Alberta to be staying in Canada.

What I would like to talk about in this moment is bringing forward an amendment to this motion. As I read this motion, there is an item that is glaringly absent from this motion. You know, when we're in the House, we hear the Speaker read a land acknowledgement. We confirm our commitment to treaty and working with First Nations and the Constitution that is set out in how we work with treaty. We know that last week the courts stopped the separatist petition because it was in breach of treaty and the Constitution and consulting with First Nations. So, Mr. Chair, I'd like to put forward an amendment that reads:

- (c)(i) the government consult with the following Indigenous communities and organizations before ordering the referendum:
 (1) Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, (2) Piikani First Nation, (3) Siksika First Nation, (4) Blood Tribe, (5) Sturgeon Lake First Nation, (6) Assembly of First Nations, (7) Assembly of Treaty Chiefs, (8) any other First Nation whose rights are recognized and protected under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

The Chair: Okay. Can you just confirm that your amendment has been captured correctly on the screen, Member Ellingson?

Member Ellingson: Yes.

The Chair: All right. Would you like an opportunity to speak to your amendment?

Member Ellingson: Yes.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I said, you know, as we read the government motion, it is glaringly absent of anything with respect to First Nations and Indigenous people. As I said, in the House we hear a land acknowledgement, our commitment to treaty. We know that last week the Stay Free Alberta petition was stopped in the courts by legal action from First Nations, including Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and the Blackfoot nations. We know that the Indigenous people, the First Peoples of this land, have an inherent right to have a conversation about what is happening on this land that was their land before we called this place Alberta, that these groups are going to have concerns about any referendum question that comes forward. It's important that the committee should be meeting with them, hear from them before the committee makes any decisions about what goes back to the Legislature.

The government can't bypass the duty to consult. We heard that from the courts last week. Any question that is going out in a referendum is likely to impact treaty rights, First Nations' rights, and we need to take the time to hear what they are thinking about these conversations. As we sat in this committee just a couple of weeks ago, again, as we heard from speakers from Elections Alberta and from the Ministry of Justice, we did hear from the government side that we wanted to take the time. Minister Sawyer at that time expressed that she really felt that this committee needed to take the time to debate and consider and hear from, among others,

constituents and presumably First Nations. So it's surprising to me that we didn't see a reference to First Nations or Indigenous people in the motion or that the government members haven't expressed an interest in taking some time to consult or to have conversations with First Nations.

The Mikisew Cree First Nation, the Sturgeon Lake Cree First Nation, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation have sent briefs to cabinet urging the government with respect to having conversations, that this can't be a decision that is made without them being at the table. This committee has not had conversations with First Nations or Indigenous people. The government was slow walking the work of this committee until last week, when the courts struck down the separatist petition because of their lack of conversation and consultation with First Nations.

Mr. Chair, let's not make that mistake again. Let's take the time. This committee was brought forward to take the time to have those conversations, and perhaps if there is anyone in this province that should be at the table and have a conversation with this committee before this committee makes any decisions about what happens with the petition, it is the First Nations.

With that, Mr. Chair, I move the amendment that we see on the screen.

2:50

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

Is there anyone else wishing to speak to this amendment? All right. I see a couple of hands. MLA Pancholi, I think I saw yours first. Go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: My apologies. I gave him a beat there, Mr. Chair, because I assumed that the government members would want to speak to this amendment, particularly as we know the Minister of Indigenous Relations is a member of this committee. I thought for sure she would want to speak to it.

In any event, I will take this opportunity to speak in support of the amendment brought forward by my colleague the MLA for Calgary-Foothills because I think it should go without saying. I'm hoping that by this point the government has learned a bit of a lesson. Certainly, it seems to have been a real eye-opener for some in the government caucus to learn that there are actually constitutional obligations and the duty to consult and that you can't just talk about separating Alberta from Canada without significantly impacting treaties which pre-existed the creation of Alberta, and of course honour of the Crown is bound up in those treaties. There are obligations on both the federal and provincial government and on each individual Albertan as a result of those treaties.

We have now had two court decisions which have made it very clear that there are significant impacts. At the very least the name of the party on a treaty would be impacted by any vote in support of separatism or even if the question was a positive one, but the no-side one: that would also impact significantly treaties. Therefore, a duty to consult is required. Again, we are only here right now today because the preferred question that the government wanted to have go forward to referendum was struck down by a court because of a failure of a duty to consult. That's the only reason that the UCP members are now currently interested in the forever Canada petition, so let's not make that same mistake twice, shall we? Let's make sure that the government of Alberta lives up to their obligations, their treaty obligations, and the honour of the Crown by properly consulting.

Now, the First Nations who are listed there in this amendment, Mr. Chair, are the nations that were specifically engaged in legal action in the injunction against the separatist petition, but of course

there are many other First Nations who would be impacted and are impacted by any discussion for Alberta to separate from Canada. I want to take the opportunity to read in a news release which was issued today by Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. It's dated today, and they're calling on the Alberta government to respect the court's treaty rights and the rule of law. In this media release it states that

ACFN has also not been invited into any discussions regarding next steps, including the so called "Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee", despite clear court rulings confirming that consultation with First Nations is legally required before advancing a referendum process. In a sham of a process, the Chair of that Committee issued a press release yesterday confirming the Government's intention to ignore ACFN, ignore the Courts, ignore the Constitution and call the referendum before the Committee itself has even voted on the issue.

I want to also highlight other quotes, Mr. Chair, from First Nations related to this. We know that both Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation as well as, I believe, Blackfoot Confederacy and Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation made substantive submissions to cabinet on the responsibility of the government of Alberta to consult before any question related to separatism, including the forever Canada question, is brought forward. The release I believe from the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation says:

any contemplated or requested action to call a referendum on secession, including but not limited to a referendum called pursuant to the Citizen Initiative Act [and] the Referendum Act. For clarity, this submission also applies to calling a separatist referendum on any variation of the Forever Canada question.

They make the claim, Mr. Chair, that Alberta cannot unilaterally call a separatist referendum without First Nations and without Canada. This is a clear call from First Nations, some of whom have had their rights protected and enforced by the courts recently, to say that there must be consultation that takes place with Indigenous peoples before a referendum is ordered.

Now, under the court action that took place last week that responsibility to consult, according to the decision, failed the moment that Elections Alberta approved the petition to gather signatures. The UCP themselves removed any opportunity for government to intervene prior to that going to referendum because they removed all of those benchmarks or those barriers that would have made sure that an unconstitutional question would not go to a referendum. They made those changes. That was the initial point.

Here we're talking about a referendum that will be initiated by government. I will come back to the initial point, Mr. Chair. This is not somebody else triggering a referendum. There is no mechanism under the policy proposal provision of this act for a petition to trigger a referendum automatically because any number of signatures has been reached. The only time that that is triggered is if there is a constitutional amendment proposal. That is not what the forever Canada petition is, so any referendum that comes out of this process today is a government-led referendum, and the First Nations and Indigenous peoples of this province are saying that they must be consulted, and they are supported by the law. This amendment is not just because we think it's important, but it is critical to ensure that there is proper consultation so there may be some sliver of legitimacy to any government referendum.

Now, if there's any hesitation to consult, I'm sure that has nothing to do with the fact that the government is expecting to announce a referendum in just over three hours. If that is what is guiding this decision today to ignore the duty to consult, then I think that the government is going to find themselves back in court, and Alberta taxpayers will once again be paying for the decision of this UCP government to go forward with an unconstitutional

referendum question without properly consulting First Nations and Indigenous peoples.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

Member Gray, I saw your hand. Did you still want to join in on debate on this amendment?

Ms Gray: I would like to join debate. However, I believe government members also joined the list. I'd be happy to wait and allow them to speak first.

The Chair: Are there any government members wishing to join debate?

Mr. Schow: Sure. Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the comments from the members opposite, and I appreciate the amendment put forward. What I do think is happening, though, is that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is conflating two different petitions in this instance. What we're looking at here is an amendment to the forever Canada petition where Canadians, Albertans, put their name on a piece of paper and signed that they supported a referendum on remaining in Canada. That is not something that I think we should be disregarding. This is initiated, by definition, by the name of the act, by citizens of the province.

What I'm finding, however, Mr. Chair, is that it is difficult to understand or see any new information that's being brought to light by the members. They do and they have referenced the statement that was issued yesterday, and they also continue to reference consultation. That point has been made. I will go back to the time we have for this committee today and also the fact that the members opposite are doing their earnest to stall the ability for us to vote on a matter of importance to hundreds of thousands of Albertans who initiated this process.

The members opposite, the NDP, are wrong, Mr. Chair. For them to continue to stall this committee's work I think is an affront to the will of the hundreds of thousands who signed that petition. My comments are simply this, that the members opposite keep their comments tight on the matter at hand. I would love to vote on this amendment and move forward to the main motion at hand, which is dealing with the forever Canada petition. Mr. Chair, we are now an hour into this meeting. I'm getting a lot of what I'd consider vain repetition from the NDP caucus, and I'd ask them to keep the comments tight so we can get to the matter at hand, which is to vote on the motion before us. Hundreds of thousands of Albertans have asked to deal with this. They are choosing to stall.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Schow.

I would certainly ask that members on both sides try to bring new information to the fore and to bring that information forward.

MLA Gray, I saw your hand. Are you ceding your . . .

Ms Gray: I'll cede my time to my colleague MLA Pancholi and will rejoin the list.

Thank you.

3:00

The Chair: All right. MLA Pancholi, is there any new information you'd like to bring forward?

Ms Pancholi: Yes, Mr. Chair, there is new information that I'd like to bring forward. It appears there seems to be some significant urgency on the members opposite, the government members. For some reason they think debating a motion on whether or not we have a referendum on separation for an hour is too much. This amendment speaks directly to the duty to consult. If the member took the time to listen to my comments, they were not repetitive.

They were outlining the concerns raised by both the legal case as well as the First Nations. How insulting. I think this says everything you need to know about the government's approach to hearing from First Nations. They don't even want to hear us mention or talk about consulting with First Nations for longer than 10 minutes before their patience runs out.

It appears that, again, they're being pressured by some kind of arbitrary timeline, and I remind them that they had 90 days to conduct these meetings and could have initiated this process months and months and months – six months ago, actually, so we could have had a fulsome time to address all the issues. I recall that MLA Sawyer had lots of questions; MLA Nixon. They wanted all these members to come back. So I'm very sorry that they don't have the time, but you know, this is a significant issue.

The duty to consult with First Nations is a constitutional issue, and what I'm not hearing from the members opposite – and I in particular would like to hear from the Member for Calgary-North West, the Minister of Indigenous Relations, whether or not she believes it's important to hear from First Nations and consult with them appropriately before this government calls a referendum on separation. I'm sorry if that's redundant for the members opposite, but this is a pretty significant issue for the First Nations of Alberta but also for all Albertans.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

MLA Gray, please go ahead.

Ms Gray: Yes. Thank you very much. As I begin my comments, I would like to note that I am only the third speaker to this amendment from the Official Opposition caucus because the amendment has just been introduced, and to categorize this in any way as stalling is patently ridiculous, especially on something that is so serious.

Allow me to just summarize the reasons why I support this amendment. There is a legal obligation to consult before the government makes any decision to call a referendum that touches on separation, regardless of the result of this committee's process. This is relevant to this amendment and to the motion because, if passed, the motion is calling on a separation referendum, which directly touches on the recent legal cases, an important precedent and the important rule of law under which this province should be governed and which government members should be highly concerned with, yet it appears they are not. The recent decision by Justice Leonard should be something that the government is thinking about. Instead, they appear to be trying to ram through the motion under debate, ignoring this amendment.

Yesterday they issued a press release before the committee had even made any decisions. The Premier seems to have prerecorded a message to Albertans that will be aired in hours now. Instead of having a genuine debate and considering an amendment to respect the duty to consult, to understand the implications this will have on any decisions by this committee and any decisions by the government in their next steps, we have a government that is absolutely hell bent on having a referendum, on driving this through. That puts the ownership solely at their feet, Mr. Chair.

If the government moves forward with treating the forever Canada petition as a petition that could result in separation from Canada, which the motion already does, it's clear that it would touch on section 35 rights of First Nations. This committee should consult now, or the courts will make the government consult before this gets anywhere near the ballot box. I think that the government should be open to considering doing things the right way. We opened our legislative session this year with a vote of nonconfidence being

proposed by chiefs of First Nations across our great province, and the government was uninterested in listening at that point.

Here we are specifically debating the motion as to what should happen next. We have an amendment that I fully support. And because the government had been slow walking the committee up until this point, the Government House Leader accuses us of stalling. It's just ridiculous, comedic, on top of what happened yesterday and the complete disrespect that this government has for democracy, for this committee, for Albertans, especially given the disingenuous arguments that I have heard made.

I would love to hear from the government any good or genuine reason why the duty to consult should not apply to the motion that is before this committee and any reason why we should not hear from each of these tribes and nations that we have listed as part of a valid, trusted, respected process.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Gray.

MLA Ellingson, go ahead.

Member Ellingson: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess in coming back to me, it's clear that the further government members aren't necessarily putting themselves on the speakers list, so we're not going to hear from the Minister of Indigenous Relations on an amendment that says that the motion should require consultation with First Nations before we move forward.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to note a couple of things. First of all, I thought it was curious when we did hear from the government. It sounded more like he was arguing a point of order than actually speaking to the amendment itself. There's no conflation of one petition over the other here. It's clear that the government is not respectful of the 400,000 Albertans who signed the petition in question. It's also clear that they're not respecting First Nations and Indigenous people in this province.

There was a release from Treaty 8 First Nations this morning: Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta call on Alberta to respect constitutional and treaty obligations. I'm going to quote from this to show that we're not conflating petitions or their stance.

The Sovereign Chiefs of Treaty 8 in Alberta are deeply concerned by the ongoing public discussions and political actions surrounding a potential Alberta separation referendum, including recent developments reported publicly regarding the Alberta Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee process.

They're commenting on this process. They know this process is taking place. They know that they're being excluded from this process. This amendment is an attempt to bring them into this process and the conversations of this committee to honour treaty rights.

Mr. Chair, I may today represent a constituency that is in Treaty 7 territory. I grew up in Treaty 8 territory. Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation was a neighbour of mine. I went to school with many members of Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, and I think that all of us around this table have some relationship with First Nations, with Albertans who live in our constituencies. We owe it to them to hear from them. It is the law of this land and treaty obligation that we hear from First Nations in making a decision of this magnitude.

Mr. Chair, we're talking about a referendum question about the future of this province and the place of this province in Canada. To do so without having conversation with First Nations is ludicrous. It flies in the face of their requests, of court decisions . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order has been called.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Listen, we have now heard from all three members of the opposition caucus as well as now going back to the mover. I'm not hearing anything new besides quoting the same thing. I'd also say that committees are slightly different than the Assembly, where each member has an opportunity to speak within a confined time frame once on a bill at every stage, with the exception of Committee of the Whole, of course. Committees are meant to help streamline some of the processes that we deal with in the Assembly, and we are now in a situation where the members opposite, as I mentioned before, continue to go without specific timelines, without specific time constraints on the same matter.

We understand the nature of the amendment put forward before the committee. The arguments are very clear. I'm more than happy to vote on this amendment, but, Mr. Chair, I just don't see how we are getting anywhere near what I would say is productive debate anymore. I would put that, under 23(c), we continue to persist in needless repetition that raises matters that have been decided or at least that have been addressed in this committee. I leave it in your very capable hands, but I can see a pattern of members here in what they're doing under, again, 23(c).

3:10

The Chair: Thank you.

MLA Gray, please go ahead.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This is absolutely not a point of order, and it's laughable that the Government House Leader is presenting it as such. To be very clear, some of the quotations that were just being provided from Treaty 8 were released less than an hour ago. This is brand new information that we are entering into the public record as part of the committee debate relevant to this amendment, extremely relevant to the motion that the government is interested in debating. The Government House Leader refers to productive debate, yet the government members have not engaged in debate on these issues in any way, shape, or form, allowing our members to make new and concerned arguments relevant to this. He says that these topics have been addressed in this committee. No. The government has avoided talking about these items in this committee. They have not been addressed.

I do not think that this is a point of order. The person who moved and motivated this amendment is only now speaking to it for a second time and adding new information not only for this entire committee but speaking about local constituency issues. I don't believe this is a point of order, Mr. Chair, and I hope you will not rule it as one.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, both members. I will agree that this is a point of order. I think we've heard some repetitious comments. I will also note, just to make sure we get through our business today, that we need to make sure we wrap up our motions and amendments on this by 3:45 just to give us enough time to complete the business of our committee. Looking forward to hearing new information on this amendment and as we continue forward in our deliberations.

I'd like to ask if anyone would like to add new information at this time. MLA Ellingson, please go ahead.

Member Ellingson: Sorry. Can I just close my comments as I was interrupted by a point of order?

The Chair: Please continue.

Member Ellingson: From the media release a fresh quote that this committee has not heard. I'll close my comments with: Treaty 8 First Nations remain committed to constructive dialogue, the protection of Treaty relationships, and ensuring that any discussions affecting the future of Alberta are conducted lawfully, respectfully, and in accordance with the honour of the Crown.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.

With that discussion, I would like to call the question on this amendment. All those in favour of the amendment, please say aye. Are there any opposed to this amendment? Please say no. And online?

Ms Pancholi: Recorded vote.

The Chair: All right. A recorded vote has been requested. Those in the room who are in favour of the amendment, please raise your hands.

We're sticklers for process. I announce that that amendment was defeated.

Now we can move on to our recorded vote.

A recorded vote has been requested. Those in the room who are in favour of the motion, please raise your hands.

Mr. Huffman: Ms Pancholi and Member Ellingson.

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

Mr. Huffman: Hon. Mr. Nixon and hon. Mrs. Sawyer.

The Chair: All right. For those members participating remotely, please turn on your camera and microphone if you wish to vote. When the committee clerk calls your name, please indicate whether you are in favour or against the amendment.

Mr. Huffman: Hon. Mrs. Sawhney.

Mrs. Sawhney: Against.

Mr. Huffman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. For the amendment, two; against, three.

The Chair: Thank you.

That amendment has been defeated.

We can continue our deliberations on the main motion. Are there any other members wishing to join the debate? MLA Pancholi, please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: It is interesting, Mr. Chair, that such a momentous motion is before this committee, one that has been a year long in coming and has, you know, really taken the province through an incredible amount of turmoil. It's one where we've seen the government change laws multiple times, overrule court decisions, announce that they're going to use taxpayer dollars to appeal a decision of the court in favour of separatism, yet not a single member of this committee seems interested in speaking to this motion, nor do they seem interested in speaking to the substance of the duty to consult. Perhaps they're aware that this is a deeply unpopular decision for the general population of Albertans, but of course it's deeply popular with the base that keeps their Premier in her position and many of them in their seats. Maybe they're concerned about having their nominations challenged, but this is their motion, yet they seem reluctant to speak to it, Mr. Chair, which I find remarkable.

I will say that the one thing that I think we absolutely must put on the record when it comes to this motion is that regardless of all of the narrative that the government is now spinning to justify bringing forward this motion, they are completely ignoring what the reality is that we're facing in this province, which is that we just experienced the largest data breach in Canada's history, when the voters list in Alberta containing the personal information of 3 million Albertans was illegally shared with one side of the argument on this debate. Any – any – referendum at this point that would call into question or whatever language is going to be used when the Premier announces it in just a couple hours, whatever that question is, one side of that debate, Mr. Chair, has illegal access to personal information of Albertans.

This data breach is enormous. While government has discussed, you know, letting the investigations and that there are three investigations taking place right now, the RCMP – thanks to the opposition for reporting that information to the RCMP – as well as Elections Alberta as well as the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner: those are significant investigations. We have no indication that those investigations will be complete between now and October or even in advance of October so that we can have any certainty that the outcome of any referendum on this issue can be valid or legitimate.

This motion was originally introduced by a member of the UCP cabinet who used to have responsibility for the information and privacy acts in this province, who is the Minister of Tech and Innovation so should understand how this information can be shared.

We recently saw reporting just yesterday that a portion of that data and that voters list that was illegally shared with proponents of the separatism cause in Alberta have now appeared in databases in the United States. We have had credible reports of foreign interference.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: Again, I'll go under 23(b) this time, not speaking to the question that's under discussion. If the member would like to discuss the motion, go for it. You've already been clear about that. If not, let's vote.

The Chair: MLA Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is not a point of order. The member is speaking to the motion and making arguments as to why there should be concerns about passing this motion specifically because of current events and the implications of the data breach, the fact that should this motion pass, one side of the referendum question, the separation side, has already proven themselves to be bad actors. There is data that has been leaked. There are security concerns for Albertans, and the government has completely failed to respond to that in any meaningful way. No support provided to Albertans for how to manage their personal information, knowing that it is out in the world with bad actors. No information about how they are going to protect the legitimacy of a debate and a referendum. This is all relevant to this motion. I encourage the members opposite to try to follow the arguments that are being made and how they are relevant, because it is clear as day.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

I would ask that members comment specifically on the forever Canada petition that we've been tasked with as a committee. I don't

think bringing in the additional potential questions is very helpful at this point, so I would ask the member to please move on and continue debating the motion that we have.

3:20

Ms Pancholi: I just want to say congratulations, Mr. Chair, as well for your promotion and the pay increase that you got. You've clearly earned every dollar of that.

Mr. Schow: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

Ms Pancholi: I apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Schow: No. I'm going to get this on the record because, Mr. Chair, under 23(h), (i), and (j) it is clear that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has a disdain not only for the committee process, the standing orders, but for you, the chair. It is so disrespectful – so utterly disrespectful – to the position that you have, to the role that that member has as an elected member for Edmonton-Whitemud. I think her constituents would be ashamed of the way that member conducts herself in this Chamber and in this committee room right now, bringing into conversation your pay, your role in this caucus, your role in this chair position.

Like, Mr. Chair, if we're not going to have productive debate today, then let's just call the question and move on with it. This is clearly an attempt by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, Ms Pancholi, to grandstand for her next leadership race, and I think it's completely disrespectful to you, the chair, the members of the committee, and the hundreds of thousands of people in the public who signed a petition asking for a referendum to stay within Canada.

Ms Gray: Mr. Chair, the member has already apologized and withdrawn, but I would like to note for the record that the Government House Leader proceeds to insult and demean members, to state how he thinks other people believe the member is doing her job, and he is absolutely wrong in all respects. The comment has been apologized for and withdrawn, and I think continuing to move into insults is likely to create disorder and we should move away from that.

The Chair: Thank you, members. Thank you, MLA Gray.

I would agree with that. Decorum should always be the order of the day, and I ask all members if we can keep that in mind. I acknowledge and thank the member for her withdrawal and apology. I like to think I have pretty thick skin, so I'm happy to move this along and ask that we continue debate on our motion.

Please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, this motion introduces a referendum, not just in concept. It specifically indicates that a referendum should be held on October 19, 2026. That is a specific date for this specific referendum, although the question remains incredibly vague. The question says that it would "include an option for Albertans to vote for Alberta to remain in Canada," as if perhaps this referendum question is going to be a multiple-choice question and we get to choose which one of the options we want, which, again, for a referendum would be completely absurd and would be intended to confuse voters.

At the end of the day, this motion, as put forward by the government members, very specifically calls for a referendum to be held on October 19, 2026. In my comments I am raising significant concerns – I am not the only one who has done this, Mr. Chair – about how one can hold a valid referendum in just a few months given the fact that we have had this enormous data breach that one

side of the very issue that is the subject matter of this referendum has illegal access to, and those investigations that will be conducted into that may not be complete in time for Albertans to have confidence in any referendum to be held on October 19.

I will go further and say that we also cannot trust that there has not been foreign interference. There have been credible reports. This calls into question how we can hold a referendum on the date proposed in the motion that can have any confidence from Albertans that there has not been tampering from some kind of foreign influence but also that one side of that argument won't even co-operate, Mr. Chair. We have indications right now that the key person behind this data breach allegedly won't even co-operate with Elections Alberta and confirm that that data is not still being used. As recently as last night we still had that reporting out there.

This is why I'm speaking to this motion and raising concerns that we do not have the conditions in this province right now where we can say with confidence that a legitimate referendum can be held on this issue. That is yet another reason that this committee should not be suggesting that this matter go to a referendum and why I urge the government, because it is the government who is making this decision and it is the government who will decide the words that will be on that referendum question and it will be the Premier who will announce those words today on her referendum, that we should not go forward with that. Even if you put aside who asked for this or who didn't ask for this, at the end of the day Albertans do not have confidence in the ability to have a secure referendum on this issue right now.

I'd like to know if any of the members on the other side – because we have not heard from them about whether they have concerns about the legitimacy of a referendum in these circumstances, with this data breach and foreign interference being a concern. Do they have any concerns about whether or not this referendum can be held appropriately, legitimately, and with security?

The Chair: Member Ellingson, please go ahead.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll keep my comments short. I'm sure that will make the government members happy. The only ones here today that have disdain for the process are the government members. The only thing we've heard from them today is that they see this committee as stalling and holding up what they really want to do, so let's be clear. The Premier wants a referendum on separation. Her question was stalled by the courts, and she's using this committee to legitimize her desire to have a question on a referendum. The Premier cannot hide behind this committee. She cannot hide behind the 400,000 Albertans . . .

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order.

Mr. Nixon: A point of order on two things, 23(b), again continuing to talk to a question that is not under discussion. What the Premier thinks or does not think is certainly not under discussion in this motion. I mean, I could call a point of order on putting false motives on a member of the Legislature, which the Premier is, but I won't bother. Point of order 23(c) also. The member opposite continued to needlessly repeat the same questions and comments that have already been addressed at this committee. You've ruled on this already, Mr. Chair, but the opposition continues to persist with that. Do they have anything new they would like to add to the motion, which is what you've ruled on? We'd be very interested in hearing it.

The Chair: MLA Gray.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is not a point of order. We continue to be accurately debating the motion that is in front of us. I think that the comment of the minister, that they would be interested in hearing our arguments, seems to be patently false given the dialogue that has happened in the points of order that have been called so far.

In this case, Mr. Chair, we still have an additional hour on this committee. This is the only piece of business in front of us. We are discussing this motion. It is of significant public importance. I do not think that the comments have been repetitive, and I believe that the member should be allowed to conclude what he was saying. He even opened by suggesting that these were his final words on the subject. I believe we should allow him to make his points so that the committee business can continue instead of these constant points of order and mischaracterizing what the Official Opposition is doing.

The Chair: Member Ellingson, did you want to conclude your remarks? Please go ahead.

Member Ellingson: I will conclude my remarks. Mr. Chair, a dialogue implies that there are two parties involved, and we have heard not one word from the government today on this motion. They're not interested in a dialogue.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Hearing that, I am prepared to call this question. All those in favour of the motion as presented on the screen, please say aye. Are there any opposed? All right. Online? That motion is carried.

Ms Gray: Recorded, please.

The Chair: A recorded vote has been requested. Those of you in the room who are in favour of the motion, please raise your hands.

Mr. Huffman: Hon. Mr. Nixon, hon. Mrs. Sawyer.

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

Mr. Huffman: Ms Pancholi, Member Ellingson.

The Chair: For those members participating remotely, please turn on your cameras and microphones if you wish to vote. When the committee clerk calls your name, please indicate whether you are in favour or against the motion.

Mr. Huffman: Hon. Mrs. Sawhney.

Mrs. Sawhney: In favour.

Mr. Huffman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. For the motion, three; against, two.

The Chair: All right.

That motion is carried.

Is there any other business under this item?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to move us on to next steps. We're now at the point in the . . . [Disturbance in the gallery] All right. I'm still prepared to move us on to next steps.

We are now at the point in the agenda where we will discuss the next steps for our review. In the event that we move to the reporting stage, I would like to call upon Ms Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and committees, to discuss the process of drafting a report to the Assembly and explain about minority reports.

3:30

Ms Robert: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think most of you have been through the committee reporting process, but I'll very quickly at a high level go over what typically is involved in a report from a committee to the Assembly. The main purpose of the report, of course, is to reflect the recommendations that have been agreed to by the committee. The report would also include the committee's mandate, the consultation and review process that it undertook, who it met with, et cetera.

In this case the citizen initiative petition that is the mandate of this committee would be appended to the report, and then if there was a minority report, that would be appended to the report as well. Typically what happens is that if there's a motion to direct the LAO to draft a report, we do so, and then it's shared with the committee, and then the committee decides how it wants to go about the approval process.

With respect to minority reports, minority reports are certainly permitted in our system, and the chair would suggest deadlines for receiving minority reports, and then any report would just be appended to the report that is presented to the Assembly. Since we're not in session right now, the report could be intersessionally deposited or, if the chair preferred, could be presented when the Assembly meets again.

That's really everything I needed to say, but I'm happy to answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you so much. Appreciate that information.

Are there any discussion or motions? MLA Sawyer, I see your hand. Please go ahead.

Mrs. Sawyer: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a motion I'd like to move, please. I move that

the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee direct the Legislative Assembly Office to (a) prepare a draft report of its review of the Alberta forever Canada citizen initiative policy proposal and distribute it to committee members for their review, and (b) authorize the chair to approve that draft report after committee members have had an opportunity to provide comments on the draft report.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, MLA. Can you just confirm that is your motion on the page there?

Mrs. Sawyer: Yes.

The Chair: All right. Would you like a chance to speak briefly to this?

Mrs. Sawyer: I think it's pretty self-explanatory in the sense – I'm happy to – that, you know, we've got the recommendation here, and the next step would be for the committee to direct the LAO to prepare that draft report. I just want to make sure we get that done.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other members wishing to join the debate on this motion? MLA Pancholi, please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: I just have some questions. Maybe they're for Nancy. If we are to amend a minority report, do we need to include that in the motion, or is that something that – how do we build that into the process here for a minority report to be included?

The Chair: Please go ahead.

Ms Robert: Thank you, Mr. Chair. No need to include it in the motion. The standing orders permit minority reports, so the chair, I

suspect, will set a date that he hopes to receive any minority reports, and then if they're received by that date, they would just be appended to the report.

The Chair: Thank you.
Go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Just as a follow-up maybe for you, Mr. Chair: are we setting that date today at this meeting as to when that minority report and the final report will be submitted?

The Chair: Yeah. We intend to discuss that after our motion.
Any further discussion on this motion?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to call this vote. All those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed? All right.

That motion is carried.

Thank you, everyone.

I'd like to note that there has been significant public interest in the work of this committee and that we should complete the reporting process as soon as we reasonably can. I would like to have the final report for intersessional deposit on Tuesday morning. In order to do this, I would like to ask that committee members review the draft report as soon as possible once it has been distributed. Any questions or concerns about the draft report should be raised by 4:30 p.m. on Monday. I would ask that minority reports, if any, also be provided to the committee clerk by the end of business on Monday.

As this may well be the final meeting of the committee, the practice in similar select special committees has been to authorize the chair to approve the final set or sets of meeting minutes for the records of the Assembly after members have had the opportunity to review them.

I would like to open the floor to comments, questions, or motions on the matters that I've just brought forward. MLA Sawyer, I see your hand again. Please go ahead.

Mrs. Sawyer: I'd like to move a motion, please, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mrs. Sawyer: I'd like to move that the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee authorize the chair to approve the draft minutes of the May 20, 2026, and May 21, 2026, meetings of the committee after they have been circulated to committee members for review.

The Chair: All right. That is your motion on the screen?

Mrs. Sawyer: Well, if you want me to be particular, I said May 20, 2026, and May 21, 2026. Other than that, yes. It's missing in the order, but it's there.

The Chair: Okay, so it sounds like – good. Is there any discussion on this motion? MLA Gray, please go ahead.

Ms Gray: Just a question because I'm not sure I have seen a point of privilege represented in committee meeting minutes before. I'm just curious how much information will be included. Will it only be the motion? Is there a description of the arguments for the record? I'm interested in knowing what that might look like.

The Chair: I think we might all be interested in that. I will ask if the table has any comments.

Ms Robert: It's been a while since we've had a privilege question in committee, but I would suspect it would just briefly describe the issue raised and the ruling, similar to the Votes and Proceedings.

Ms Gray: Thank you. Thank you for that answer.

While I am still supportive of this motion, I think my request of the chair might be to send a copy to the Official Opposition just so we can take a look. We'll still leave the ability to approve with you, but it would be interesting to us and we may have feedback after. Perfect.

The Chair: Well, good. I was going to say yes anyway, so it all works out.

All right. Any other debate on this motion? All right. Oh, sorry. MLA Pancholi, please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: I just have a question, then, as the Tuesday morning will be the date by which the intersessional deposit takes place. That's correct, so the recommendation from this committee would not actually be available or taken to the Legislature until Tuesday morning. Is that correct?

The Chair: I believe the process is that the report is what is going to be intersessionally tabled. I don't know if the table has any additional information to that.

Ms Robert: Sure. Thanks. Yes. In an out-of-session period, basically, someone wanting to table a required tabling, as it were, sends a note to the Clerk and asks that the document be tabled. It is, and then it's provided to the library.

Ms Pancholi: To clarify, does that mean that the report does not become official, in terms of as the recommendation from this committee, until such time as it's been tabled?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Robert: Yeah. The recommendation that I think you're talking about, the motion that was just debated and passed here: that is done. The report doesn't make it more done. The fact that the motion is passed on the public record: it has happened. The report will be the administrative ending of the process.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you.

The Chair: All right. If there's no more debate, I'm prepared to call this question. All those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Are there any opposed? All right. That motion is carried.

We can move on on our agenda to other business. Is there any other business to be addressed today? Seeing none.

Date of next meeting. There are no additional meetings anticipated for this committee.

I can move us on to adjournment. If there's nothing else for this committee's consideration, I'll call for a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Nixon: I move to adjourn.

The Chair: Moved by MLA Nixon that the May 21, 2026, meeting of the Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee be adjourned. All those in favour, please say aye. Any opposed? That motion is carried.

[The committee adjourned at 3:40 p.m.]

