



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 5, 2024

Day 65

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
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United Conservative: 49

New Democrat: 37

Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 5, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my great pleasure to be able to host family members of members of the Assembly, and I was able to do that today for the hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations. He had some very important guests visiting the Legislature today. It's my pleasure to introduce to all members of the Assembly his daughter Robin Myck, son-in-law Jeremy Myck, and granddaughter Ariana Boyda. I'm not sure if anyone remembers – perhaps the Clerk will remember – but Robin was actually a former page who served in the early '90s and is very familiar with what this Assembly can look like on occasion. I'm sure it won't be like that today. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I also would like to introduce to members of the Assembly community members that were here today as part of World Book Day to celebrate the Book Publishers Association of Alberta, who hosted an event in the lower rotunda today that I know many of you were able to participate in. They had a great display of books that are made right here in Alberta. It's my pleasure to introduce to all members of the Assembly Kieran Leblanc, the executive director of the Book Publishers Association of Alberta, and she is joined in the gallery by a number of other book publishers and members of the BPAA. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly grade 6 students from Glengarry elementary school, the first Arabic bilingual public school in the province. I ask the students and their teachers Wafaa Abbas and Loubna Farhat – I say [Remarks in Arabic] and ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Sherwood Park have an introduction?

Mr. Kasawski: I do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. To you and through you to the members of the Assembly it's my pleasure to introduce you to the students, teachers, and chaperones from Pine Street elementary, who today debated: should they wear school uniforms? They voted that they should. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health has an introduction.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dr. Rithesh Ram, family physician and rural generalist,

president and founder of the Riverside Medical Clinic, and president of the AMA section of rural medicine. Thank you for being such a strong advocate for rural health. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Fir: It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly some of the amazing publishers here for Alberta Book Day: Megan Bishop, Justin Pitt, MacKinley Darlington, Kyle Flemmer, Christine Kohler, Meredith Thompson, Carolina Ortiz, Tom Lore, Kay Rollans, Wendy Pirk, and Elisia Snyder. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Member Irwin: It's an honour to rise and welcome so many transgender Albertans and their allies in the gallery today, including Rowan Morris, a 23-year-old transgender Albertan and founder of Trans Rights Yeg, and Bradley Lafortune, executive director of Public Interest Alberta. Please all rise, and let's give Rowan, Brad, and all these guests a very warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you it is my pleasure today to rise and introduce community leaders and builders and people who exhibit inclusivity in sport every single day from the Bow Valley pride community: Ren Lavergne, Rachel O'Reilly, Mich Lam, Finn St Dennis, Kye Lyle, and Carly Moore. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Sunny Kakar and Raj Malhotra, who are the founders of Sifarish Network, which connects professionals in the South Asian community across Edmonton and Calgary. They're joined today with their significant others, Mandeep Kakar and Archana Malhotra. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Lundy: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce Ms Emily Kelndorfer from Killam, right next door to my hometown of Forestburg. Emily is an ambitious political science student at the University of Alberta, and as a fellow political science graduate myself I would certainly encourage her to seek public office but only as a last resort. Emily, please rise and enjoy the warm welcome of the House.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly my beautiful relatives, my trans relative who came out so young to his supportive parents. I love you. I believe you. I support you. Please receive the warm welcome from all of us here in the Assembly.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Later today I'll be tabling tens of thousands of signatures on a petition. Some of the folks who helped gather them to save the Royal Alberta Museum original site here are Stuart, David, Dawn, Darrel, Marianne, and Sherry. There are others here as well, but I ask anyone who is part of that to please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Louis Baillargeon, a constituent of Edmonton-South West and an advocate for the preservation of the former Royal

Alberta Museum. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly, Louis.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to you and through you to introduce to you the wonderful, amazing folks with Pride Corner on Whyte in Edmonton here, a staple for our community: Claire Pearen, Erica Posteraro, and Tess Chappell. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise to introduce Chris Gallaway and Mitchell Pawluk from Friends of Medicare and Deanna Ogle from Canadian Labour Congress. Please rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce a very determined octogenarian-plus, June Acorn, an advocate and petition organizer who is organizing people all over the province to stand up and save the former RAM from destruction by the UCP government, as it was a gift. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists, who spoke to us today about how they fit into the medical system. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

Government Policies

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Mr. Speaker, it was a brisk fall in 2013 when a leader stood before her party and asked them to endorse her leadership. This leader told them that she had learned the lessons of the past year and promised to do better. She promised she would stand up for the rights of all Albertans, including the 2SLGBTQA-plus community. She promised she had listened to Albertans and no longer believed in gambling away their retirements with the Alberta pension plan or wasting money with an Alberta provincial police force. She promised that she now believed in climate change, and she promised that she would stand up against corruption with the current sitting Conservative government. But 14 months later, after she had her membership endorsement, she betrayed them and crossed the floor.

Things change, Mr. Speaker, but none of them have changed as much as this Premier has. This weekend we saw the Premier campaign and vote against so much of what she once believed in, what she once staked as the principles she wanted to bring to the government. Her government is now attacking 2SLGBTQA-plus Albertans and their rights. Her government is still out to grab and gamble the pensions of hard-working Albertans. Her government now praises carbon dioxide rather than reduce emissions.

1:40

She does all of this while her ministers accept luxury box seat hockey tickets while ignoring the cost-of-living challenges Albertans are facing. Health care is in crisis, Albertans can't find a family doctor, and the cost of living is making it harder and harder

for families just to get by. Albertans are struggling, looking for more, looking for a government focused on them, not leadership reviews. They won't get that from the UCP, but in 2027 they will get it from Naheed Nenshi and the Alberta NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Member for Livingstone-MacLeod has a statement to make.

Primary Health Care Funding

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today our government announced a \$42 million investment into strengthening primary health care across Alberta. This significant funding commitment is part of our ongoing efforts to ensure that all Albertans can access the care they need when and where they need it. Albertans have made it clear that timely, reliable access to primary care is a top priority, and we are responding with our focused approach to enhance services that are vital to our health care system.

The funding announced today includes \$30 million over two years to expand services at four community health centres: the Alex community health centre, CUPS Calgary Society, Jasper Place Wellness Centre, and Radius Community Health & Healing. These centres will broaden their range of essential services, providing team-based primary care for Indigenous and marginalized groups, mental health services, walk-in care, outreach, and additional supports like housing navigation, recovery support, and food access programs.

Additionally, as part of this comprehensive \$42 million investment we are dedicating \$12 million over the next two years through the rural health action plan. This funding will support rural health by helping communities recruit more providers and expand team-based services in local clinics.

Mr. Speaker, strengthening primary health care is one of the many ways we are working to improve access to services for all Albertans. Recently we also announced plans to expand cardiac care in southern Alberta with the addition of a cardiac catheterization lab at Chinook regional hospital in Lethbridge. Currently patients from southern Alberta needing cardiac care must travel to Calgary, placing strain on families and increasing pressure on Calgary facilities. This new lab will serve an additional 1,500 patients each year in southern Alberta, bringing vital care closer to home.

As we move forward with these health care improvements, our government remains committed to supporting the health of all Albertans in a way that reflects the growth and evolving needs of our communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Transgender Youth Policy

Member Tejada: The first weekend after session provided a stark contrast between the UCP and Alberta's NDP. There were two big gatherings. One was a room voting to hurt human rights, obsessed with chemtrails and resistance to evidence. The other featured thousands of voices, the Alberta NDP included, joined in a collective roar of love and resistance, fighting for each other, fighting for all of us, fighting for what this Premier used to say she stood for: freedom. Freedom should mean living a life of dignity, to be active participants in schools, sport, and society at large, freedom from the government meddling in our medical decisions, and the freedom for parents to make decisions in careful and thoughtful collaboration with medical professionals.

This weekend at Calgary city hall and the Alberta Legislature Queer Citizens United and Skipping Stone rallied along with others, community members, allies from all walks of life. Families, unions,

teachers, friends all showed up to tell the government that trans rights are human rights. As we brace for another round of this government's collective punching down on vulnerable kids, I know kids across Alberta are watching carefully, and they know that when rights and freedoms of one group are politicized and up for debate, we are all at risk.

In the words of our leader, Naheed Nenshi, kids are asking, "Am I next?" On this side of the House we're here to tell Albertans to hug their kids tight and look after each other because we know that better is possible. We know that the next few years will be hard, but there are champions already at work to fight for your rights and real freedom. We stand with them, and we're ready to help. To all kids, and especially trans and nonbinary kids who got out to the rally and those who couldn't: we see you, we love you, we will fight for you, and we will win.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

School Construction and Modernization

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is the economic engine of Canada thanks to our skilled and dynamic workforce and diverse economy. We also have the lowest corporate tax rates in North America, and we are home to many world-class postsecondary institutions. Alberta is the powerhouse of job creation across our country.

However, Mr. Speaker, just as people have invested in and moved to our province, we must invest in them. Alberta's population boom has caused extraordinary growth in the education system. In the '24-25 school year there is a historic number of additional students enrolling in schools across Alberta. This need for increased capacity can be seen in my riding of Leduc-Beaumont, with Beaumont specifically requiring a new high school to keep up with demand. I'm proud to continue to support the city of Beaumont by advocating for this important investment.

The good news is that our government is listening and fast responding. Our Alberta government is investing a historic \$8.6 billion to create up to 200,000 new spaces for students and making record investments into education to support students this school year, which will address enrolment pressures and will ensure students have a comfortable place to learn with the support they need to succeed inside and outside of the classroom. This historic school construction investment will build up to 90 new schools, modernize or replace another 24, and deliver more modular classrooms in our fastest growing communities, all within the next seven years, which will help enhance learning environments and address overcrowding.

I am proud to be part of a United Conservative government that recognizes the importance of properly educating our future Albertans. These generational investments in schools help communities like Beaumont that have taken the steps towards education. Mr. Speaker, our education system is growing, and we must grow with it.

Thank you.

Emissions Reduction Policies

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, we are in a race to attract low-carbon investments. The American Inflation Reduction Act, policies in Europe and the Middle East are transforming the energy investment space. Capital is flowing in stable jurisdictions with policy certainty, recognizing we live in a carbon-conscious future because of climate change.

Unfortunately, the federal emissions cap comes down at us without understanding Alberta's existing carbon management frameworks and without sufficient consultations with industry and impacted communities. We're also seeing a UCP government fighting with everyone under the sun, unable to represent Alberta's interests, unable to close deals with Ottawa or bring federal money for Alberta's industry and assist with emission-reducing technologies.

The UCP's job is to have credible industrial and climate plans. If only the minister of energy worked on all forms of energy instead of coal mining in the eastern slopes. If only the minister of utilities did not ban renewables. If only the minister of environment worked on the environment. If only the Premier didn't appoint her friends on our regulators. Maybe the Premier needs to break the news to global CCUS investors about her party's monumentally ignorant policy of removing the designation of carbon dioxide as a pollutant.

Mr. Speaker, the Americans chose to put billions of dollars of taxpayer money in emission-reducing technologies. The EU has carbon pricing and emission trading systems. Alberta has had a long tradition, under many governments except the UCP, to advance responsible development while protecting the environment. Our energy products must not only be cost competitive but also carbon competitive. When will the UCP abandon their three-word slogans and position Alberta for the future?

Community Safety

Member Eremenko: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are rightfully concerned about public safety. In March this year the city of Calgary released 28 recommendations from the Downtown Safety Leadership Table, mandated to address safety concerns by growing and building more safe and vibrant spaces. The report identified significant issues regarding addiction, mental health, and homelessness. Some of the most serious concerns raised were related to public drug use, "drug poisonings, vandalism, encampments, and the high visibility of populations experiencing addictions and mental health issues."

Rather than reaching out to the municipality or the affected communities or the experts or the impacted residents and businesses, this government is insisting on playing politics, more focused on boosting the numbers at the Premier's leadership review than on ending the public safety crisis that has grown under their watch. Calgary-Currie is an inner-city riding, right next door to the public safety minister's riding. My constituents expect this government to have a constructive dialogue with city and community leaders on solutions to the safety issues they live and know every day. My constituents not only expect better from this government; they deserve better, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

In 2023 the UCP government committed just \$5 million to a \$425 million downtown revitalization strategy in Calgary. Revitalizing downtown would positively address the concerns Calgarians have raised, but on that front the UCP was MIA.

Fast-forward to today, and the UCP claims they have no choice but to apprehend and detain people with addiction without their consent. Their only solution to open-air drug use is to support the closure of the space, the one space that provides supervision of health care professionals and options to get help with addictions. This UCP government suggests they've exhausted all other options, but this could not be further from the truth.

Mr. Speaker, public safety is worse under the UCP. Drug-related deaths have gone through the roof. Homeless rates are frighteningly high. The truth is our cities are worse off under the UCP.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Minimum Wage Rate

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, in western Canada Alberta has the highest utility prices and the highest car insurance rates, and Alberta has, after years of high inflation and rising costs of living, shamefully, the lowest minimum wage. For Albertans struggling with the high cost of living, better pay at their job would make a world of difference. Alberta's minimum wage hasn't gone up in over six years. Since that time, inflation has soared here by over 20 per cent. Why has this government let Alberta fall to last place and refused to increase the minimum wage for their entire time in government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has risen.

Ms Smith: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things we're very concerned about is the level of youth unemployment, which is persistently high, sadly. We may have a 7 per cent unemployment rate in our big cities. Lots of people are coming here; many of them are able to find jobs within a few months, and yet the youth unemployment rate is almost double that. I would encourage the members opposite to look at the minimum wage as the entry level wage so that individuals are able to get that first job, first foothold into the market, so that they can develop their skills and be able to expand. That's what we're looking at, and as soon as we start seeing those youth unemployment rates go down, we know that we won't have an impact if we raise it.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier doesn't understand who our minimum wage workers are. Sixty-five per cent of them are not students, and with inflation soaring by more than 20 per cent, worker buying power is eroded. Alberta's low minimum wage means workers who are not able to afford the basics work a full-time job and then have to choose between buying food or filling the gas tank of their car. In the last three years while their wage hasn't gone up, families are spending 20 per cent more for a four-litre jug of milk. It's time to ensure that all Albertans can afford the basics. When will the Premier finally raise the minimum wage?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As of 2023 there were 126,000 employees in Alberta earning minimum wage, compared to 270,000 in 2018. What happens is that if an individual can get that first job and prove themselves on the job, they very quickly get promoted. They get promoted into a higher wage category. But if they can't get that first job, then they end up with persistent unemployment; 14.3 per cent is the youth unemployment rate in Alberta due to national economic pressures as well as making sure that we have opportunities for them.

Ms Gray: The lowest minimum wage in the country; our high youth unemployment isn't because of that.

Albertans want a stable economy and they want wages that keep up with the high cost of living, but this Premier has instead focused on her conspiracies like chemtrails instead of working on the basics that make a difference for families. Instead of hanging out with the wealthiest people in skyboxes, the Premier needs to spend a day with working families struggling to pay the bills. So will Albertans see an increase to the minimum wage under this Premier, or will they have to wait for a new government in 2027?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you what we won't do. We won't do what the NDP did, which was have a massive increase in the minimum wage when they first came in, which resulted in a massive decrease in the number of jobs that were given to youth. The people most impacted by that huge increase were those in rural Alberta and those aged 16 to 24, missing out on that opportunity to get a foothold into the market. We're monitoring our youth unemployment rate, and we're using that as a bit of a gauge about whether or not the minimum wage can go up. As soon as we have some comfort that those young folks are being able to get a job, we can have a discussion about that.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for her second set of questions.

Education Funding

Ms Gray: This Premier is monitoring Albertans falling further and further behind, and doing nothing. Just like in our school system: Alberta ranks last for per capita education spending in the entire country. For such a wealthy province this Premier and her government have never made education a priority. What this means, Mr. Speaker, is that students don't get the classroom supports that they need. Why? Why does this UCP government choose to spend the least in Canada for each precious Alberta student?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2018-19 the NDP education budget was \$8.3 billion; in '24-25 the education budget was \$9.3 billion. We know we have to invest in K to 12 education, and we are. The other thing that we're looking at is how we would be able to support our schools with targeted support. So we did give them additional dollars in order to be able to hire 3,000 more teachers and EAs, education assistants, over the next three years. We've committed \$1.5 billion to support the specialized learning needs of students. And as we find out more pressure points, we'll do more.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, talking about total spend is disingenuous when we are talking about the per capita funding for students. Given that the UCP government changed the funding formula, which has led to this problem – Albertans do not want their kids to fall behind, but instead of focusing on the basics, this government chases chemtrail conspiracies. Albertans know their kids' classes are too big. When can parents expect to see this government actually fund education by at least the Canadian average? That would be a great start.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things we heard loud and clear from school boards is that they needed to have additional spaces so that students would be able to have smaller class sizes, and that's the main priority that we're working on right now. We announced an \$8.2 billion capital spend. We're going to be building 30 new schools a year for the next three years, increasing the number of spaces, when you include modulars, by 50,000. By 2030 we'll have 200,000 new student spaces, which will allow for each of our school boards to be able to grow with the growth in student enrolment. We're going to be able to keep up with that.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows school boards can't afford the teachers. They also can't seem to afford to hire EAs and pay them the salaries they deserve. That means that students who

are struggling in classes are not getting the supports they need. A student who's in ESL doesn't get the support that they need. A kid falling behind in math doesn't get the support that they need. And when this government chases conspiracies and chemtrails, our students are not getting the supports that they need. Our future economy depends on a well-educated workforce. Why has this government taken Alberta and put us in last place when it comes to funding?

The Speaker: The Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we gave \$1.2 billion to school authorities to hire more than 3,000 teachers, EAs, and other educational support staff. We trust the judgment of our school boards to be able to decide which educational professionals make the most sense in their environment. On top of this, over the summer we also injected an additional \$125 million into the system, where school authorities can use that to hire up to a thousand teachers. We also know that we have a serious mental health crisis in our school system. As a result, we're funding \$50 million through the mental health in schools pilot program. We've invested \$70 million in CASA Mental Health classrooms so we can give that support, too.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has a question to ask.

Transgender Youth Policy

Ms Pancholi: In 2014 the Premier stood right here in this Legislature holding back tears as she shared the stories of kids facing rejection and abuse because of policies forcing parental notification, policies that outed kids, denied them their privacy, their dignity, and in some cases their lives. Back then she said, quote, this really is a case of life or death for some of them. Some try to kill themselves. Sometimes they succeed and die. Unquote. Can the Premier tell us why now her political future is worth more to her than the lives of trans kids?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parental notification and consent as it relates to changing a student's preferred name or pronoun is an important element that our government is moving forward with. It's important because we want to make sure that parents are involved in these difficult conversations. We know that you get the best possible results for students and for children when you're able to bring parents, educators, and other professionals that are able to work together into the conversation. Of course, additional counselling and other supports are available to students should they need them in our education system.

2:00

Ms Pancholi: Now we know that those kids are not even worth a response from the Premier.

Everyone wants kids to be safe, to have parents actively involved in their lives, and for schools to be places where they can grow with confidence. If James goes by Jamie or Alexandra prefers Alex, their lives shouldn't be upended, but under the UCP's antitrans policies that's exactly what will happen: teachers forced by law to notify parents, parents forced into bureaucratic red tape, children left feeling vulnerable, shamed, and scared. Why is this Premier so determined to undermine children's safety and well-being? Were those 4,200 votes worth it?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, to suggest that the Premier doesn't care about children or care about Albertans is beneath the member opposite. I would call upon the member opposite to retract and apologize for those comments. The Premier and the entire United Conservative government cares deeply about all Albertans and all children. That's precisely why we brought such legislation forward, to make sure that parents are involved in these difficult and challenging moments in a child's upbringing and educational journey. As I mentioned before, we know that when parents, professionals, and educators are working together, we get the best results for . . .

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

Ms Pancholi: Well, if the Premier would like to explain why she's changed her mind about the value of trans kids, she's welcome to say something.

Affordability, health care, jobs, public safety: these are the issues Albertans need addressed. But instead, the Premier is laser focused on stoking fear by denying trans kids health care, overriding parental consent, and undermining health care professionals with harmful, ideological legislation. She's putting kids at risk, violating their rights and their parents' rights, all to pander to a fringe base. When will the Premier stop acting like the Premier of the UCP and start acting like the Premier for all Albertans?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that the member opposite actually agrees with our position because in debate the member opposite said, "the reality is that in terms of brain development young people: actually, their brains aren't fully developed until up to [the] age [of] 25."

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Nicolaides: That's precisely what the Premier has mentioned as well, and it is precisely why legislation like this has been brought forward so that we can ensure that young individuals are not making decisions that might adversely affect them and have long-term consequences. Adult decisions of this manner need to be made by individuals who have the opportunity to consider all of the consequences, just as the member opposite agrees with.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:02.

Personal Income Tax Rates

Mr. Ellingson: Mr. Speaker, this government misled Albertans by promising a break on their income taxes of up to 20 per cent. Not only are they failing to deliver their first campaign promise; they are now hiking everyone's taxes through deindexation, just like they did under Jason Kenney. Make no mistake. Bill 32 will increase taxes. Why is this minister increasing Albertans' taxes after they promised that they would lower them? Did they make that promise just to win votes?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, there's a couple of things there. We are completely committed to the tax cut that we promised Albertans. I've been clear to Albertans that they will hear more about that in Budget 2025. We promised an 8 per cent bracket with \$60,000 and under. We will honour that commitment and keep that to Albertans. I want to make clear that we are not deindexing. This is about standardization of rates across government. Every year a choice will be made by Treasury Board that's about a default setting that's put in place, either 2 per cent or Alberta CPI. But a decision can be made after.

Mr. Ellingson: Premier Kenney described this tax hike as bracket creep and an enormous, insidious tax grab. His party dumped him when he hiked Albertans' taxes through deindexation, so I will ask this government the question that Jason Kenney refused to answer when he was asked: how can the minister justify a tax system which taxes people without their knowledge with this insidious tax grab?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we've been clear. It's 2 per cent. That decision has been made for 2025. It's about a \$200 million cost to our programming, and the way the process will work, there will be a default setting to ensure that programs are indexed to the same rate within government. One of the challenges that the Premier saw in her first year and a half in office was that we had different rates and different dates being used across government. How fair is that to someone in one program that it's being increased at a different rate than another?

Mr. Ellingson: So if 2 per cent is less than inflation, to be clear, less than inflation was what Albertans got.

The last time the UCP played around with deindexation, it cost Albertan families \$650 million. They pretended to reverse it when there was an election, and now we see them bring it back. This government should read its own legislation. Their own law requires a referendum before income taxes can be raised. It was the first bill of this session, the number one priority of this government. If the minister wants to raise taxes on Albertans by deindexing, when will they call the referendum?

Mr. Horner: To be clear, Mr. Speaker, once again, this isn't deindexation. We set the inflation rate for Alberta. The most current data we had was 1.9; we chose 2 per cent. That is the same thing that we can do in any given year, and we'll standardize that across all government programs.

Royal Alberta Museum Former Site

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton-Glenora is home to some amazing attractions: the Telus World of Science, the Roxy Theatre, Government House, and the former Royal Alberta Museum. However, the UCP has announced that they will be demolishing the former museum. Tens of thousands of people have expressed their disappointment through letters, phone calls, signing petitions, including several who are here in the gallery today. Will the minister commit that the former Royal Alberta Museum will not be demolished before community members, Indigenous leaders, and interested historians and architects can have an opportunity to meet with him and express their concerns and hopes for the building's future?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, the former Royal Alberta Museum housed important artifacts and educated Albertans for almost 50 years. It holds sentimental value for many. As a young person growing up in the Edmonton area, I visited the building myself as a student. Unfortunately, time caught up to the structure, and in 2015 it closed its doors to the public. Three years later the new Royal Alberta Museum opened in Edmonton's downtown core. Now, we're always willing to hear from the public, but for the last nine years the old RAM has remained empty. Unfortunately, due to the building's poor and deteriorating state, it is not suitable for public use.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the museum was built as a Confederation memorial centennial project in partnership

with the federal government and given that it only opened in 1967 – some believe that things in their 50s are old, but I disagree.

An Hon. Member: Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: You're welcome.

Given that the exterior walls of the building have many artifacts, fossils, and unique art embedded in them, has the minister or anyone in the provincial government reached out to the federal government to see if they'd be willing to help finance the preservation of the original RAM? And will the minister please meet with these advocates?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, the federal government is putting caps on us and imposing all sorts of restrictions. It's difficult to get anything out of them. Unfortunately, the old RAM's best days are behind it, but I am glad to see the new RAM open and thriving. Estimates indicate that it'll take as much as \$200 million just to bring the old RAM up to code, and that's not including tenant improvements. Since 2015 efforts to repurpose the structure have failed and abatement has begun. A recent public survey indicated a variety of opinions, but ultimately we agree with the NDP's 2016 . . .

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

Ms Hoffman: Given that many folks are concerned that this historic building is being demolished just to pave the way for developers to come in and make millions and given that the minister just referenced a survey and in that survey 95 per cent of the people who responded said that they want the building saved and given that the last major historic building overhaul resulted in the sky palace, where Jason Kenney and members of his liquor cabinet sipped whisky, will the minister please assure this House that the land where Government House, the Carriage House, and the former museum reside will not be sold to corporate developers and that no elected member of the UCP will have a private interest in the matter?

2:10

Mr. Guthrie: Just to be clear, Government House and Carriage House are the only buildings on-site with historic designations. Now, that said, you know, we do understand the attachment that the community has to this property, and that's why we are preserving every item of importance from inside the building. We're making plans to save the production of the First Nations petroglyph wall, Writing-on-Stone, that came from the provincial park that's located on that south wall. Now, although no final decisions have been made, it would seem fitting to have this major item become the centrepiece of a future park, letting the museum's legacy continue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Water Act Licences

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently Alberta's government announced an important step forward by reducing wait times on water licences. Water is one of our most precious resources, and as chair of the water advisory committee I know many Albertans for years have expressed frustration with the long delays in getting these water licences. To the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: can you please inform this House how successful we were at reducing wait times for licences under the Water Act?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank the member for his question but also for the great work that he's doing chairing our water advisory committee. I am very proud to say that we've reduced wait times for Water Act licences by 57 per cent; 25 per cent of that has been in the last year alone. This, of course, helps businesses, landowners, and communities manage and grow our economy. On average this means approvals are now being delivered 253 days sooner. Our government knows that wait times can delay projects, reduce economic growth, and limit water users' ability to adapt to changing conditions. That's why this is a priority for our government.

Mr. Wright: This is great news for Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for this great step forward. Given that water rights are an ongoing topic of conversation in my constituency and given how important it is for landowners, communities, and businesses in my constituency to acquire the water licences they need to ensure that they can meet their agriculture and economic prosperity needs, can the same minister please tell this House if her department is establishing mandatory service targets to provide timely reviews, ensuring that we build upon the reduced wait times?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that this is a concern that comes up often all across southern Alberta but right across our province. This is a great question. We're not just reducing licence wait times; for the first time our department is establishing mandatory service targets to speed up reviews and stop unnecessary delays. It also provides certainty and predictability for those applying under this act. That means that Water Act decisions must now be made within specific time frames. We're not stopping there. We know that there is more work to be done, especially on some of those higher risk or more complex cases.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that we are now seeing reduced wait times for crucial water licensing by 57 per cent, with mandatory service targets to help speed up the process even more and further given that farmers, ranchers, industry, and municipalities in my constituency have looked for more efficiency in the application process, can the same minister please tell the great people of Alberta if we are streamlining processes even further?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is yes. We are very proud of our record, but we know that there is more work to do to reduce bureaucratic delays. This doesn't mean saying yes to every single request that comes to our department, but it does mean maintaining our high environmental standards and providing certainty, whether that be for municipalities or industries, and to meet the demands of our growing province. My department is looking to streamline even more regulatory decisions under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, and we're going to continue to look at other ways to speed up all of our regulatory processes in Environment and Protected Areas.

Grizzly Bear Management

Dr. Elmeligi: Mr. Speaker, this summer the Minister of Forestry and Parks launched the Wildlife Management Responder Network, which basically creates a grizzly bear hunt. The minister claims that it's not a hunt, but bear biologists, myself included, and countless Albertans were outraged. Grizzly bears are a threatened species, and current research shows that hunting them does not solve conflict. Fish and wildlife staff don't even have the capacity to investigate grizzly bear conflict that would trigger the minister's new program. How will the minister's program work if fish and wildlife can't even instigate it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. Of course, our number one concern on this side of the House and with the UCP government is the safety of Albertans and the protection of their property as they go forward. We know that many municipalities and many people living in rural Alberta have been concerned about the effects of grizzly bears on their lives. We've had two people mauled just this year in Alberta. We have multiple incidences of negative interactions with grizzlies. We need to do something to help protect Albertans, to protect their properties, and help them as they move forward in their lives. We have people that are scared to send their children to wait for the bus because of grizzly bears in the area.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given, again, that hunting bears does not reduce conflict – the government-approved, expert-written and -reviewed grizzly bear recovery plan contains an array of recommendations that will reduce conflict; none of them involve allowing the public to kill conflict bears – and given that the public is not trained to track or hunt aggressive grizzly bears and given that many landowners don't want a trigger-happy Albertan wandering their land to hunt a grizzly bear, has the minister even considered the safety risk of telling Albertans to hunt dangerous bears because the UCP has failed to adequately fund fish and wildlife staff?

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, the program that we've instituted here on this side of the House is a multifaceted approach. We believe in creating habitat for grizzly bears. We believe in educating the public on how to avoid negative interactions with grizzly bears. Those are the first two facets, and the final facet is a wildlife responder program which allows Albertans to be involved in the management of wildlife, which we use for all wildlife in Alberta. Again, this is not a grizzly bear hunt. These people that would be called: we'll be very specific what, where, and how they hunt.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that the people who apply to this program only need a hunting licence and to be over the age of 18, I don't think that they're as qualified as the fish and wildlife staff to actually track and dispose of a grizzly bear humanely and properly.

The minister keeps asserting that the grizzly bear population has recovered, yet there's no definition or target for recovery in the recovery plan. The government's own reports on the grizzly bear population are in some cases over a decade old, with no updated monitoring of the grizzly bear population since 2016. Given that citing reports and conflict incidents are not population estimates, can the minister stop scaring Albertans into thinking there's an abundance . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, I think the evidence is very clear that the grizzly bear populations have grown and have expanded into areas where we haven't seen them before. We have people all across the province that are contacting us. I myself live in a grizzly bear area that never used to be a grizzly bear area. The only fearmongering that's going on is from the members opposite. Their idea of taking care of the grizzly bear problem is to fence them out. Well, that's not the solution that we have. We would have to fence off the entire eastern slopes in order to keep grizzly bears out of the places where people live, and that's not the approach we have. We want to come up with a balanced approach.

Homeless Supports and Services

Member Irwin: Winter is coming, as it does every year. I've urged this minister many times to make a plan to support unhoused Albertans and take this crisis across our province seriously. We've got a record number of unhoused folks, a record number of deaths on our streets, a record number of amputations from frostbite. The data could not be more clear. It's a crisis, yet this government chooses to allow this crisis to continue. Minister, denying the data and making up numbers won't fix the problem. Investing in housing and wraparound supports will. So will he act now, before it's too late?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the only person making up numbers is that member and people around that member.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: That member recently just went out, Mr. Speaker, and claimed totally irresponsible numbers when it came to how many people were living on the streets. Then when we looked into the numbers, she was identifying 2,700 people that were housed in government programs. It's quite disappointing. This government has invested \$212 million directly in helping with emergency supports of homelessness, the most shelter spaces in the history of the province. We're supported by every major organization working with the homeless, and they just want to make them sleep outside.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted by the Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the Government House Leader at 2:18.

Member Irwin: Unbelievable.

Given that it's not clear the minister is interested in hearing from me or from any of the experts, what about Dr. Eddy Lang, an emergency room physician in Calgary who says that the looming winter is worrisome and that a long-term solution to ensure Calgarians have access to stable housing – that's a solution, housing. Shelters aren't stable housing. They're a Band-Aid, a short-term solution. It's only November, and shelters across Alberta are experiencing alarming numbers. Data just released by this minister shows that shelters outside Edmonton and Calgary are already over 95 per cent capacity. Ninety-five per cent. Minister, where's the plan?

2:20

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we do not have one shelter in this province that is overcapacity. We did not have one shelter that was overcapacity last year, and we will not again this year because we've made the investment the NDP would not make. Unfortunately, again, that member wants to continue to stand in this Chamber and claim that putting people in tents keeps them safe

from frostbite. It is shocking that this is the NDP's approach to caring for the homeless. This is absolutely outrageous, and the average Albertan knows the best plan is to give homeless people a safe place to receive services, not outside in freezing conditions, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

Member Irwin: Given that the UCP refuses to provide data from Edmonton's navigation centre on how many Albertans have been permanently housed and that this minister has claimed that 4,000 people have been connected to housing supports but these are referrals to a worker and to a wait-list, not a home, and given that if you talk to anyone working on the front lines, as I often do very regularly – I don't think this minister ever has – you will hear stories of yearlong wait-lists, a lack of permanent supportive housing, and a devastating shortage of rental supplements, to the minister, please, just once: how many Albertans have been permanently housed through the navigation centre? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'll put my resumé for caring for the homeless up against that member any day. I have spent my entire career caring for the homeless. My family started the first homeless shelters in this province. I can tell you what we know: forcing people to live on the streets and not providing them care is absolutely outrageous. That's why this government continues investing in caring for people, and we will never be lectured by the NDP, who continue to try to push forward plans for palliative care for drug addicts and street people. Shame on that member, and thank you to all those who care for the homeless in our province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

AIOC Mandate Expansion

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, or the AIOC, is a game changer. It has played a significant role in supporting Indigenous nations, allowing them to have a seat at the table with investments but also making them, as our Premier says, true partners in prosperity. Last week the Minister of Indigenous Relations announced an expansion of the AIOC's mandate to include tourism. Can the same minister explain why adding tourism to the AIOC will help meet the high demand for authentic Indigenous experiences and how this will benefit Indigenous communities and help boost the economy?

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

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that important question. Indigenous tourism is gaining serious traction in Alberta, and we expanded the AIOC's mandate for that exact reason. According to a study by WestJet 2 in 3 people visiting Alberta want an Indigenous experience, and what better way to ensure they get those experiences than to have Indigenous ownership in major tourism projects backed by loan guarantees from Alberta's government? This expansion will create jobs and drive new revenue streams right back to those communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for this fantastic news. Given that Indigenous tourism in Alberta is poised for tremendous growth and given that it was this UCP government that started the AIOC and given that when the NDP were in power, they completely forgot to help Indigenous people in any meaningful

way economically, choosing instead to lean on the typical socialist game plan – overpromise, underdeliver; lather, rinse, repeat – to the Minister of Tourism and Sport: how will this expansion support Indigenous entrepreneurs and nations in Alberta? What impact could this have on our province’s tourism sector?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Tourism and Sport.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. member for the question. The people of Lesser Slave Lake are very well represented by him. Tourism in this province means jobs, and last year we saw \$12.7 billion spent by visitors right here in Alberta. The expansion of the AIOC allows us to help Indigenous operators create amazing products that visitors from around Canada and around the world want to come and see. We’re going to reach our goal of \$25 billion of visitor spend by 2035, and we’re going to do it in partnership with our Indigenous communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is indeed an exciting opportunity for our tourism sector.

Given that expanding the AIOC mandate to include tourism represents another meaningful step towards economic reconciliation and given Alberta’s commitment to establishing equal partnerships with Indigenous communities and continuing to find new ways we can work together on positive changes that are real and impactful, to the Minister of Indigenous Relations: how will the AIOC’S expanded mandate contribute to reconciliation, ensuring Indigenous communities participate as owners, partners, and leaders in Alberta’s thriving tourism industry?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to that member. Alberta’s government is strongly committed to economic reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Indigenous tourism helps support the livelihoods of Indigenous entrepreneurs and provides a platform for sharing of cultures and histories. There’s a high global demand for authentic cultural and land-based tourism, and the expanded mandate will help more Indigenous communities and entrepreneurs further capitalize on the increasing demand for authentic Indigenous experiences. Economic reconciliation is about ensuring that Indigenous peoples are included at every level of the economy as owners, workers, and partners, and this expansion of the AIOC is going to ensure that.

Pharmacy Services Funding

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, pharmacists have reached out about this government’s sudden cuts to their service compensation fees, which they state will have a negative impact on their businesses and patient care. Margaret Wing, CEO of the Pharmacists’ Association, says that she’s extremely disappointed because, due to these cuts, patients’ comprehensive annual care plans, which help patients with complex health conditions such as diabetes, mental illness, and cardiovascular disease, will not get the follow-up care that they deserve. What is the minister’s plan to make sure that Albertans will get the care they need after they cut the health supports pharmacists provide?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health has the call.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. In fact, we are not cutting the pharmacy budget. We are in fact working within what has been allocated. We have an

overall envelope of \$670 million. We were due to surpass that. There were consultations done with the Pharmacists’ Association, with RxA, who represents pharmacy, and through those consultations we looked at a number of opportunities to make sure that we stay within that \$670 million budget. That’s exactly what we’re doing.

Member Loyola: Given that the province is on track to surpass its \$670 million pharmacy service budget by \$30 million this year and given that patients with complex needs, including seniors in continuing care facilities, routinely need to alter medications as their conditions change and express concerns to their pharmacists and given that there hasn’t been any fee increase for more than a decade according to Nadia Kamran, a pharmacist who owns and operates Grand View Pharmacy here in Edmonton, when will this government actually sit down and negotiate with pharmacists on their important services instead of attacking these small-business owners when they can least afford these cuts?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We are in constant conversation and negotiation with the RxA, which represents the pharmacists. In fact, we’ll be starting next year’s negotiations here in November because the contract ends in March of 2025. We also saw that the overall funding envelope of \$670 million was going to be surpassed. We, in fact, provide the highest compensation for that complex assessment, and that’s gone from \$100 to \$70. It doesn’t mean that that assessment can’t happen.

Member Loyola: Given that these cuts are particularly demoralizing, especially with the shortage of family doctors in the province, causing more Albertans to rely on pharmacists for medical care, and given that pharmacists have taken on an extra workload due to an increased population and fewer other health care providers and given that the pharmacists have told me that they are paying out of pocket for syringes, bandages, and alcohol swabs each time they administer even a flu shot, to the minister: where is the respect pharmacists deserve? Why won’t this government sit down with pharmacists and show them the respect and negotiate directly with them?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we show pharmacists respect each and every day. The fact that we have the highest scope for pharmacists in the whole country shows that we respect the work that they do each and every day. We can’t afford to be more generous than any other province in the country. We were supplying 12 follow-up sessions, where every other province applies a maximum of four. We have to be responsible, as do the pharmacists, and we will work with them each and every day.

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

Economic Development and Job Creation

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A record 204,000 people moved to Alberta last year, and we anticipate more to join this year. We are seeing companies growing their workforces in Alberta, but unfortunately this growth is not keeping up with our expanding province, the overall slow Canadian economy, and a high unemployment rate across the country. Given that Alberta’s unemployment rate sits at 7.5 per cent and some Albertans are struggling to find gainful employment, including some of my constituents in Calgary-East, can the minister please share what our

government is doing to create jobs to address this increase of labour . . .

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure has risen.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, record population growth has impacted unemployment as new Albertans settle into the job market. Alberta is leading the country in economic growth, job creation, productivity, and weekly earnings. This is driven by low taxes, a strong investment climate, and vast entrepreneurial opportunities. Furthermore, our government continues to invest record amounts into education, postsecondary, as well as employment and training programs, to ensure workers can fully participate and succeed. Our government is dedicated to fostering a business-friendly environment to sustain Alberta's robust job market.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given the continued, persistent issues with the Canadian labour market and given that Edmonton has a high unemployment rate, compared to major Canadian metropolitan cities, at 9 per cent while Calgary dropped to 7.4 per cent, to the same minister: what are we doing to ensure Edmonton and Calgary continue to improve in terms of economic development and job growth?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, business incorporations are the highest in Alberta's history, up 9.9 per cent in the first nine months of this year. This growth was driven mainly by construction, retail, and tourism. To encourage growth, we provide a range of supports to help businesses grow and succeed; this includes advice, coaching, financing, training, and opening up funding pathways. One specific program, the film and television tax credit, successfully attracted many productions, with significant activity in and around Calgary and Edmonton. We continue to work with industry partners to support economic growth.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's economy is still growing and given that while we are seeing more jobs created in the past month, Alberta is still experiencing a relatively high unemployment rate and given that it is taking more time for some workers to find a job or find suitable roles that match their unique skills, to the minister: what are the government programs available to Albertans that address the current and longer term labour market challenges?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, our government provides a multitude of supports to help Albertans transition to stable, good-paying jobs. Some government-backed programs to assist businesses include the northern economic development grant, workforce partnership grants, small community opportunity grant, Alberta export expansion program, and the investment and growth fund. For workers there are training and skills development programs available in over 60 communities across Alberta. With our continued leadership in job creation and reduced barriers to employment, we are confident in the workforce of tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Family Physician Compensation

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, by 2025 the number of Albertans without primary care doctors is expected to be near 1 million. To make matters worse, for the 2024-2025 fiscal year alone the

physician services budget was underfunded by this UCP government by approximately \$730 million and has not kept pace with population growth and inflation. We need a healthy population to ensure economic growth, so why is this government failing to find Albertans the family doctors they need?

Member LaGrange: Again, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are misinformed. We continue to work with the Alberta Medical Association to make sure that we have a strong, sustainable primary care physician compensation model that will meet the needs of Albertans yet also make sure that we have the ability to scale up and add more physicians as needed. We've worked very closely with the College of Physicians & Surgeons as well as the AMA and AHS to remove barriers so that we could have more physicians coming to Alberta, and that is working.

Member Hoyle: The same college of physicians said that 6 out of 10 physicians have said that they're considering closing their practice and given that the critical step to attracting family doctors to Alberta revolves around stabilizing clinics and given that the Premier and minister committed in March to finalize a physician's primary care compensation model and it is now October, can the minister provide a clear date for when family doctors in Alberta can expect this compensation model to be implemented and alleviate pressures in primary care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll remind the members opposite that in October of 2022 we signed an agreement with the Alberta Medical Association that provided an increase for all physicians, including family physicians; they got 5 per cent over four years as well. When I came into office I was made aware of the fact that we are in fact facing an issue with family physician compensation. We worked very closely. We signed an MOU with Dr. Paul Parks at the time, who was the president. In October of 2023 we added \$200 million in stabilization funding over two years.

Member Hoyle: That is nowhere near enough.

Given that family doctors have solutions for timely, effective, and evidence-based health care but are being ignored by this UCP government and given that the Alberta health care crisis will only be made worse because this UCP government isn't collaborating with physicians on changes and given that primary care clinics are not only struggling to keep their doors open while meeting the demands of hundreds of thousands of families looking for doctors, what is this government doing to ensure that every Albertan has access to a family doctor?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we're doing so many things. In fact, I announced today that we are in fact having a rural team recruitment grant of \$6 million. We also have a municipality-supported clinics grant; it's another \$6 million. We've got a rural health strategy. We've got a nurse practitioner program. I'm going to be happy to share some really great news that's happening there. We've got the new funding model. We've got \$200 million of stabilization while that new funding model for family practitioners is coming forward. In fact, I just received a letter from the mayor of Ponoka who said that they have seen a great increase in the number of family physicians in their . . .

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

Women's Income Equality

Ms Hayter: The Alberta Union of Provincial Employees represents non-academic employees in postsecondary as well as various health care fields and government services. These public workers are essential workers and predominantly are women. Currently the average living wage in Alberta is \$21.80. Eighteen per cent of essential workers make less than a living wage. Eighty per cent of general support workers make less than \$20. To the minister of labour: when will struggling Albertans get paid a living wage?

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, our government understands the pressures many Albertans are facing, especially with recent cost escalation and elevated interest rates. We're also mindful that changes to minimum wage could impact small businesses, youth, part-time workers, and those entering the workforce. This is an important issue and our government is committed to a thoughtful review of all relevant factors to ensure that any adjustments are appropriate and sustainable. It's a complex matter and we're taking the time to carefully evaluate a balanced approach.

Ms Hayter: Given that many essential public workers are women and many are racialized women and given that these women are working caring jobs – social services, auxiliary nursing care, general support services and hospitals, and supporting our long-term and continuing care centres – and given that we are the only province in Canada that does not have pay equity legislation, to the minister of status of women: when will this government start valuing the work of Albertan women and ensure that they can start making equal pay for equal value?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province places an incredible value in Alberta's women, whether it's investing in numerous scholarships to support Alberta's women or investing in incredible programs like Women Building Futures, elevate aviation, and so much more. We believe in helping women prosper and develop their skills and abilities, as when women in Alberta prosper, the whole province prospers.

Ms Hayter: Given that I'm speaking specifically to women working in the care economy that are not being paid a living wage, showing that their work is not valued, and given that 75 per cent of front-line workers are women trying to pay their rent and their bills while also putting food on their tables during an affordability crisis and given that the AUPE pay equity committee was here yesterday and willing to meet with anybody in the government, but once again were ignored, when will any of the ministers sit down and meet with the AUPE pay equity committee to advance pay equality for Albertans working here?

2:40

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, bargaining is ongoing. I know the members opposite know that, and we're certainly not going to complicate that situation in the House out of respect to all of the people involved and the process. We respect our front-line workers very much, and we desperately do want to see a fair deal for all Alberta's public servants, and I'm sure that's where we will land. The process has to play out.

Waste-to-energy Conversion and Energy Efficiency Projects

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is proud to be a trailblazer in innovative industrial and manufacturing techniques which reduce emissions, manage waste, and enhance efficiency. The recent announcement of a \$10 million investment from the industry-funded TIER program to launch a strategic energy management program for industry will only reinforce our strong standing in the area. Can the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas provide more details on how this program will support Alberta's industries in managing energy costs while reducing their environmental impact?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With \$10 million being invested from the industry-funded TIER program, this will help make our industries more competitive, more efficient, and reduce their energy costs. The program will cover the cost of energy assessments and capital retrofits while effectively saving Alberta-based industrial manufacturing facilities money on their energy bills. Companies reduce costs all while helping them to continue to invest in innovation here in the province of Alberta.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that industrial and manufacturing companies in Alberta are continuously working to meet rising global demand while tackling challenges related to emissions and waste management and further given that the new tire-derived fuel pilot program will promote conversion of waste into energy by incinerating scrap tires instead of letting them accumulate in landfills, can the same minister outline how this pilot program led by Alberta Recycling Management Authority will contribute to Alberta's goals of reducing landfill waste and emissions while supporting industrial innovation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for this question. This pilot is not new, but it is certainly new to Alberta. It will help test the effectiveness of turning old, worn-out tires into energy to power industrial facilities. This pilot could help turn up to 1.5 million used tires into up to 15,750 tonnes of chips that will become tire-derived fuel in the coming months. Results from that pilot will be used to help determine whether tire-derived fuel should be permanently added to the province's existing tire recycling program.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta's government has made substantial investments in emissions reduction through the industry-funded TIER program and given this \$2.8 million in support for waste energy and carbon capture facility being developed by Varme Energy in the Industrial Heartland and further given that this facility will divert more than 200,000 tonnes of municipal solid waste from our landfills annually and eliminate more than 1 million tonnes of CO₂ over its lifespan, can the minister provide more insights on how these projects will support job creation, save landfill space, and reduce carbon emissions in constituencies like mine?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The example provided by this member is just one example of this type of technology that's being looked at in areas all across the province. There are a number of municipalities across the province looking at partnerships with industry to transform waste to energy. Of course, that's a solution for waste. It also helps reduce emissions. We're not funding this through taxpayer dollars, but we do have a business-friendly environment, low taxes, and the skilled workforce that drives these types of investments in addition to our TIER program.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we'll continue with the remainder of the daily Routine.

Order. Order. Order.

Presenting Petitions

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition from Skipping Stone and the TransAction Coalition, which reads as follows:

To the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in Legislature assembled:
We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to

- (a) acknowledge that trans and gender diverse youth themselves, as well as their parents & caregivers, and healthcare professionals are the ones in the best position to determine the best course of action for their care to maximize physical and mental wellbeing,
- (b) acknowledge that healthcare decisions require a precise and individualized approach for each patient as determined by the patient, their family, and their healthcare provider, free from political interference,
- (c) not pass any Bill, if introduced, that would restrict, ban or otherwise increase barriers to accessing gender-affirming care.

This petition, Mr. Speaker, has 12,465 signatories from all over Alberta, and I'm so grateful for all of them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and the keeper of the Great Seal of Alberta.

Bill 31

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2024

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise here this afternoon and move first reading of Bill 31, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2024.

This bill will make updates to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, the Public's Right to Know Act, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act, and the Alberta Evidence Act. Amendments to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act would increase the number of electoral divisions in this province from 87 to 89 if passed. Given our growing population, Alberta's electoral boundaries must be redrawn. Increasing the number of electoral divisions would provide the next Electoral Boundaries Commission with the flexibility when developing their recommendations for new boundaries in this great province. The proposed amendments would also update and clarify the list of factors that the Electoral

Boundaries Commission can consider when they make their recommendations.

Amendments to the Public's Right to Know Act would allow the Minister of Justice to require government departments, municipalities, and police services to provide consistent and predictable and up-to-date data to enable greater information sharing and more informed conversations between government, municipalities, and police services regarding crime and policing. Amendments would also incorporate certain prescribed health care facilities currently identified in the critical infrastructure defence regulation into the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act. This would ensure the definition of critical infrastructure is contained in one place, the act, rather than being divided between the act and the regulation.

Amendments to the Alberta Evidence Act would give Albertans simpler and more modern processes for confirming the truths of the information they provide to the courts.

Mr. Speaker, I now move first reading of Bill 31.

The Speaker: I'm not sure that the minister left anything for debate at second reading of the bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to submit the five requisite copies of an article that highlights the B.C. NDP's proposed correction and incarceration model of drug addiction and mental health treatment through their involuntary care.

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

Ms Pancholi: Sorry; nothing today, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Then the hon. Government House Leader, followed by Edmonton-Glenora.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of the report of special rapporteur of the UN on violence against women and girls and its causes in sport. It outlines the need for biological female-only divisions.

2:50

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I'm rising to table a petition that has been gathering tens of thousands of signatures. June Acorn was here earlier today; she started the initial one. There's a second one here, and I encourage all members to look at it. It's about the former Royal Alberta Museum site.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there appear to be a number of tablings today. I just wanted to provide some clarity. People who are on the list are called first, and then we go to those that will be recognized.

Ms Chapman: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a policy brief, a nice, short one for busy folks. Just a one pager on the harms of opt-out when it comes to sexual health curriculum.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has a tabling.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of each of the statements from the Alberta Medical Association's section of pediatrics on gender-affirming treatments

and as well a statement from the Alberta Psychiatric Association. Both of these statements are condemning the UCP's proposed antitrans legislation.

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

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five requisite copies of e-mails from my constituents that relate to the antitrans bills, in support of not passing them.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five requisite copies of yet another e-mail sent to the Premier and us denouncing the antitrans legislation, this one quoting the British Medical Association, that "the BMA believes transgender and gender-diverse patients should continue to receive specialist healthcare regardless of their age."

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table five copies of an e-mail from a constituent of mine called Taryn. She is urging the Legislature to protect trans health care rights. Five copies of that.

Ms Hayter: I rise to table five copies of a letter from the federal Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Marci Ien, to the Premier urgently requesting a meeting to discuss the rights of trans and gender-diverse kids that have serious impacts on their mental and physical health here in Alberta. She wants trans and queer kids who woke up feeling unsafe to know that they matter and that you are important just the way you are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the requisite five copies of an e-mail from a constituent in opposition to the antitrans legislation coming through, noting several of the harms here but especially that trans and gender-nonconforming youth are five times more likely to consider suicide and nearly eight times more likely to attempt suicide than their straight cisgender peers.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a letter from social workers in Alberta regarding concerns about the UCP's legislation that takes away health access for transgender and gender-diverse youth. We, certainly, as a social worker myself, want to make sure that Albertans can have vital gender-affirming care.

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two articles from the St. Albert *Gazette*, the first from October 31, written by Craig Gilbert, entitled Bill 20 Could Quadruple Cost of the 2025 Election in St. Albert. The second was written on October 31; Kevin Ma is the writer: Bill of Rights Changes Will Have Little Impact, Says Legal Scholar.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of a Canadian Encyclopedia article which chronicles that the current Alberta Premier was the leader of the Wildrose Party for

919 days, which is two years, six months, and six days, before being elected to the Legislature in the 2012 general election. It makes me wonder if we have a case of the pot calling the kettle black going on.

The Speaker: The hon. the Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just tabling five copies of a letter from my constituent Donna McEwen concerned about this government's antitrans legislative agenda.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:02 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order. Go ahead.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. At the time noted – actually, before I get into this, I have two points of order. I'll withdraw the second one.

The Speaker: Agreed.

Mr. Schow: At the time noted by you, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was speaking and I believe it was her first supplemental, in the end of the question, she said: "Why is this Premier so determined to undermine children's safety?" Those are, of course, unofficial records but ones that I took rigorous notes on. This point of order being under 23(h), (i), and (j), which would be "(h) makes allegations against another Member; (i) imputes false or unavowed motives [against] another Member; (j) uses . . . language [that's abusive and] likely to create disorder."

I don't think this language is becoming of members of this Chamber. I think the Premier is certainly not trying to undermine children's safety. That is not a matter of debate, Mr. Speaker. We can debate the contents of the bill, which we'll be doing today, but this is certainly language that I think is out of order. I'll leave it in your hands.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I completely disagree. This is absolutely a matter of debate, and for this I would refer to you April 11, 2024, *Hansard*, page 1037. Specifically we have debated in this Chamber when things are a matter of debate, when we refer them to a Premier in this case. Actions or inactions of an individual member as Premier are not considered a point of order. On that particular day – I will quote from you, Mr. Speaker – you said that the items that were under the debate at that time were "within the purview of the hon. the Premier, of which a point could be made that this is a question about government policy. I don't consider it a point of order." That was your ruling that day.

I submit to you that whether the legislative agenda this government has put forward is undermining kids' safety and well-being is a matter that is under debate here. The Premier is representing that work, and specifically we know that it is undermining kids' safety and well-being because we have just seen a peer-reviewed journal report that antitransgender laws have a significant and causal impact on suicide risk among transgender and nonbinary young people. In this case the study was across the United States.

This is not an accusation; this is not unfactual. This is part of the debate about this government's antitrans agenda. Again I submit to you that as on April 11, 2024, talking about a Premier's record is

part of the debate that we need to have in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker. I believe this is a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule. Now, I will accept that it's possible that the Blues which I have are not the exact section that the hon. the Government House Leader refers to, because the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said, "Well, if the Premier would like to explain why she's changed her mind about the value of trans kids, she's welcome to say something." She goes on to talk about: "Affordability, health care, jobs, public safety: these are the issues [they care about]." She goes on to say, "The Premier is laser focused on stoking fear by denying trans kids health care, overriding parental consent, and undermining health care professionals with harmful, ideological legislation," and then she continues.

While I have some concerns and, certainly, as I noted on that day, the record of the Premier or the government of course is a matter of debate, the challenge that we come up against is when we use direct attacks to a member, not just on their record but make statements about that individual and particularly when we don't do that through the chair, it often does create disorder. I won't rule that this is a point of order based upon the Blues that I have before me but will provide a general caution with respect to making allegations about a member as we head into what I'm certain will be a contentious period of time before the Assembly. This isn't a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

In light of the second point of order being withdrawn by the hon. the Government House Leader and that I was informed earlier that the Official Opposition Leader and the Official Opposition House Leader, I suppose, has also withdrawn the point of order that was at 2:18, this concludes points of order for today.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 26

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2)

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 26, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2), on behalf of the Minister of Health.

This bill is a piece of legislation that ensures that children and youth retain their ability to make adult decisions as adults and is part of a suite of bills including Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024, and Bill 29, the Fairness and Safety in Sport Act, that aim to strike the right balance for the health, safety, and well-being of all children and youth in our province.

3:00

Let me start by saying, Mr. Speaker, that there's no place for hate or intolerance in our province, and Alberta's government stands with the LGBTQ-plus community and will continue to be an ally of this community. [Disturbance in the gallery]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order.

Ms Smith: Alberta's government has consistently recognized crucial milestones and days of significance for the LGBTQ-plus community. Be it raising the rainbow flag, observing Transgender Day of Visibility or International Day Against Homophobia,

Transphobia and Biphobia, our commitment has been steady and unwavering. The Minister of Arts and Culture, her mandate letter specifically directs her to engage with the LGBTQ-plus community. In August there was a round table held in Calgary with members of the community, and the minister continues to hold regular engagement sessions with members of this community.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we have \$360,000 in funding that has been provided to pride organizations and other LGBTQ-plus serving organizations by Alberta's government just in the last two years. We gave Canadian Mental Health Association support for the Calgary region to the tune of \$23,000; altView Foundation for Gender and Sexual Minorities, \$32,000; the Pride Calgary Planning Committee, \$50,000; the Grande Prairie Pride Society, \$30,000; Edmonton PrideFest Association, \$75,000; the Downstage Performance Society, \$75,000; Calgary Outlink: Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, \$60,000. We continue as well to honour the members of this community with a new category in the Stars of Alberta volunteer awards, starting in 2020 to recognize exceptional Albertans advocating for LGBTQ-plus inclusion.

What this bill, this suite of bills, though, is about, Mr. Speaker, is ensuring that every person in the Chamber who wants the best for children and youth, including their physical safety and health, has the ability to speak to that, and that's why this legislation is so important. It's also very sensitive. We need to be cautious when it comes to young children that are undergoing procedures when we don't fully know all the risks or long-term consequences. That's why this policy is designed the way it is. That's why this legislation is drafted the way it is. It's designed and drafted to help preserve the choices children have before they make serious decisions about their bodies or their ability to have children of their own one day or to undergo potentially permanent procedures where the benefits and risks are not yet fully understood.

Mr. Speaker, more and more people are raising concerns about whether or not children and youth should be beginning treatment or undergoing procedures to change their gender at a young age. We've been paying attention to this research that has been published around the world, and we believe that this is the appropriate method to go forward to make sure that everybody's rights are protected and everybody's choices are protected.

At the same time we're seeing more and more people raise safety concerns related to biological men competing against biological women. The Minister of Tourism and Sport will be sharing more data on this tomorrow when he speaks. Again, through our legislation we're working to keep Albertans safe while encouraging their part in sport. After women have spent so much time fighting for recognition, fighting for equality, it is simply unfair to take that away from them by removing their ability to compete fairly against other biological women and to receive credit and congratulations for being the best in their sport.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker, that I have and will continue to uplift every child who identifies as transgender and who experiences gender dysphoria. That concern and compassion does not end with this legislation. Quite the opposite. That concern and compassion are why I feel so strongly about this legislation.

It's why we're also making changes through the Education Amendment Act and why they're also so important. Through that legislation we are ensuring that everyone – a child, their parents, their teachers, and their peers – is all aligned where there are official name and gender changes. When we talk about ensuring the well-being of children and youth who identify as transgender and who experience gender dysphoria, that includes their mental well-being. I can only imagine the impact on the mental health of a child when they have to go by one name and gender at home and then another name and gender at school. You cannot leave parents out as the only

ones who don't know what's going on with their children, nor can you expect children and youth to switch back and forth between names and genders depending on where they are and who they're with.

That's why this entire suite of legislation is so important. We're unifying policy across different departments, and we're taking into consideration what a reasonable amount of decision-making by minors is. That's no different than in other areas, where we restrict the ability of minors to make decisions so that we can be assured that they are of full capacity to make decisions that will be consequential to them. In short, Mr. Speaker, we are following the science, and we are creating balance.

I want to make reference to a few international reports that have recently come out, and I will table these tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. The Cass report was released in April of 2022. Dr. Hilary Cass was the lead on that. It was commissioned by the National Health Service, NHS, in England in 2022. After four years of extensive review of all of the research they released 32 recommendations, ranging from pre- and postcare to data and research to workforce. Following its release the U.K. government introduced indefinite restrictions on the prescribing and supply of puberty-suppressing hormones, puberty blockers, to children and people under the age of 18.

I'll just quote from the report, Mr. Speaker.

The rationale for early puberty suppression remains unclear, with weak evidence regarding the impact on gender dysphoria, mental or psychosocial health. The effect on cognitive and psychosocial development remains unknown.

It also goes on to say, because there was other research that it quoted:

Based on a single Dutch study, which suggested that puberty blockers may improve psychological wellbeing for a narrowly defined group of children with gender incongruence, the practice spread at pace to other countries... Some practitioners abandoned normal clinical approaches to holistic assessment, which has meant that this group of young people have been exceptionalised compared to the other young people with similarly complex presentations. They deserve very much better.

It also goes on to say:

I have been disappointed by the lack of evidence on the long-term impact of taking hormones from an early age; research has let us all down... However, we cannot expect you to make life-changing decisions in a vacuum without being able to weigh their risks and benefits now and in the long-term, and we have to build the evidence-base with good studies going forward.

Mr. Speaker, good scientific method involves being very, very careful through study, through clinical assessments and developing the base of research and evidence before moving forward with these kinds of life-altering treatments. You don't do the research after the fact. That is what the Cass report ended up determining.

This was also paralleled by an earlier report done by Socialstyrelsen, which is the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare. This was released in December of 2022, and it was commissioned by the Swedish government to update their 2015 national guidelines. I'll quote from that as well, Mr. Speaker.

The National Board of Health and Welfare currently assesses that the risks of puberty blockers and gender-affirming treatment are likely to outweigh the expected benefits of these treatments.

And they recommended a number of revisions that take into account efficacy and safety, benefits and risks of treatments are not proven... uncertainty resulting from the lack of clarity about the causes, that the number of people diagnosed with gender dysphoria has continued to rise... particularly in the 13 to 17 age group and especially among people whose registered sex at birth is female... The documented prevalence among young adults of

medical detransition... experience-based knowledge of participating experts is less uniform than it was in 2015.

But the U.K. and Sweden aren't the only countries who have updated and further restricted their policies. Finland has also placed tight restrictions on puberty blockers and hormone replacement therapies for minors as have Denmark, Germany, and Norway. They require multidisciplinary approval for puberty blockers and hormone replacement treatment for use in minors.

Now, it seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite know, just as we do, that young children are not able to make the full range of decision-making because their brains are not fully developed. It's been remarkable to us to watch in different debates how they are making the exact arguments that we are making today. The MLA for Calgary-Beddington, for instance, when they were talking about expanding a program to age 24, the rationale that she made was:

Our brains aren't finished developing until our mid to late 20s, and the part of the brain that's still cooking in those final years is the prefrontal cortex. That's a really key piece of brain, right? That's the part that's responsible for planning, for prioritizing, for making good decisions. So this is a really critical time in a young person's life, when they need supports.

She went on to say:

Prefrontal cortex, right? It's executive function. It's that ability to self-regulate. Some of the things that come along with that are like: how do you delay gratification? How do you not cave to instant gratification? How do you make decisions? How do you problem-solve? How do you set long-term goals? How do you balance any, like, short-term rewards you might find with whatever long-term future goals that you have?

3:10

The Member for Calgary-Acadia also in the same debate made very similar arguments.

It remains that the young person's brain continues to develop critical areas during this period. For example, the area of the brain responsible for decision-making, impulse control, and the ability to reason is very slowly maturing during this time. Areas responsible for emotional regulation are restructuring so that you can learn to keep your cool when challenged and so that you can exist and contribute to society. The whole concept of risk assessment is ongoing during this period. The combination of emotional and cognitive development presents a critical juncture in a young person's life... We know that brain development continues well into the 20s.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The same Member for Calgary-Acadia, also in a different debate on October 28, was discussing a campaign on not doing drugs, in this Chamber. Here's what she said then.

I saw an advertisement the other day where the take-home message was to not do drugs... your human brain is not fully developed until the age of 25, so why not wait till you're 25 to try this? I love it. It's evidence based. It meets adults where they are. It's respectful to their autonomy and decision-making abilities while providing guardrails to keep them safe. It's brilliant, and it's the right thing to do. Can we not do the same for the children and youth for whom we are responsible?

Madam Speaker, it does seem to me the members opposite are grappling with the very same things that we've been grappling with as we contemplate this legislation. I can tell you that we looked at the international experts, and then we also engaged locally. We spoke with researchers, psychologists. We spoke with psychiatrists, psychotherapists, family physicians, neurogynecologists, clinical endocrinologists, pediatricians, bioethicists, community organizations, parents, social workers, advocates, universities, professional

regulatory bodies, detransitioners, and transgender community members as we charted out a course to take in bringing forward these three pieces of legislation.

I can tell you that one of the endocrinologists we spoke with, Dr. Roy Eappen, is an endocrinologist at St. Mary's hospital in Montreal and assistant professor of medicine at McGill University's Faculty of Medicine. This is what Dr. Eappen had to say.

As a physician, I recognize the importance of careful, well-considered approaches to gender-affirming care for minors. These policies provide essential guardrails to ensure that minors have the time, support and resources needed to make informed decisions as adults and align with the latest systematic reviews in the UK, Finland, Sweden and other leading jurisdictions. The proposed policies will help protect young individuals during a formative period in their lives, ensuring their choices align with their long-term well-being.

Dr. Eappen went on to say that there are also questions about height, questions about bone density and other issues; there are long-term issues about whether or not this is actually affecting brain development, and studies that should have been done for this have not been done.

I should also mention, Madam Speaker, that one of the individuals who spoke with us when we unveiled this legislation was Kellie Lynn Pirie, who is the founder of DeTrans Alliance Canada and a detransitioner. Her story is quite heartbreaking. She was abused as a child and developed severe mental health issues as well as hatred of her body. She thought that transitioning was the right path for her, and she started as an adult, age 37, before detransitioning much later. Her comment was: boy, if I didn't know as an adult that this was the right path for me, how is a young child supposed to know that that's the right path for them?

Here's her quote: under these policies, the child will have a consultation with their family, their physician, and a psychologist or psychiatrist; the government is going to promote a research environment in which the research as it is evolving can be discussed. She also said that "it didn't fix the things I thought it would," which I think is really important, Madam Speaker, as we talk about mental health. "It didn't fix the things I thought it would."

Kellie-Lynn Pirie said: I was given the indication that it would address mental health issues that I experienced, issues with social anxiety issues, with feeling uncomfortable in my body, and I realized that the discomfort that I started to experience after my mastectomy was actually the early indicator that I was entering into what was called regret.

We don't want any young child to make a decision prematurely and ultimately end up regretting it. If a child needs to have mental health support, we want to give them mental health support. We know as well that a supportive family as well as a doctor and good psychologist support are going to be key for those children in figuring it out, and we want to support them in whichever path they end up taking, as long as we make sure that they're making life-changing, body-changing decisions that are irreversible as adults, when they can understand the full consequences of that.

Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate that we as adults and legislators need to depoliticize the debate. I have referenced peer-reviewed research coming out of Europe, and the primary difference between these policy discussions in Europe versus here in North America is that, as Joshua P. Cohen wrote for *Forbes*, it's fact based versus partisan based. In an article dated December 2, 2023, Mr. Cohen wrote:

In Europe political divisions on this topic aren't nearly as conspicuous as they are in the [United States]. Rather, the debate is much more fact-based. An increasing number of countries have conducted [systemic] reviews of evidence to determine the benefits and risks of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones.

And the findings from these reviews – that the certainty of benefits is "very low" – have informed changes in policy regarding treatment of gender incongruence in minors.

Madam Speaker, we owe it to every child and youth who identifies as transgender and who experiences gender dysphoria to have open and honest and rational conversations based on evidence. We want what's best for them and for their families.

That is why I'm pleased to move second reading of the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2).

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm actually going to begin, if I can, by speaking to the trans youth, the parents of trans youth, the trans adults, the Albertans who are watching this debate, who are in the gallery, who are engaged, who are writing letters to their elected officials, who are rallying in cities across this province and those who are afraid to, those who are scared to. I want to speak to all of them and to let them know that we see them. You are loved, you are valued, you are important, and we will continue to stand up for you.

I also want to send a message to parents right now because I think there are some universals in life in Alberta in our communities. Across cultures and religions and races and genders there are many things that unite us as Albertans, and there are a lot of things that unite us as parents. One of those universal values is that we all want our kids to have the freedom to learn, to be themselves, to grow up healthy and supported and safe.

But what we're seeing, Madam Speaker, is that the government is not focused on trying to make sure that all children feel loved and safe. They're actually deliberately and intentionally stoking fears among parents, among all Albertans to put their desire for political power over our children's safety. Deliberately there has been misinformation that has been spread. It has been exploited. It's really, I think, that the lack of familiarity that many Albertans may have with transgender children and youth and adults has been exploited because it's a way to distract. It's a way to distract from the things that government is responsible for doing, and it is also a way to punch down on the most vulnerable people in an effort to gain political power.

This may seem like a small percentage of Albertans, and I believe that's what they're counting on, Madam Speaker. I believe they're counting on the fact that we know that those who identify as transgender and nonbinary are a small percentage of our population, but let's be clear. They are our friends, they are our families, they are our neighbours, they are our co-workers, they are our students, they are our teachers, they are our health care providers: they are everything. They are part of the fabric of our community, and to think that any government would choose to decide to go after a population, an incredibly vulnerable population, for the purpose of political gain is beyond the pale when it comes to what we should expect and should demand from government.

3:20

Let's be clear that this is what this is about, Madam Speaker. Somewhere along the line it feels as if the government chose to do a poll and decide who was the most vulnerable, the smallest group of people, the most likely that they could go after, who maybe seemed a little different, that maybe people didn't have enough information about, and then, "We could exploit that for our advantage and to take over the conversation in this province" for as long as they have now, to scare communities against each other. We've seen this being riled up in cultural communities, and all for what? It's so that the Premier could win 4,200 votes on Saturday.

That's what it was about. It was so she could come out with confidence and say that she's got the backing of her base, of her supporters.

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

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

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Williams: Madam Speaker, I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). The truth is that it's of no value to question the intention of the Premier and the government in these matters. The truth is that we can have a substantive debate without needing to devolve to accusations questioning the intentions, which I believe are beyond reproach, of every member in this Chamber. We can of course have a civil debate about the content of the legislation. We need not be questioning the intention of members and the Premier herself.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would say, you know, having listened to the comments in this House – and I think this is a matter which will be hotly debated – this is an issue of debate. It is clearly a matter of interpretation what the intent of the legislation was, why it's being brought, why it's being brought at this time, why it's being brought in three pieces.

I would say, I think, that as members of this House, as experienced members of this House, we are free to interpret why it is that the government would have broken this particular set of bills up into three separate bills to try and increase debate and prolong debate. We are free to interpret our view of what that legislation is doing, what its impact on individuals is, and I think, Madam Speaker, that the member was being, honestly, quite reserved in her comments in terms of what the impact of this legislation will be. I think we are free to presume that the government is informed and well aware of what the impact of their legislation will be and that they made those decisions in an informed and well-aware manner.

So I would say that this is clearly a matter of debate. It is the purpose of this House, and that is exactly what the member was doing.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you for the comments from both members in this House in regard to the debate before us here today.

I think that I will start by saying, as this is our first point of order in the early stages of, I think, what could be a passionate and lively debate in this House in which we are going to debate and there's no out, my first caution would be: let's be very careful with the words that we choose as Albertans are watching and this is very important. It is important that we debate the facts in the legislation in a manner that matters to all Albertans. I'll start with that.

I won't find a point of order in this case. Moving forward, let's get through this, as I know that we can.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has the floor.

Debate Continued

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, it's very clear that in the previous UCP conventions the party had laid out a number of resolutions, and we know that the intent behind why the Premier is bringing forward Bill 26 and the other suite of legislation that is going to make life more difficult for trans youth

in this province is because the members of her party passed resolutions. She's made that very clear. This past weekend at her convention she literally held what was called an accountability session where she went through all previous resolutions related to the issues that now form part of government policy in Bill 26, and she said: check, check, check. She actually went through and said that she was following the directions from the policy convention that happened with her party. That is what directed her to turn her back not only on vulnerable Albertans but on herself.

It is a matter of record in this House – in this very House – that the Premier stood up 10 years ago, when she was leader of the Wildrose opposition, and claimed that she was heartbroken, and she shed tears in this House because of children being outed under legislation that was being brought forward by the then PC government. We've heard her stand since she's been elected Premier and say over and over again that she would not interfere in trans rights. She said this early on when she was elected. She said that she had trans members of her family, and she understood, and that's not where she was going to go. Frankly, Madam Speaker, had she maintained that position, that would have been consistent with principles that she'd claimed for many years, to be a libertarian, to stay out of people's business, to leave it to themselves to decide and make their own bodily choices.

But, Madam Speaker, she did an about-face. She flip-flopped dramatically, and we do know why because she has said why: the UCP members, who form a small, small percentage of the Alberta population, decided that this is what they wanted the Premier to do. That is why we're standing here today. Rather than standing up to the members of her party and saying, "No; my principles as a Premier hold true, and my job is to govern for all Albertans, and that includes the most vulnerable Albertans; that is my job," she decided her political future and her ability to win a leadership review is more important.

Now we know, Madam Speaker, that those UCP policy conventions are going to be the basis of government policy going forward. She's made it clear that that's going to be her plan. We know that this past weekend is just the beginning. In this past weekend they passed resolutions to end public funding for transitioning health services altogether. They passed resolutions blocking nonbinary options on ID cards. They passed resolutions banning trans women in women's bathrooms or shelters. Now, ordinarily I would say that this is just party policy and it wouldn't be a matter that we should be debating in here, but the Premier has just proven that those policy resolutions become government policy for all Albertans. So we do have a right to care and to question the intention of how we got here.

Madam Speaker, it is important to talk about the misinformation that is the foundation of Bill 26. We heard the Premier stand and speak. First of all, the fact that this bill begins by banning surgical procedures that do not happen on minors in this province is a good indication that she's not operating from a basis of facts. She's doing that for the purpose of drilling up that fear, because every time she says that we're going to ban surgical procedures that are not happening on minors, it's giving the impression that before the ban it was happening. That is intentionally why she is doing that. Rather than saying, "I don't need to ban those procedures because they're not happening," she didn't do that. She included that as part of Bill 26. It's in there to give the impression that she's doing something.

Now, I want to add that this is the only suite of procedures that is listed in the Health Professions Act as prohibited surgical procedures for a regulated professional to perform. It is an outlier that they are singling out gender-affirming care for prohibition by regulated members. It doesn't happen anywhere else. This is the

only care. Again, creating the impression that there was something to ban in the first place.

Now let's get back to the other piece of this legislation, where the Premier and the Health minister have decided that they're going to ban access to puberty blockers and hormone therapy. Again, Madam Speaker, we deliberately see the Premier operate from a place that is not based on fact. The Premier is acting like puberty blockers and hormone therapy were widely available to minors simply at their request. That is not true. Parents are required. Parental consent and involvement has always been part of a young person getting access to puberty blockers, and let's be clear: puberty blockers are reversible. The Premier continues to spread information that is not factually accurate about puberty blockers.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, before the government stands up to make a point of order . . .

Ms Pancholi: I apologize and withdraw, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Pancholi: The Premier continues to claim that puberty blockers are irreversible. The evidence suggests strongly otherwise, Madam Speaker. It has been supported by the Canadian pediatric association, Alberta Medical Association, Alberta College of Family Physicians.

3:30

The Premier stood up and recited a whole slew of European studies, but she has totally and intentionally disregarded North American studies and professionals and expertise. The important thing about that, Madam Speaker, as we listen to the Premier speak with some sort of confidence about any of these procedures, is to say: this is exactly why it should be left to the medical professionals. Picking and choosing as a politician which study you're going to accept or not accept is not the job of politicians; it is the job of the medical professionals. They are doing the research. They're the ones giving the advice. That's the way that should be done. It shouldn't be surprising, and it's not surprising for most Albertans because we have heard the same Premier give her medical advice when it comes to ivermectin and treatment for COVID. The Premier, despite her best efforts, is not a medical professional, and Albertans should not be trusting her judgment about what should or should not be medically available. She is not qualified to do so.

Even more, what I found incredibly troubling as I listened to the Premier introduce this bill on second reading is how many times she used phrases such as "we want to strike the right balance; we want to find the right, appropriate thing to do to preserve children's choices." We – we – meaning the Premier and the UCP government. Madam Speaker, I am a parent. I don't need the Premier interfering in my child's medical decisions and choices. That is my job. That is not the job of the Premier, and that is not the job of this government.

I have never heard a so-called libertarian so quickly throw out their values and principles for political gain as the Premier has on this issue, Madam Speaker. This is a Premier, this is a party that has often claimed freedom and the right to autonomy and bodily choice, but here we have the Premier repeatedly stating that she somehow knows better than the rest of us, than us as parents, than any of you as a parent as to what your child needs in terms of medical care. Let's be clear. Going back to the misinformation that is spread, the idea that because a child wants to change their pronouns in school, or the idea that a child says, "I want to be called by a different name," does not mean that that child is going to be seeking and

getting gender-reassignment surgery as a minor. That continuum is not real. It is actually a fiction that the Premier and the UCP have created to stoke fear. The idea that any child is getting hormone therapy and hormone treatment without their parental involvement is just not factual.

You know what? I think, really, what strikes me the most, Madam Speaker, is that these are very difficult, personal, intensely vulnerable things that a child and a parent are going through. These things are incredibly intimate, they're challenging, and of course, certainly, for some kids it may be difficult to even get to a point where they can articulate the words as to why they're doing these things or why they're feeling this way. It is a journey, and it is a journey as a parent. As anybody who is a parent will know, you're trying to help your child; you're trying to support your child. You're going to try to get information. You're going to talk to health care providers. None of these decisions are made lightly. None of these things are easy.

There are things because they're trying to make sure that their child – I would want to make sure my child has the best care they possibly can. I cannot imagine knowing that there are treatments available that could support my child, that could help them, that could even give them a little bit of time to help figure out what they're feeling about these things, and that I would be denied that care because the Premier thinks I should be. This is a fundamental violation of the relationship between a parent and a child and the expertise of medical professionals.

Now, I want to go back to it because I can see that the Premier and the UCP have come upon their talking point. They've come upon their talking point, which is that when discussing the vulnerable children who are in government care, who are transitioning out of care into adulthood, several members, myself included, of our caucus talked about what we know to be the case about brain development, which is that young people – yes – their brains are not fully developed until they're the age of 25. Now, I don't hear the government on the other side trying to deny all people up until the age of 25 medical treatment. No, no. They're only trying to deny young people under the age of 18 who need gender-affirming care treatment. So this is not about that at all.

Of course, by the way, Madam Speaker, we were talking about providing financial support. Studies show that – and I'm sure many of the members, even on the government side, who have adult children can attest to this, that when their children get older and they age out, they don't stop caring for them or stop providing financial support or other support after the age of 18. In fact, studies show that 97 per cent of parents continue to provide financial support to their younger or adult children up to the age of 27. We are simply saying that government, who is legally responsible for children who are in government care, should continue to provide financial support to those young people up until the age of 24, which is what this government used to do.

They're obviously conflating this issue deliberately because taking things out of context is a disingenuous way of . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt.

Ms Pancholi: I apologize and withdraw, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Pancholi: The government, by taking these talking points out of context, is trying to make a really strange argument. If they are saying that they agree with us that the brain doesn't develop fully until the age of 25, then they should be denying the ability to make medical procedures up until that age as well for all young people, but that's not what they're doing, Madam Speaker. And let's be

clear, again, that the kinds of care that they are banning and prohibiting right now up until the age of 18, the access to hormone blockers and hormone therapy, those decisions are made with parents. Those decisions are made with parental consent. No 12-year-old is going on hormone blockers by themselves. I know they feel like they've got a catchy talking point, but, as with most arguments that they make, it is not based in reality.

I think it's very important, as we go through with the discussion on these bills, that we remember that there are real people behind these actions. When the government says that you can't have access to hormone treatment or hormone therapy unless you're over the age of 16 or 17, with exemptions, they know that that's essentially banning hormone treatment. We all know the medical science, and perhaps the Premier even knows, that if you're not providing hormone blockers when puberty first onsets – you know, it's different between boys and girls. It's a little bit younger for girls; a little bit older for boys. But if you're not providing it in that age range, it's essentially ineffective. So, basically, what these decisions are doing: they're denying gender-affirming medical care to children who, with their medical practitioners, with their parents, have made a choice about what would be best for them and for their care.

Let's be clear. It has been said over and over in this House, and we will continue to talk about it, that this has real impacts. The Premier is following in the footsteps of a number of states in the United States, where they have banned all kinds of care as well. And the impact on these young people: up to 70 per cent of transgender young people in these states are saying that they are at increased risk for suicide and for depression, and that's going to only increase. This is an active choice by this government to deny young people gender-affirming care and to say: we're going to put you at greater risk.

One of a doctor's fundamental beliefs is: do no harm. If you're a parent, your fundamental belief is: do good. When a child seeks gender-affirming care, it's because they're seeking care that will make their life better. It is of no business of government to come in and to say to any individual child and their parent that they know better. They simply do not, Madam Speaker. We need to continue to make sure that Albertans – every Albertan across this province, those who are listening, those who are watching need to know that we will continue to stand up for your right to the medical care that you deserve, that you need to feel safe, included, and healthy. That is what we take seriously as our responsibility.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join in this debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 26, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024, at second reading. While many Albertans have told me that health care is their number one issue, nobody but the Premier has told me that the number one issue that needs to be addressed is the legislation that she's bringing forward today. I spent a lot of time going door to door across this province lately, quite a bit in Lethbridge, and I will tell you that what people in Lethbridge are talking to me about is the lack of family doctors. They're also talking to me about wait times for surgeries, in general. One actually said to me: if kids are so good at navigating the system, getting surgeries they're not even legally allowed to have, maybe they should be the health minister; maybe they should be figuring out how to work the health care system in this province. Because, Madam Speaker, the stories that are being told in this place and to the media are extreme and rare and appear to be often made up.

3:40

Madam Speaker, I'm going to talk about – there are many sections in this legislation that touch on things separate and apart from trans health, but I am going to focus my comments today in second reading on youth who are trans and the care that's being limited for them here in the province of Alberta. As my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said, this list of specific procedures – and I will mention some of them here. They are listed in section 9(2)(iii). By listing 10 specific procedures, the only ones that do currently apply to minors – and by minors I mean four kids in the last fiscal year – were breast augmentation and chest masculinization. There were four kids who managed to access those procedures, and that's it, and the remainder of them are not regulated in the province of Alberta or the country of Canada for anyone under the age of 18.

But also what I find problematic in this list – and as, again, my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud said: there is no other section in the Health Professions Act where professionals are told that they can't use their professional judgment to administer health care other than one that was written in, which was female genital mutilation. This is written in essentially alongside that, saying that things like having a hysterectomy are things that the government believes that they're wiser on than health professionals, consenting parents, and patients themselves, Madam Speaker. But, again, this isn't happening anywhere in Canada, so for the Premier to write these things into legislation implying that she's making some grandiose change feels like it is significantly about showboating and speaking to extreme views in her party and otherwise.

What I will say, Madam Speaker, is that in January, when the Premier released her video with the soft lighting, it was produced very lovely, but the language that was heard by so many, especially members of the trans community and people who love them, couldn't have been more hurtful or vile. In fact, I was here on the plaza with many members of the community, and one of the speakers who came to one of the rallies still haunts me a little bit when I think about this topic, and it was somebody whose adult nephew, I believe, died of suicide shortly after this was made public. An adult. I'm not saying that there was a direct correlation. The speaker did say that. But what I will say is that it has created a sense of emboldenment among people who are transphobic and who have hate in our community, and that is unacceptable. Trans rights are human rights, and human rights deserve to be respected and honoured among everyone.

So even if this section is strictly about politics and it won't potentially have a negative impact on health care providers or youth because these restrictions are already in place, what it does do, Madam Speaker, is it creates a culture of saying that some human rights don't deserve to be protected, some human rights are a target and that it is a good government policy to be able to limit and attack certain groups in legislation. That scares me a great deal.

So does item (xi), listed under procedures, which states: “a surgical procedure identified [within] the regulations.” That I find highly problematic because they've taken the time to list out 10, but they're giving cabinet the authority to be able to add any other procedures to be seen as grounds in conflict with the Health Professions Act. I will say that, having been a political voyeur of U.S. politics and particularly watching what's happening right now around women's reproductive health and the attacks on abortion services in particular in the United States, that has had a chilling effect on folks who need to access those procedures but on others as well.

There are many documented news articles, including one here that I am just going to briefly refer to – and I will happily table it

tomorrow for *Hansard* – Texas Abortion Laws Are Straining Ob-gyn Workforce, New Study Shows. This was published on October 8 of this year. What it goes on to say is that when health professionals are told that they cannot do certain things that they have been trained to do and that if they do those things, they will lose their licence, it makes them terrified to do things that are even somewhat aligned, adjacent or otherwise.

For example, they refer to women who have experienced a miscarriage needing to have a D&C and ob-gyns being terrified that if they do a D&C, because technically all abortions are D&Cs, they will lose their licence even though the fetus has no heartbeat. That has led to a chilling effect among obstetricians, and many of these ob-gyns are choosing to practise in other jurisdictions as a result.

So we want to talk about a health care crisis, and we're telling psychiatrists, endocrinologists, and others who are working specifically in gender-affirming care that they can't operate to their full scope and that if they do, they could potentially lose their licence. It makes them not just worried about when they're working with trans youth, which, of course, is the target of this Premier's legislation, but with all youth, Madam Speaker.

I will say that one of the other arguments I heard from people on the steps of the Legislature talking about why this legislation is so cruel, Madam Speaker, is that if you do actually believe some of the nice things that are couched around hate that are coming from government press conferences and if you do believe that this is about giving children time for their mental health to catch up to their physical health, then let their physical health be preserved and let them pause puberty. Give them time to work on their mental health. Give them time to meet with psychologists, social workers, and other recommended health professionals as navigated by their parents and by their family physician. Give them time so that they don't feel like their bodies are changing without any control.

Puberty is a difficult time for any child. Imagine if you were in a body that you felt didn't align with your gender identity and watching this happen to you and not having any sense of control to be able to pause things and to be able to take the time to get mental support and to work with professionals to make sure that you're ready, when your brain is fully developed, to make the decisions that are going to be in the best interest of you, Madam Speaker.

I also want to touch on some of the language in this bill that I believe is intended to inflame. The Premier says that we've got to take the politics down, but the language in this bill is intended to inflame. For example, when we talk about sex reassignment surgeries, rather than using the technical terms of the surgeries or whether talking about gender affirmation or gender confirmation, you're specifically speaking with a dog whistle, trying to inflame the argument. When you talk about gender dysphoria and gender incongruence: again, a big dog whistle intended to speak to certain segments of the population and something that kids have picked up on is a problematic way.

I also want to say that we have seen governments in this place and other governments, other orders of government, within Alberta act in an attack on the 2SLGBTQ-plus community in the past, and it did not go well, neither for those youth who were attacked nor for those politicians who chose to focus their energy on taking down vulnerable kids. We probably all, or hopefully all, remember the lake of fire and what happened when certain candidates talked about children with such disrespect and disdain and their likely outcome in the afterlife. It did not bode well for those politicians because I know that so many more Albertans have love in their heart for children, period. I know that we all know somebody who is queer or identifies as being part of the community, and hopefully many of us love those people because everyone who lives in this province, everyone on this planet deserves to feel love and to be loved.

3:50

We are in a representative democracy where it is our job to, you know, assess what the will of our constituents is and to balance that with our moral compass and to do right by all Albertans, not do right by a small segment of people who are trying to attack a vulnerable group. I don't need polling to tell me right from wrong. This bill is wrong. This bill is harmful, and it's going to hurt kids.

I will say that giving children and medical professionals the space to be able to work together with parents to be able to navigate the best line of care I think is the responsible thing for any government to do. I do think that if the current government is interested in addressing the issues that people are talking about in Lethbridge and in other parts of the province, it would be becoming of them to focus on access to family medicine, including access to a doctor. We know that nearly a million Albertans don't have access to a family physician right now at all; specifically in Lethbridge, about 20,000. Can you imagine? One in 5 people in that city don't have a doctor, and the government chooses to bring forward a health statutes amendment act that will potentially lead to further reduction of services.

As we've learned from places like Texas and from other well-documented research, when you question the validity of health professionals, it definitely isn't good for respect, it isn't good for morale, and it isn't good for the patients that they're seeing. I can tell you that when I've been in the emergency department with a loved one, I can tell what the mental state is of the person who's there helping us. If they're having a good day or if they feel like they're really enjoying their job, it's going to be a happier visit for everyone than it is if somebody is exhausted, worked off their feet, and feels disrespected by the people who are supposed to be stewarding the public health care system for them and for all of their patients.

Madam Speaker, as my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said, this bill is absolutely intended to be a wedge between parents and children, a wedge between parents and doctors, a wedge between children and doctors. I'm not interested in validating the government's latest focus on a line of attack on these vulnerable kids. I am interested in making sure that everyone can feel safe in our communities.

I recently said to somebody that is a prominent trans activist, "I'm so glad you're so strong," and they looked at me and said, "I'd rather be safe." Nobody wants to have to be this strong. Some of us are born into bodies that enable us to feel a little stronger automatically. Some of us are in bodies that don't feel congruent with who we are as people. But everyone deserves to feel safe when they walk the halls of our Legislature, when they go to school, when they sit down with their doctor to talk about their medical care. Everyone deserves to feel safe and respected.

We have made some progress. I mentioned the lake of fire, but I didn't mention that in 2012, when I was still a school board trustee, there was a former trustee from Pembina Hills who very publicly said: if kids want to feel safer, they could act less gay. Incredibly hurtful and harmful from one individual who didn't have the power to enact a law. But, essentially, what's happening in this bill is the government saying, "Act less trans," and I'm not okay with that, and I don't think anyone in this place should be okay with that. I want every single one of us to be able to go home for constituency break with our heads held high, feeling like we're doing things to make everyone in our province and our communities feel safer.

Madam Speaker, with that, I will be urging all members of the Assembly to think really seriously about what's happening here in the Health Statutes Amendment Act and if you will be able to go home with that confidence at the end of the day. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank members for engaging in what has been a heartfelt and civil debate thus far. The government will be bringing back Bill 26 again for more time of debate.

In the meantime, Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 25

Early Learning and Child Care Amendment Act, 2024

[Adjourned debate October 31: Mr. Guthrie]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join the debate on Bill 25? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 25, Early Learning and Child Care Amendment Act, 2024. I would like to go a little bit down history lane to help understand how we got to this piece of legislation. We've seen our shadow minister for Children and Family Services do an incredible job when it comes to supporting parents with child care, but this bill is being sponsored by the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade. "Why?" you may ask. Well, we're going to do a little bit of a history on what led to this piece of legislation being introduced into the Legislature.

In 2023 there were over 400 cases of E coli spread across 17 licensed child care facilities. In 2024 there have been 17 cases of E coli in child care facilities, and these are from person-to-person transmission, not food. In 2020 the UCP passed Bill 39, Child Care Licensing (Early Learning and Child Care) Amendment Act, which deregulated child care licensing to reduce red tape.

The responsibility for early learning and child care was moved in February 2024 from Children and Family Services to Jobs, Economy and Trade. The government has never really been forthcoming as to why child care, which has traditionally always been housed under Children and Family Services, got moved to another ministry. I would suggest, Madam Speaker, that it's because of the complete and utter failure of adequately supporting the child care file.

We know that the Deputy Minister of Children and Family Services has refused to answer questions about the 2023 E coli break when that ministry had the file, and that would be the reasonable person to ask because they were responsible for it at that time. But what we have heard is from the Minister of JET, saying that the province is committed to building a sustainable child care system and that the GOA is working with providers and the federal government to ensure a fair agreement is made. Well, I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that an accessible and affordable provincial daycare program is something that we're still waiting to see from this government.

A little bit more of the history of things that have occurred that prompted this piece of legislation was that on September 4, 2023, Alberta Health Services announced that an E coli outbreak across 17 different licensed child care facilities occurred. The outbreak concluded after 51 days with nearly 500 confirmed cases and 38 children being hospitalized. This was most likely caused by improperly handled meat that was served at a daycare facility. The kitchen that was linked to the outbreak had health code violations dating back to 2021. There was a smaller outbreak of E coli in 2022 where nine cases were confirmed.

When the 2023 outbreak happened, the government did not address the outbreak until there was significant public pressure to do so. It was at that time that the UCP created the Food Safety and Licensed Facility-based Child Care Review Panel. The panel released its final report in the summer of 2024. That report has not been made public.

Under a FOIP request we found out that the report laid out over 30 recommendations for the government to implement to avoid another catastrophic outbreak. What the government is saying is that this piece of legislation, Bill 25, is in response to that report. Only one of these recommendations is being implemented in this legislation. The report laid out 30. The UCP has introduced this legislation and has only included one of the recommendations. So I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that this legislation does not do anything to establish hygiene policies or guidelines that will effectively prevent further outbreaks from happening. This was the exact reason that caused the report, yet only one of the recommendations is actually addressed in this piece of legislation.

4:00

So what we have is a government that is inadequately responding to the needs of children when it comes to having safe early learning and child care facilities. We watched them mismanage early childhood development, child care, and day homes. We saw the minister get that file taken away and given to another minister. There was hope, perhaps, that something would be done. There was a report. You know, the Premier got up and the ministers got up and talked about how they're taking it seriously and they're doing this report that they never released to the public. And then we find out that only one of the recommendations is actually part of Bill 25. So when we have a piece of legislation that doesn't adequately address the issues that led to the distressing E coli breakout in Calgary daycares last June – it doesn't set out any further guidelines for hygiene policies with daycare facilities to limit future outbreaks – I would say that individuals that require child care are being completely ignored, Madam Speaker.

As a mom of three children – my kids have all been in different types of child care. They've been in day homes, they've been in after school care, and they've been in child care facilities, and I've been very blessed that my children had opportunities to be at home with their grandmother for quite a few years. I had worked shift work, and that was the only reasonable option that I had for my family. Now, my background is social work, so I know that there are certain criteria that should be in place when I'm looking at child care, and one of the criteria is that it's a licensed provider. I know that because I work in the area of children's services, and one of the things that's very important is that the child care facilities that I was accessing for my children be licensed.

Now, I don't know that the average Albertan understands the difference between a licensed and an unlicensed facility. However, this legislation only impacts licensed child care facilities, so if you are a parent that found a day home, found a daycare, is unaware that it's not licensed, this legislation doesn't actually impact that. Again, Alberta families are being ignored by this government, Madam Speaker. I know that there are so many things that come to selecting a child care facility for your children, and Albertans should trust that their government is making sure that those are the safest, best places for your children to be. This legislation absolutely does not ensure that.

Many families in the province who are aware of the difference between the licensed and the unlicensed sometimes opt for the unlicensed providers because they have lower costs, they have increased flexibility. But one of the main things is that there are long wait times to be accepted to licensed day homes or facilities.

There are parents that want to access licensed facilities but can't because they just simply aren't available. This government has done nothing in this legislation to ensure that there are lower cost, more licensed day homes or facilities, and they've only taken one of the 30 recommendations that came from that report.

So when I look at this legislation and what the intentions are, you know, I'm curious because Bill 25 was kind of an explanation of them responding to the E coli incidents that happened in this province, yet it doesn't do that. I'm curious. What in this piece of legislation actually does anything to prevent future outbreaks or diseases and to maintain clean daycare facilities? I haven't been able to find anything in this piece of legislation that actually does that. That was the main concern that prompted this piece of legislation, yet I can't find it.

Bill 25 also doesn't explicitly address how E coli spreads, both through food and through person-to-person transmission. We've seen outbreaks of both kinds in our province in the last two years. How can Alberta families know that this legislation is adequate? You have a government that's saying, you know: we did a report; we saw the concerns; we've created a piece of legislation that's going to make families feel safe in leaving their children. This legislation doesn't do that. So I'm curious where that is in this legislation.

The other piece I'm curious about is that they took the time to create a panel to come together and create recommendations, and there were 30. I'm curious how it was decided to bring forward a piece of legislation based on this report and this response – how they decided that only one of those recommendations would be utilized. Who gave that recommendation? Who said, "Out of the 30 that we're presenting, we would like to see this one that is happening be brought forward into Bill 25"?

I'm curious who they talked to on this because I've been on panels where we've created recommendations, and the recommendations are very, very thought out. It's a group of individuals that come up with the best ideas that they want to bring forward to see implemented. I would perhaps suggest that there were probably over 30 that they were considering but decided that 30 was a manageable number and that 30 recommendations would be presented in a hope to have some sort of impact, yet one of those 30 actually made this piece of legislation.

I would like to know if the families that were impacted by this outbreak were part of that consultation and if they have any insight or comment about 30 recommendations coming from this. It was the government saying: "We're listening. We hear you. We take this seriously, did a report, had 30 recommendations." What did the families think about one of those recommendations coming forward for the legislation? I can't imagine as a parent that was impacted by that or as a parent even that had a child in daycare, knowing that that was a possibility, knowing that the government took the time to do a report.

Who did they talk to to get one of the 30 recommendations? What's the rationale on excluding 29 recommendations and only doing one? How did that become the one that created this piece of legislation?

I'm curious, when I read this, about how this piece of legislation actually helps the families and children that have already been affected by the E coli outbreaks. We haven't heard anything that this government is doing to help support those families. We heard that they would do a report, that they would consider the information, but I haven't heard what was done to help support those families.

I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, Madam Speaker, that this legislation – the incident that prompted it originally sat with a different minister. Our shadow minister for Children and

Family Services has maintained the daycare piece of this because that's where it belongs. So she's followed this, and she's provided some comments after talking with individuals, parents, child care facilities, child care operators, and she's created some significant insight into this. Ultimately, it says that this government is continuing to show negligence in safeguarding vulnerable children in Alberta's daycare system. As a parent when you're leaving your child with somebody else, you are trusting that you made the best decision with the information that you had to leave your children in a safe place.

4:10

Now, there was an opportunity for the government to take the report and to enhance the current act to make it even better. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, this piece of legislation doesn't do that. It's concerning when they took the time to do the report and then didn't release it publicly. There are 29 other recommendations that I'm curious what they're going to do. Are they going to create amendments and add them to this piece of legislation? Are they going to come back in six months and go: "You know what? We probably should have just implemented that when we had the act open the first time." It's hard to know because the report wasn't made public. Where's the accountability of that report? Where's the accountability of this government in making sure that children are essentially safe when their parents drop them off at daycare?

I think that parents have the right to be concerned about the lack of transparency and the lack of reaction that this government has had when it has come to early learning and child care. They haven't shown anything that says that they can or should be trusted, Madam Speaker. We have serious – serious – incidents that have happened across the province and an opportunity for government to do the right thing. One recommendation taken out of 30 is absolutely unacceptable. There are absolutely no additional resources or funding for health care inspectors.

When we've asked the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade about this specifically, he couldn't respond because the file originally started with Children and Family Services, and now this piece of the legislation is apparently responsible under Health. So who is actually keeping their eyes on these kids? This government touts around saying how they are cutting red tape and they're doing all of these things to make sure that things are smooth and running smoothly. Well, keeping the file under Children and Family Services, where those that are responsible for licensing and following up with concerns, would have made sense. But now we have a former ministry that isn't answering any questions, a current ministry that's saying, you know, that that actually falls under a different piece of legislation, a different ministry, and then a report that has never seen the public. It's concerning.

I don't know that this piece of legislation actually does anything to fully support children and parents. They deserve better, Madam Speaker. It's a concern when the significant impact of these E coli outbreaks happening to children created the space to realize we need to do an assessment, a thorough assessment, put a panel together, do a report, and then only take one recommendation. What's the point? What was this government doing? It's concerning to me that we have an opportunity here to really have an impact and look at those 30 recommendations that came forward or at least understand why only one of them was brought forward into this legislation.

I really look forward to fulsome debate on this, and I would encourage members to continue to ask those questions about: why does this legislation not do what it was initially intended to do?

With that, Madam Speaker, I will take my seat and listen to the debate. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members who wish to join the debate on Bill 25 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to join in the debate this afternoon on this piece of legislation. My colleague from Edmonton has talked about this bill in detail, and she raised an important concern as well. This bill apparently is trying to provide a response to the E coli outbreak in Calgary, one of the biggest in the history of this province, that impacted so many kids and that got so many parents worried about the state of affairs in our daycare system. At that time it took weeks for this government to recognize that as an issue, even that there was something happening that is of concern to children's health, that is of concern to the parents.

My colleague also mentioned the Public Accounts Committee meeting. We had the ministry of children's services before the committee, and officials there did actually refuse to answer any questions about the E coli outbreak even though when that outbreak happened, at that time that ministry was responsible. Then they transferred that responsibility to Jobs, Economy and Trade. Members there raised concerns that the next time around, when Jobs, Economy and Trade would come before the committee, that time, that year, would not be under consideration, so there would be no accountability.

As my colleague said, if this bill is responding to the concerns arising from the E coli outbreak, then I guess government should have said so, taken some responsibility to the parents and all those who are concerned about it, and put forward a plan that can assure parents that when they are sending their kids to day homes, their kids will be safe.

I will take my seat with that and look forward to the debate on this important piece of legislation in the Legislature. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to address this bill. As my colleagues have said, this bill is a reaction or came as a result of what I think was the largest outbreak of E coli amongst children in child care or daycare centres in the entire country. I've been in and around government for many, many years, but I cannot remember a situation where over 500 children were affected by E coli as a result of eating the food in their daycare.

[The Speaker in the chair]

It is absolutely shocking that we don't spend more time putting into a bill more provisions and protections for children in daycare. Parents put their children in daycare. They would rather, I think, be able to stay at home with their children, but not all parents are in that fortunate position. Because of the affordability crisis going on, in many situations both parents have to work, or if there are not two parents and they don't have the support of other family members – as my colleague said, her mother provided that support when she was raising her children. If you don't have that support, you need to look to care outside of the home. Parents go to and believe and trust and they examine and they do all sorts of things to try and understand if where they're putting their children will be safe for the day.

4:20

I live in an area of Calgary that for the longest time the families – it's a rather old community, so the families have grown up, and, you know, there were no kids for a number of years. I guess there were some, but there weren't many. But now in my community there's a

child care centre at the end of the lane that's on my street, and there's another one in a new condo building on the commercial main floor, and there's one that's been in the community at the Alexandra Centre for many, many years. So where there was one for the longest time in the community – and I've lived there since '96 – now there are three, two more child care centres, and the number of kids in those two new ones would probably be in the neighbourhood of maybe 150. I see them walking around my community all the time, you know, getting some air with their child care staff members. It's a wonderful thing to see.

But my heart breaks to think what happened back on September 4: an outbreak that concluded after 51 days, Mr. Speaker, one that started because children were getting sick in the child care centre, but they couldn't identify where that was coming from. It took time for health inspectors and others to locate the problem. The problem was in the kitchen of one particular provider, and the concern was: oh, you're probably using tainted meat. And that food was going out to all their various locations throughout Calgary. Not all children but 500 people, because parents were getting sick from their kids – that outbreak took 51 days to stop. This bill is not the kind of response one would think needs to take place after the significant illness some of those children went through, an illness that could very well change the course and the health outcomes of some of those kids and some of those parents.

When I reviewed the bill and I listened to my colleagues and I listened to the minister, I thought: "Where is the urgency? Where is the import? Where is the care for Alberta's children?" It's not in this bill. You know, just while I'm talking about those children and the families that were impacted, nothing in this bill will address the needs of those already affected by E coli and the impact on their health. I know there's probably some – I think they call them class lawsuits.

Member Arcand-Paul: Class action.

Member Ceci: Class action.

That is right and just for the people whose health outcomes are going to be affected over the course of their lives. There should be a class, and there should be settlements, and there should be care for those people, but it's not as a result of anything in this bill, Mr. Speaker.

I read many parts of the bill, of course. In parts of the bill I was concerned that daycare operators who are investigated and there are complaints and they're founded and they are repeated investigations and founded complaints: those operators would lose their licence if there's an accumulation over time but only, it looks like in the bill, potentially up to two years, and then they can reapply for licensing. Mr. Speaker, that is a toothless approach to regulating the important care that families rely on for their children. That is something – I can't really understand why that's taking place, but that's what takes place in this bill.

Why isn't more import put into – if you have a number of problems in your child care centre and if you address them but you keep having problems, there's something wrong, Mr. Speaker, with that child care centre, and it should not be allowed to receive children. The sacred trust parents put in child care centres to protect their children and to be able to pick them up at the end of the day, happy, healthy, and ready to go home and, you know, live their lives in complete health: why just a two-year suspension before you can reapply? It doesn't make sense to me, and I don't think it makes sense to Albertans. I wish the minister responsible would step up and do something on behalf of Alberta's children and the parents who rely on child care centres.

The other thing I wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, is on the total amount of administrative penalties that can be levied. Money talks. If a child care operator has to pay a significant amount of money for repeated violations of regulations, they should be suffering the full extent of penalties, and what we find here is that they're only up to \$10,000. When you look crossjurisdictionally across Canada, there are other places, notably Ontario, where penalties can range to a maximum of \$100,000. Like I said, that is a province that is looking out for the best interests of their citizens, particularly the smallest citizens, in their province.

I'm also concerned that there's no change to the number of children that can be looked after in unlicensed child care centres by child care providers. I've always had a problem with this. In this province, and I recognize that not all places across the province – and it's different everywhere, of course. Child care providers that are unlicensed can have two of their own children in their own home and look after six other children. And it doesn't matter what age those children are. They can be from 12 to newborns. I think that is far – far – too many kids for one person to look after, Mr. Speaker. Bill 25 doesn't change any of that. Bill 25 leaves that in place. That is another place where this government missed the opportunity to better protect children in this province and better understand what the needs of those parents are.

In British Columbia, again crossjurisdictionally, they have a much more restrictive way of looking after unlicensed day homes. That means that only two children unrelated to the provider can be in that home. Think of the quality of care, quality of the environment, the quality of that young kid's day as a result of being one of two as opposed to one of six. Mr. Speaker, again, this government misses the opportunity to have quick wins for the people in this province, the youngest people in this province.

Ontario has a lower number of children who are unrelated to the provider. The total is five kids, which is lower than the six kids we have in this province, but only three of those five kids can be under the age of two. And, again, Mr. Speaker, there is no limit here in this province. They can all be newborns if that is, in fact, what shows up at the door of the unlicensed provider.

In Manitoba, again, four children between the ages of two and 12. So these are the some of the things that are concerning me.

4:30

My colleague, the first speaker, did a really good job of presenting some of the background that we need to look at. Back in September of 2023, right after the election – May was when the election was – we had E coli outbreak in this province, the likes of which Canada hadn't seen before. Mr. Speaker, this Bill 25 does nothing, in my view, to make sure that we won't be back to an E coli outbreak like this in the future. I do know that another bill here, the unregulated meat inspections bill – it might be under a health statutes act – is a good thing. We have massive challenges for parents who rely on child care centres in this province. If they can't put faith in the fact that when they come home at the end of the day and they go to pick up their kid, their kid won't be impacted by E coli or some other kind of contamination that is going through the child care centre – you know, this bill doesn't help me. I don't think it'll help many parents feel better about where they're leaving their kids.

I like that there has been a requirement to notify of the fact, put on their doors or someplace – if a centre has contravened some sort of safety, they have to display that they're under disciplinary action. Disciplinary action should be enforced more rigorously is what I'm trying to say. I think putting a stop order on some child care centres until they're able to address the disciplinary action in a way that will show that they understand, they've been fined, and they're

going to go back, Mr. Speaker, and do a better job for everybody: that's what we really need in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I think Bill 25 misses the mark, and I won't be supporting it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, second reading of Bill 25, the Early Learning and Child Care Amendment Act, 2024. If you care to do so, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, on this side of the House we have always advocated for child care facilities, ones that address, of course, affordability, not stopping at affordability but also quality of care that children receive. A key to quality of care that children receive in daycares includes safety. That is what instills confidence in parents in the morning when they are dropping their children at the daycare.

Mr. Speaker, my wife worked in daycare in her first years in the country. I managed a daycare when I was the executive director of the Africa Centre. Thanks to this side of the House for starting the first \$25-a-day daycare programs, which did not compromise the quality of services that children ought to receive in daycare.

Mr. Speaker, we do kind of understand and advocate that daycares are opportunities that provide employment, but also we do recognize that if the trust of the public is compromised, it has a significant impact on daycares across the province. This brings me back to the bill because in 2023 alone there were 400 cases of E coli spread across 17 licensed child care facilities in the province. This is stuff that will hit the news all the time. The moment that this hits the news, it impacts parents' confidence, it impacts parents' trust, and it impacts the quality of services provided to those young children.

We're still within the year, but this year there have been 17 cases of E coli in child care facilities. These are from person-to-person transmission and not food. This impacts, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the public trust in the institutions that the government subsidizes and funds. Not only that, but it risks the lives of children. Also, it strains the health care system as the system responds to the source of outbreaks that happen in congregated facilities like daycares or child care facilities.

This brings us back to why members of this side question the bill and its ability to address the current needs that we see. Mr. Speaker, Bill 25 emphasizes the existing power of the statutory director to renew, revoke, and cancel a caretaker's licence as well, but it kind of comes short on addressing the bottom line of the issue, which is how the bill addresses the E coli outbreaks that we see on a day-to-day basis now. It's becoming a common threat that is happening.

Mr. Speaker, the questions that we have when it comes to Bill 25 are: what precautions does the bill take to prevent future outbreaks of disease and to maintain clean daycare facilities? At the moment we are only reacting when outbreaks are reported, when media coverage speaks, and when the public reacts to these outbreaks, without having preventative measures that mitigate these outbreaks before they occur, that prevent these outbreaks before they occur. We should be having mechanisms that will address some of these outbreaks prior to their occurrence.

The bill does not explicitly address it. As it's written now, it does not explicitly address how E coli spreads both through food and through person-to-person transmission. We have seen outbreaks of both kinds in our province, whether it is a person-to-person outbreak or whether it is an outbreak that comes out of the manner that food handling is being done within these facilities. How can the families know that this legislation is sufficient enough to mitigate and prevent outbreaks prior to them happening? The measures that are needed that are missing – what was the process? What process

was taken to decide in terms of proposing recommendations that will address the outbreaks that we have seen? The public reporting of health violations makes kids and providers safer, how the public reports in terms of these outbreaks and when they happen, but the bill falls quite short in terms of addressing some of these challenges.

4:40

I will bring back again that not only when it happens, it will ruin the public confidence in the services and programs. Child care services are included here, which are government subsidized, which is something that this government has repeatedly mentioned, reducing the cost of child care. But it shouldn't come at the expense of public confidence and public trust in these facilities. It shouldn't come at the expense of compromising the quality of the services, the spaces where these children are being taken care of. Also, it shouldn't compromise in terms of the type of food and how it is handled. It shouldn't compromise in terms of the parent being able to check and see some of the things that are happening in these daycares.

The child care services, Mr. Speaker: yes, we have talked a lot on this. It's an opportunity where jobs are created. It's an opportunity where parents can drop their children so that they can work. Also, it is an opportunity where a quality of service is provided to these children.

Studies show that quality daycares facilities, with early childhood development as part of that package, are the ones that will enable children in terms of educational attainment. There are quite a number of studies that have been done, longitudinal studies, that show the daycares and the services and the quality of those daycares and the implications they have on (a) economic outcomes, implications they have on (b) health outcomes, implications they have on life trajectory, positive outcomes for these children, not only because they are in a daycare or in a child care facility but because they are in quality daycare and child care facilities where those educators or those providers who are in these daycares are provided with the tools, are provided with the knowledge that they need. That includes in terms of mitigating risks that can arise from those child care facilities.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of this bill is that this bill doesn't address and doesn't improve in terms of the quality required within these daycare facilities. That speaks to what we are seeing now in terms of the outbreaks that have been reported over and over, multiple times. If we don't take mitigating factors, if we don't provide necessities that are needed to address why these outbreaks are happening, if parents cannot see what some of the violations that happened before are, if parents cannot see some of the reporting mechanisms that they could do, then it kind of ruins and erodes the confidence that the public has in terms of these daycares. This is part of the mismanagement of this social infrastructure or support systems that are in place, that has been happening. The mismanagement of early childhood development and child care in the day homes is part of some of the things that have been compromised when it comes to quality of services.

This bill does not address the issue that has led to the distressing E coli outbreaks in Calgary daycares, that have been reported in the news. This bill does not set out any further guidelines for hygiene policies within daycare facilities to limit future outbreaks. This will have an impact not only on the child care facilities, but it will also have an impact on our straining health care system because the moment that you find those outbreaks, they will be ending in the hospitals. The health system has to respond to this. Mr. Speaker, it is so critical and important that we do kind of address the preventative requirements, policies, and guidelines that will mitigate the risk of outbreaks, that will prevent future outbreaks of E coli, that will

instill confidence in parents as they drop their children off in these daycares.

I will conclude and say, Mr. Speaker, that this bill doesn't address the necessities that are required for quality child care facilities. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak and address this Assembly on Bill 25, the Early Learning and Child Care Amendment Act, 2024, amendments for increased accountability, transparency, and safety. This bill focuses on making sure that the welfare and safety of children in our province remain paramount in our government's agenda. I'm always pleased to advocate for our government's policies and legislation that uphold family welfare and values, and I extend my thanks to everyone involved in bringing Bill 25 forward, advancing the quality and safety of Alberta's child care sector.

Perhaps you would like a little bit of the context for the support of this bill. Alberta's government is committed to child care that's affordable, accessible, high quality, safe, and inclusive, offering a choice for all Albertan families. Whether those families be our own families, those of friends and neighbours, anyone throughout Alberta, these families deserve safe environments that support the social, physical, intellectual, and emotional growth of their children. The welfare and safety of children are at the heart of Bill 25, reaffirming the government's dedication to strengthening the family unit and promoting well-being across the province. This bill is one of many steps the government is taking to fortify the family's role and welfare, which are crucial for a healthy, thriving society.

Enhancements to our child care policies will ultimately benefit our province's productivity and prosperity by giving working parents the confidence that their children are safe and in good hands, allowing them to focus on their work and productivity without additional burden. This is particularly important here in Alberta, that has the highest employment participation rate in the country, which indicates that more than anywhere else we will have both parents working, working mothers. So we want to make sure that the facilities and the support are there so that they can do that.

I think we all can relate to this, anybody who is a parent. I certainly recall that time that I had to bring our child for the first time to a daycare centre and looking and the process of trying to investigate where it was. We took recommendations from neighbours and other family members as to where would be a good place for our most valuable treasure, our child. It can be daunting. We had to spend a lot of time looking around.

It's important to make sure that we have confidence that the government is looking out and providing standards and enforcement for child care so those places that we leave our most treasured child are safe and are nourishing and provide all the services that we expect. Whether they are daycares or early learning locations or day homes – which is, you know, vitally important because in this legislation there's a lot more included in terms of dealing with day homes, which are an increasingly important part of child care. We have shortages of daycare facilities in this province, and we have to make sure that we provide the legal structures to support not only daycares but day homes because they represent an increasingly important part of overall daycare in our society.

4:50

Why do we need these amendments? Well, Alberta's licensed early learning and child care system is managed under the ELCC

Act, which authorizes the government to license, inspect, and monitor child care programs. We want to protect trust and safety. These legislative changes increase oversight, providing information to parents, and enforce meaningful penalties for providers who fail to meet essential safety standards.

I'm going to get back to this earlier because I heard some criticisms that tell me that some members of the opposition have not actually read the whole bill that's there. Noncompliance concerns. Well, most providers meet these high standards. Unfortunately, as we found out last year, there's a small percentage who will do things that pose risk to children through noncompliance with these safety standards, and we need to make sure that those safety requirements are enforced and complied with.

What are the key areas for this amendment? It's enhancing accountability and transparency, strengthening the licensing and inspection protocols to ensure all programs align with provincial safety standards – to be more clear, more accessible information for parents on provider compliance, certification status, and safety records – and to enforce those quality and safety standards. We have provided new tools to allow temporary closures of specific areas within a facility to resolve compliance issues without impacting, necessarily, the entire program – so it's a little bit more focused than what we had before – and fair penalties for providers that failed to meet Alberta's standards for safe and quality care.

The member opposite talked briefly, Mr. Speaker, about the fact that it was only \$10,000 fines. It's \$10,000 per day or suspension or closure. That's a little bit of a significant difference. These are very strong penalties for those facilities that do not comply. You know, let's keep this in mind.

We want to support child development and family welfare. The legislation ensures children receive the care and safety and healthy environments that foster social, physical, intellectual, and emotional growth, and it reinforces support for the family unit, acknowledging that strong families are foundational to our prosperous province.

What can we anticipate to be the benefits to Albertans? Public trust, enhanced transparency, which strengthens the parents' trust in Alberta's child care system, providing peace of mind for working parents – with my own family this was key; we wanted to be able to put our child in a place that we felt we could have peace of mind that they were being taken care of and taken care of safely so we can focus on our work and support productivity and prosperity in our province, as I talked about earlier – strengthening child development and family support, safe, nurturing environments that help children thrive and build a solid foundation for future learning, supporting the welfare of both children and families in Alberta.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, there are some concerns about increased penalties for providers. Well, as I indicated before, we have increased significantly the penalties for providers. They will pay big fines, or they will be suspended, or they will be closed, depending on the circumstances. These changes are to ensure safety, not for any providers who already meet the standards. The penalties are fair and focused on serious noncompliance.

This bill maintains the family choice, ensuring options are safe, inclusive, and quality driven without restricting family choices. I alluded earlier to the fact that day homes are now a bigger part of this legislation and requirements for them.

In conclusion, this is a call to action, strengthening the care for Albertans. Bill 25 demonstrates Alberta's commitment to safe, affordable, and high-quality child care. This bill reinforces that the welfare of children, the role of families, and confidence in child care are integral to a thriving Alberta. I honestly believe that this bill should receive unanimous support from all members, and I encourage you all to support Bill 25 to foster a child care system

that upholds safety, supports child development, and provides parents with confidence in their choices.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 27

Education Amendment Act, 2024

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024.

These amendments have been developed in consultation with many of our partners and stakeholders in our education system and beyond, which, of course, includes families, school boards, mental health organizations, and other education partners, on how best to implement new policies. As well, we've also consulted with these partners about how to implement recommendations from the Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel, which, of course, concluded recently and issued its recommendations. A number of those recommendations touched on education. It's a good opportunity for us to be able to implement some of the recommendations. I'll talk a little bit about that in a moment.

Throughout our consultations, though, Mr. Speaker, we have heard from our partners across the province and from many families that parents and guardians and caregivers want to be more involved in their child's education, and we're looking to strengthen their involvement through this legislation. We're committed to ensuring that our education system evolves to meet the needs of families and students of today, and I'm confident that the proposed amendments to the Education Act will help us do just that. Through these amendments we are helping our education partners, parents, guardians, families, caregivers, and others navigate and enter into complex conversations around sexual orientation, sexual education, and gender identity. We're also affirming students' right to an education while increasing transparency and clarity for parents and guardians during a public health emergency or other states of emergencies.

Under the Education Amendment Act one of the amendments that's contained in the bill, of course – we will be able to provide more clarity and promote more consistency for students, parents and guardians, and teachers and others as students navigate any questions around gender identity or sexual orientation by requiring notification and consent for changes to a student's gender-related name or pronouns in schools. For students 15 and under consent would be required when a student requests that a teacher or any other staff refer to them by a new name or pronoun, and while consent would not be required for students who are aged 16 or 17, school authorities would still be required to notify parents if they request these changes.

An important piece of this, Mr. Speaker, is to help ensure that we create clarity and consistency. Currently, right now in Alberta, our school boards have a variety of different policies on this question. There are some school boards that have their own policies in place that stipulate exactly what I've just read, which do direct teachers and other staff in their school division to notify and consult and get parental consent if there are to be any changes to pronouns or names. That's already the case in many school divisions. Other school divisions have a different policy, and some school divisions don't have a policy at all on this topic. So the amendments will create a province-wide standard for all school divisions to follow, which, as I mentioned, will create a degree of consistency.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we know as well that these are difficult topics and can be challenging interactions and conversations for some families to navigate, which is why, in some cases, we understand that should notification be expected to result in emotional or psychological harm to a student or if the student themselves requests assistance, the school would be required by legislation, if passed, of course, by the contents of the bill to provide that student with supports prior to notification taking place.

In addition, we will be making changes to the sex education curriculum, and we will be changing that from the current format, which is opt out, to opt in. As I mentioned, currently in Alberta parents, guardians, and caregivers are notified in advance when instruction on human sexuality is to occur, and a child can opt out without any kind of academic penalty. Under these proposed amendments parental notification and opt-in provisions would be required when any subject matter deals primarily and explicitly with human sexuality and additionally with any conversation or any interaction where subject matter deals primarily with gender identity and sexual orientation.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

5:00

We have stipulated in the bill that school authorities would need to provide a minimum of 30 days' notice in advance should there be any activities or classroom instruction that discusses or engages on the topics of gender identity, sexual orientation, or human sexuality. They'll be required to notify parents 30 days in advance, and parents would need to provide their consent for their child to be a part of that conversation, classroom instruction, or interaction. The new model will ensure that parents or guardians are notified in advance and have the information that they need to make an informed decision on whether specific topics are appropriate for them, their family, and their child.

In addition, Bill 27 will also make changes to learning and teaching resources in our schools. Parents and guardians can rest assured that for topics dealing primarily and explicitly with human sexuality, gender identity, or sexual orientation, learning and teaching resources and any external third-party material and resources would need to be approved by the Ministry of Education prior to its use. This is to ensure that age-appropriate material is put in front of children and that the information is appropriate for the age of the audience.

Currently the Minister of Education indeed has the authority to authorize learning and teaching resources to help teachers and school boards determine which resources are most appropriate for use in their schools. One of the proposed amendments would provide the minister with the authority to approve learning and teaching resources that are primarily and explicitly related to those topics being used in Alberta classrooms. Teachers would be required to use only approved learning and teaching resources for these topics. It would also apply to external third-party groups and organizations, as I mentioned previously.

Now, this approach, of course, Mr. Speaker, is intended to increase transparency for families because when they are more involved in their child's education, children feel better supported and fundamentally achieve better outcomes. I want to reiterate that these changes will ensure that students and families have the right supports in place, have the right degree of clarity and transparency over curriculum content and resources and other material that is being used in schools.

I know that this is a topic that many parents, guardians, and caregivers have questions and concerns about. Indeed, a number of people over the course of the past few months have contacted my

office with concerns about material that exists in our schools primarily through third-party groups and through other material and teaching resources, so these amendments will help ensure that there is greater transparency over what material is being used.

Now, as I mentioned, the bill will also be making some amendments to ensure continuity during public health emergencies. I talked a little bit earlier about the public health emergencies review panel. I mentioned that panel concluded its work and has suggested a number of amendments to the Education Act, and we're happy to bring those forward in line with the panel's recommendations. Of course, the panel was put together to review the COVID-19 pandemic response.

I'll jump right into it. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, the amendments would create a new right to education during a public health emergency in alignment with requirements in the in-person learning regulation. Amendments would also add new elements to the preamble of the Education Act to highlight a student's right to education, the importance of education, and the importance of preserving in-person learning even during a public health emergency. It would also ensure that parents have a right to be notified and make decisions on behalf of their children regarding any health measures that a school division may seek to apply during a public health emergency.

Through the proposed amendments to the Education Act school authorities would be required to notify families and obtain consent for health measures that would apply, so if it's a health measure, they would need to get parental consent. [interjection] We can talk more about your specific question afterwards. I guess I can accept interventions, but I'm not going to right at this moment. I don't think the member is offering to intervene anyway.

Nonetheless, it's intended to capture individual health measures that would not be seen as routine and that would not apply to regular personal hygiene practices or routine school cleaning practices. These are health measures that a school division may seek to apply during a public health emergency. It would also not apply to immunizations as those already, of course, require parental consent. This will enhance transparency for families and emphasize a school authority's responsibility to share information with them.

Further amendments will also include new regulation-making authority related to in-person and at-home learning. If these amendments are passed, amendments to other regulations, of course, would follow, as is the natural consequence and course. These regulatory amendments that would follow would provide school administrators with more clarity and more guidance on expectations for in-person learning during public health emergencies. Changes, Mr. Speaker, would also require school authorities to develop publicly available policies for temporary shifts to at-home learning, including options to accommodate students, the criteria for deciding to temporarily move to at-home learning and how learning will continue. This will help ensure a smoother transition when and if there is a temporary shift to at-home or online learning.

Further, the amendments would introduce a new requirement around the reasons for a school to be temporarily exempt from in-person learning and time limits for these shifts to at-home learning. This would mean that shifts of three or fewer school days would no longer require a ministerial order during an emergency, but any shifts longer than three days, even during an emergency, continue to require a ministerial order to ensure government oversight. Regardless of the length of time, all shifts to at-home learning, also known as online learning, would need to be reported to the ministry. These changes are responsive to both the panel's recommendations to set clear criteria and to limit shifts to at-home learning as well as stakeholder feedback on challenges with the current process.

If passed, the legislation and regulatory amendments for education continuity during public health and other states of emergency would be expected to come into force January 1, 2025, except the sections relating to school authority policies, which would come into effect on September 1, 2025. All other amendments to the Education Act would come into force on proclamation, which is anticipated for September 1, 2025. The objective of this timeline, of course, Mr. Speaker, is to ensure that school boards have adequate time to develop policies. As I mentioned, apart from the legislation and the regulation, school boards will need to develop their own policies regarding in-person learning, online learning, and other elements, so we want to ensure that they have ample time to be able to do that, consult with their community and other partners as they wish in the pursuit of the development of those policies.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how much time I have left, probably a few minutes. Five minutes? Six minutes? Well, maybe five or six minutes. Nonetheless, I don't need all the time. Maybe I can come back to it later. For the time being, though, I'm happy to move second reading of Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024, and I encourage all members to support this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

I will remind all members to direct their comments through the chair as we continue debate in the Legislature here.

I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to speak.

5:10

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I won't say that it's a pleasure, but it's something to rise and speak in second reading to Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024. Earlier this afternoon we had an opportunity to debate the proposed changes on the health side of the, frankly, antitrans legislation that the government is bringing forward, and I'm going to start the same way that I did then. I'm going to start the same way now, which is to speak to trans youth and students, through you, Mr. Speaker, to those young people, to those students, to those kids who right now might be feeling incredibly vulnerable and incredibly scared when they see that the government is bringing in measures that are not putting their best interests at heart.

Mr. Speaker, I want them to know that they are loved, that we are all committed on this side of the House to making sure that school is a safe space for you, that you can trust your teachers, that you can trust your fellow students to be surrounding you with love. We're going to do the same thing. We know that being in school in times like this can be troubling and scary, and we want you to know that you are special. We see you, and we're working very hard to make sure that you feel safe to grow up to have the best potential that you possibly can.

It might be jarring for those young people, Mr. Speaker, to have just listened to the Minister of Education introduce second reading of this bill and not once speak to them, not once speak to those students, not once speak to how this bill is actually designed to improve the well-being, the opportunities, the success for learning of students. That was glaringly absent from the very clinical approach to describing what this legislation is going to do that we just witnessed from the Minister of Education. There is nothing in there that centres kids, and I would expect, and I think Albertans expect, that their government and the Minister of Education in particular would be putting kids at the heart of everything they're doing. We are already incredibly clear. The information is very clear. The data is clear. The medical experts are clear. Parents are

clear that they want their kids to have the care and support they need to be able to succeed.

What we're talking about right now is, again, a deliberate attempt by the government to take advantage of misinformation and to sometimes amplify misinformation for the purpose of creating division rather than creating better unity and understanding and compassion between people. Mr. Speaker, I'll admit that I am a parent and I have been shocked by what I've heard is circulating in some communities around what is being taught in schools and the perception of what's being taught by teachers and what resources are being used. There is a lot of misinformation being spread right now in many communities, and what the government has chosen to do right now is to validate that misinformation.

They had a choice, Mr. Speaker. This is a conversation that I had a number of times with the Minister of Education, with school boards. When I had the honour to be the critic of Education for a period of time, I said that we are aware this information is out there. What are we doing to bring parents and schools and teachers and students together to dispel these rumours and this misinformation?

If you talk to parents who are hearing these things – you know, we know that there are WhatsApp chats and there are e-mail chains that go on and there are videos and links that are shared. We know that there is a whole other world of really weird material out there that seems to be the main source of information for the government and the Premier and the minister, but it's not real, because when they cite the examples of the things that are supposedly being taught in schools, none of those actually happen in Alberta. We've all heard these strange rumours about litter boxes or something, and none of that happened here, if it even happened at all. In fact, where there have been incidences where, yes, maybe something has been brought to a school by a third party or maybe a teacher crossed the line, there are mechanisms by which to deal with that, Mr. Speaker.

Rather than take advantage of the fact that – let's be clear. Too many Alberta parents right now are exhausted. They are tired. They do not have the ability sometimes, whether it be for cultural reasons, time reasons, resource reasons, language reasons, to be able to spend a lot of time to understand what's truly happening in classrooms. So if that misinformation is out there, the onus is on government to bring people together to better understand what's happening. Instead, they validated that misinformation by saying, "We're going to bring in all these rules now," to perpetrate this idea that teachers are doing something insidious. This is all about dividing parents and teachers, although let's be clear: many parents are teachers, and many teacher are parents. But this is meant to further this suspicion, the way that we all look at each other, rather than bringing people together.

When I would talk to school boards, I'd say: "Okay; so if there are communities in your area that you represent who are not sure about what's being taught, let's work hard to make sure that those parents, especially – you know, let's make sure that it's accessible, that it's in languages they understand. Let's bring them together to understand what's really being taught in schools, that this is about human rights, that every child, regardless of their race, their religion, their gender, their gender identity, their sexual orientation, has protected rights." We want to make sure that, yes, teachers and materials meet standards, of course. And there are mechanisms to make sure that if that's not happening, it can take place. But rather than bringing people together to dispel those rumours, this government brings in this bill.

I go back to the idea that every parent wants to understand more about what's happening in their kids' classrooms. They would love to hear more about – hey, I'm a pretty educated parent when it comes to the education system, but even I haven't been able to sit

down all the time to go through in detail the curriculum and the programs of study that my kids are learning. If I'm not doing that, we know there are many parents who can't, so how do we make it more accessible, more understandable of what's happening?

If this government was truly about improving parents' involvement in their kids' education, first of all, they would address some of the issues that Albertans are facing such as health care and cost of living and affordability. They would address those things, but they would really try to bring parents together with teachers. But that's not what they've chosen to do.

I want to just take a moment to say again that all professions – there may be situations. Like, I'm a member of a regulated profession; I'm a lawyer. We know that if things are not going – if a lawyer steps out of line, there are processes to deal with that. The government made a decision two years ago to take over responsibility for addressing teacher conduct, so if there were complaints about specific teachers doing something, they could handle it that way. But they didn't do that, Mr. Speaker. Well, they did do it, but they actually haven't been able to handle any of those complaints. They've had that system for two years, and not one single hearing has taken place. So they're not interested in actually addressing if there are bad actors, dealing with those bad actors. They've developed a flawed system that's not working, and they've decided to fester that division between parents and teachers even more.

Now I want to talk about the piece that talks about parental notification. Again, I come back, Mr. Speaker, to not 10 years ago. The Premier stood in this House and shed tears at the idea that schools would out children. She shed tears. She spoke. Her words were to talk about the impact that this would have on kids, that it would lead to suicide, that it would lead to death. That was the Premier. Ten years later she has absolutely no problem outing kids. Absolutely no problem.

One might question what the difference is. Well, I think we all know. We talked about it earlier. It's because she needed to keep her job. So who is the first to be sacrificed for the Premier's climb to power and to maintain her power, Mr. Speaker? It appears to be that she's fine with outing kids all of a sudden . . .

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

Ms Pancholi: . . . because that's exactly what's going to be happening.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Ms Pancholi: I apologize and withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Apology accepted. Just continue on with comments, careful to not cross boundaries.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be careful not to cross boundaries.

Let me be clear. This bill, proposed legislation, says that children who are under the age of 16 will require parental consent before they can change their pronouns or their preferred name for the purpose of gender identity. I was about to say, "Well, I'm not a lawyer," but actually I am a lawyer, so let me just add, Mr. Speaker, that that seems pretty ripe for some pretty clear human rights complaints because the only children being singled out for who cannot change their names and their pronouns are those who are doing so for the purpose of gender identity. Might I remind this government that that is a protected ground under the Human Rights Act, and it has been read into the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well. It is singling out those students. If they want to change their

name for any other reason, that's fine, but if it's for gender identity, then all of a sudden their parents need to consent.

Now, let's be clear. They're saying they won't require consent, just notification of parents, if the child is over the age of 16. Well, what happens if you send notification, Mr. Speaker, and a parent is upset about that and they don't give their consent? It's the same thing, and it's really putting vulnerable kids in a tough situation.

I really take issue, Mr. Speaker, with the, I have to say, somewhat pathetic attempts in this bill to try to address the very real reality that kids who are in this position are going to be made incredibly vulnerable by being outed against their will to their parents by including a provision that says that if a board believes that a student is reasonably expected to suffer emotional or psychological harm or the student requests, the board has to ensure students are provided with counselling or other assistance before notifying the parent.

5:20

So let's work through that a little bit, Mr. Speaker, because here's the thing that that means. First of all, now suddenly the UCP is okay with the idea that a child, a student, can be provided counselling without parental consent. They have no problem with that piece of it. They're saying that parents won't be notified, that there will be no notification, but somehow they'll be providing counselling and other assistance to this child.

Now, when we heard this bill was introduced, they were saying suddenly that Counselling Alberta was going to be the answer. All these kids who are in severe vulnerability and distress are now going to get access to Counselling Alberta. If you're outside of Calgary, Counselling Alberta is an online counselling service. By the way, there's also a cost associated with it. Apparently, now 12-year-olds can sign up for Counselling Alberta services without their parents' consent. I don't know how they're going to pay for it, but that's going to be what the school board is going to be provided.

I mean, I personally would love, Mr. Speaker, if there were counselling services right in every school in this province. I would love it if there were mental health supports available to every single student in this province, but there aren't. It is laughable and it's, frankly, distressing to hear that this government's answer to acknowledging the very real mental and emotional distress they're going to cause kids by outing them to their parents without their consent is that they'll make something available, something that kids desperately across this province need access to, mental health supports in schools, and do not have access to, but suddenly school boards are now responsible for providing it. It's a miracle that apparently now there's going to be mental health support services provided for every student who needs it.

I want to talk a little bit about the opt-in for sex ed. You know, I was in Lethbridge, Mr. Speaker, not too long ago, as many of my colleagues were as well. I was in a seniors' home, and these are folks who are not necessarily always NDP supporters, but I had a gentleman standing across from me and he goes: "This government seems just focused on fixing things that aren't broken. That's the only thing they want to do." I was like, "That's a hundred per cent true."

I actually think the Minister of Education might agree with that, because I had an opportunity on Friday to do an interview on the radio about these issues about opt-in for sex ed. Just prior, about 45 minutes before I did my interview, the Minister of Education was on the same radio channel doing the same interview about the same questions about opt-in. I listened to the Minister of Education struggle repeatedly after being asked over and over again by the interviewer: why are they suddenly moving to opt-in for sex ed? He

was trying to find an explanation. He was saying: yeah, we know the vast majority of parents actually do want their kids to receive it. They have very few actually exercise their ability to opt out.

Most parents are okay with getting sex ed for their kids, so what was the problem they were trying to address? This is what the interviewer kept asking the Minister of Education, and he simply could not answer. He stumbled and stumbled through it because this is not a problem that needs to be fixed. We know that good, strong sexual health education is an important part of every curriculum. It was part of the previous curriculum. It's been part of every curriculum, including the new one, because we know how important it is.

It's not just important because we want kids to – by the way, we know that studies show that access to good sexual health education delays a young person's first sexual encounter. Of course, it reduces the chances of STIs. It reduces the chances of unplanned pregnancies. We know all those things. I don't know why we're trying to revert to decades before, where we're acting like sex ed is a bad thing. We know that, actually, the studies are very clear that there are incredibly important outcomes for young people to get good, strong sexual health education.

But, also, we know, Mr. Speaker, that good sexual health education is important for kids to understand how to protect themselves and keep themselves safe. It is an important part of consent, and that is consent both for kids of all genders to learn how to understand when somebody else says no, but it's also to empower them to be able to say no. When we remove access or create barriers, as this legislation does, to kids accessing sexual health education, we're removing the tools that they have to be able to keep themselves safe. As parents I don't know why any of us would want that to happen.

Here's what's going to happen, Mr. Speaker. With an opt-in clause the way that we see from this legislation, it's going to mean that there are going to be a lot of kids who are not going to get sexual health education, not because their parents actually are opposed to it but because they just didn't get around to returning that consent form. You know, just last week I pulled a crumpled-up notice out of my daughter's backpack. It had been there for three weeks, and she gave me this look, like: eh. Now, luckily, I should know better, to go through her backpack on a regular basis, and the point is that she hadn't missed the field trip that that was about.

But the point is that this is not going to be families who are deliberately choosing to not take sexual health education. It's just going to be a lot of parents who are too busy, too stressed, too tired, who lost the notice and just don't know, and all of a sudden their kids are missing out on a critical part of education that they have every right to access. We're just going to make sure that more kids in Alberta get a worse education because of this government.

Now, I've only got a few more minutes, and I want to say a few more things. There are real problems in education right now. There are very real problems. We have the lowest per-student education funding in the country, and that was intentional by this government. It was intentional by this government. By adopting a funding model that constantly funds on previous years' enrolment, not the current year's enrolment, while at the same time running an active campaign to recruit more people to come to Alberta, they chose to implement a funding model that would refuse to fund every single student that walked through a door of a school. That is a real problem.

When I was in Lethbridge, I spoke to an elementary school teacher who teaches grades 1 and 2. She told me she had 24 students in her class; 13 of them require individual support plans – right? – an ISP. Of those 13, eight of them required OT services, occupational therapy services. She filled out the forms for these

kids, eight in her class, to get OT services. They have one part-time OT who works for the entire school division. Not one of her students last year received OT services. That is a problem.

In the junior high in my riding, Mr. Speaker, there are over 40 kids in every single class. That is a problem, and that's a choice by this government for three years in a row. They had three budgets in a row where they did not fund a single school for Edmonton public school board, one of the fastest growing school boards in the country, and they chose to do that.

These are real problems in education. We have teachers who are burned out and feel disrespected. We have EAs who are underpaid at almost below poverty wages. We have kids who have more complex needs than ever. We have kids with more English language learning needs than ever. These are the real priorities of Alberta students. It is not what is being introduced here.

Lastly, I feel compelled to talk about this because I sometimes feel like this government is living in an alternate reality when I hear them bringing in provisions around in-school learning and how important that is and how they want to make sure that happens. I love the way they're acting in a reality as if there was any parent anywhere who didn't want their kids to be in school learning during the pandemic.

I remember rallying with parents. I remember standing with my colleagues in this Legislature, demanding that the UCP do things to make sure that schools were safe for kids. We wanted fewer students in classrooms. We wanted better ventilation. We wanted masking. We wanted to make sure that there were spread-out spaces because we wanted our kids to go to school. The reason why schools closed down when and as often as they did is because the UCP refused to do anything to make schools safe during the pandemic, and now they pretend as if it's some alternate group of people who made those decisions.

The Minister of Education was part of cabinet when those decisions were made to not implement school safety measures. Many of the members of the current cabinet were members of cabinet then, including some members who were on the emergency COVID cabinet committee, who made those decisions about school closures. They're fighting with themselves. Meanwhile there are real issues that are happening for kids and teachers and EAs and parents and schools right now, and this legislation does nothing to help any of them. All it does is target vulnerable kids.

I want to go back to the courage and strength it takes for kids to come out or to ask of their teachers that they go by a different pronoun or by a different name. It takes a lot for a child to get there. And, yeah, it's true; sometimes they may not go to their parents first. I have to deal with that as a parent, too, knowing that my kids have a very safe environment. I feel I'm a very supportive parent, but they still may choose to do something, to tell their friends something or their teacher something before they tell me. I know in time they will come and tell me because that's the relationship we have. But I also need to trust. I need to know that I'm not alone raising a child. We are part of a village.

When a child goes to a trusted adult, I know that that teacher – this is the policy of school boards. This is the policy of Edmonton public schools. They want to work with that child to make sure they can bring their parents in on the conversations. They are not at odds with parents. They want to make sure that that kid is safe and welcome. It is a tough thing. It takes courage for those kids to do that. The last thing we should be doing is shaming them or making them feel scared or vulnerable because they've taken that step. It is our job, it is all of our jobs, to stand up and be there for Alberta students, and that is what we're going to continue to do every single day.

5:30

The Acting Speaker: I will recognize the Member for Livingstone-Macleod to speak.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak in favour of government Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024. Today we continue to make good on our commitment to ensuring that our education system not only survives crises but emerges stronger than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic left us with many lessons, especially regarding education. Our experience has taught us that in times of uncertainty, the well-being of our students and the active involvement of parents are paramount to their success.

Following the recommendations of the Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel our government tabled amendments to the Education Act and regulations under the act. These affirm students' rights to their education and increased transparency, consistency, and clarity in schools for teachers, parents, and guardians during public health and other states of emergency.

As we continue our discussions today, we have the opportunity to support legislative amendments that will ensure our education system is equipped to respond to future challenges while safeguarding the rights of our families. The pandemic served as a wake-up call, revealing the vulnerabilities within our education system. Students, including my own child, faced significant learning loss, emotional challenges, and disruption to their social development. We owe it to our children to create an education system that is prepared for public health emergencies, one that puts their needs first and respects the vital role of parents as the primary caregiver.

The proposed amendments to the Education Act are a crucial step in this direction, reinforcing our dedication to maintaining access to quality education, regardless of the circumstances. The emotional toll of the pandemic cannot be overstated. Many students experienced isolation and anxiety due to prolonged periods of remote learning. This experience highlighted the need for in-person interactions and the importance of a structured educational environment. By prioritizing in-person learning during emergencies, we can mitigate these adverse effects and support our children's mental health and developmental needs.

The amendments we're discussing today are also designed to provide clarity and support for both parents and teachers. By reinforcing the importance of education, we send a powerful message. Education is vital and must be prioritized. This legislation creates a framework that outlines the responsibilities of school authorities to maintain that in-person learning remains accessible whenever possible, safeguarding our children's educational journey even in emergencies.

Parents across Alberta have also been vocal about wanting to be more involved in their children's education. If passed, the amendments contained in Bill 27 will provide parents and guardians with more transparency. This includes transparency for parents regarding health measures in their children's school during emergencies and schools' plans to continue providing education if there's an unavoidable shift to at-home learning. The proposed amendments would also provide our partners in education with more clarity and guidance on various matters. These include expectations for learning during emergencies when shifts to at-home learning are allowed and government reporting requirements.

The government of Alberta has indicated it will continue to work closely with school authorities and provide support as they implement the new changes. In addition to maintaining access to

in-person learning, the legislation places a strong emphasis on preserving children's choice as they grow into responsible adults.

The proposed amendments also ensure that parents and guardians remain informed and involved in the education process. For students aged 15 and younger schools will be required to obtain parental consent before using a gender-related preferred name or pronoun. For students ages 16 or 17 parents must be notified, but consent is not required.

The proposed amendments also ensure that parental rights are factored into the learning process through a shift to an opt-in rather than opt-out model for subject matter dealing primarily or explicitly with human sexuality, gender identity, or sexual orientation. The legislation requires schools to provide notice at least 30 days in advance for these subjects. This change from an opt-out to an opt-in process for sexual education ensures that parents are aware of what's being taught to their children on these sensitive topics. It empowers families to make informed decisions about their children's education. Additionally, the proposed amendments would ensure that learning and teaching resources for topics dealing primarily or explicitly with human sexuality, gender identity, and sexual orientation must be preapproved by the Minister of Education to ensure that they are appropriate and relevant to the curriculum. This would also apply to third-party presenters on these same topics.

We must recognize that education is a partnership, and when parents and teachers work together, children benefit immensely. While we emphasize parental involvement, we must also recognize that each child's situation is unique. Our commitment to student safety and well-being remains at the forefront of these discussions. If a student is facing difficulties at home that may make parental notifications problematic, schools will have protocols in place to support the student prior to notifying the parents. This balanced approach promotes the safety and well-being of the child while still respecting the family unit.

Support services such as guidance counsellors and social workers will be available to help students navigate these complex situations. This support is essential in fostering a safe and nurturing environment where students can seek assistance without fear of judgment. By taking these meaningful steps, our government is working to preserve the choice of children as they mature into responsible adults while also ensuring that everyone's safety and rights are fully protected.

I encourage all members of this Assembly to support the amendments proposed in Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the Member for Calgary-Bedmonton to speak.

Ms Chapman: Thanks so much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 27 with a rather distinct lack of pleasure. Bill 27 amends the Education Act in three ways. The first change requires that parents are notified and consent to their child's preferred name and changes that their child may want to make to their pronoun. For students 15 or younger consent is required. For students 16 or 17 parental consent is not required, but notification still is.

The second change is to move sexual health education from an opt-out to an opt-in model. Purportedly this will allow for more clarity, transparency, and awareness. In addition, all learning and teaching resources will need to be approved by the Ministry of Education. And, yes, I think we are seeing that famed Conservative belief in really, really big government in action here.

The third change centres around access to education during public health emergencies to make in-person learning a priority. I know what you're thinking. Isn't that already the case? And, yes, it certainly is. Aside from the shift of virtual learning during the early days of the most recent global pandemic, a time when scientists and world leaders were trying to figure out this new virus, how it spread, how many people would die from contracting the virus, which type of people were most likely to die from contracting the virus, which type of people would be most likely to spread the virus to people who would die from the virus, aside from those few months, can anyone in this Chamber recall a time that their school board moved to virtual learning just on a whim? No, because schools only close as a last resort.

In addition to making sure that schools remain open, even when the plague has come to town, this legislation also restricts the ability of school boards to protect staff and students with simple measures like masking. The government uses a fancy term to confuse people: nonroutine health measures. Of course, these are completely routine health measures in many parts of the world, but I don't get the sense that this legislation was created with a lot of research into best practice on student and staff health and safety.

I'm going to spend most of the rest of the time outlining why this legislation gets things very wrong on access to sexual health education. I saw a clip recently that had me reeling. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud referenced it, and I want to unpack it just a little bit. That first legislative change, as I mentioned, is related to parental notification and consent around name or pronoun changes. The government press release stated that "The top priority of Alberta's government is that every student feels welcomed, cared for, safe and respected while at school." That's a bold way to introduce legislation that will ensure that trans students do not have the opportunity to feel welcomed, cared for, safe, or respected at school. How can you feel any of those things when you are preoccupied with concealing who you are?

Perhaps, I said to myself, this government simply doesn't understand how destructive their policies are. I remember a lot of soft lights and a soothing instrumental soundtrack, and after all these are the people who worry somewhat wrongheadedly about children in government care becoming too dependent on government support. Perhaps they simply don't understand that not everyone is born into a healthy, supportive, comfortable family. Perhaps their life experience is so very small that they can't imagine what it would be like to be different, to be outside of the expected norm.

5:40

[The Speaker in the chair]

Then I watched a clip of the current Premier speaking in this very Chamber. I won't bother recreating her crocodile tears here, but I will remind you of her words because . . .

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called. The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Abusive Language

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is definitely a point of order under 23(j), particularly, "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder" directly towards one of the members of our Chamber. The Premier I think, like any member, deserves the right to be able to speak her mind and not be accused

of these sorts of, you know, inappropriate and likely to cause disorder statements. I'd ask the member to withdraw and also for the Speaker to rule as a point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington or the Deputy Official Opposition House Leader on her behalf.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's an important piece of legislation, and when members refer to the Premier's record of things, I don't know why, it does get heated, but I think that we should focus more on the debate. These are the things that will be brought forward by members because that's a matter of debate, what the Premier said in 2013, what the Premier said a month ago. Those things I think are a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I would agree. The Premier's record is a matter of debate that all members are able to comment on. The challenge, of course, is when we begin to direct personal attacks, particularly in this case of the Premier making crocodile tears or otherwise. What I would say is that I encourage the member, as the Deputy Official Opposition House Leader has, to focus on the content of the bill, and I am certain that the decorum will remain positive.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Debate Continued

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to move right on to the words that were said. Again, this was the Premier speaking about gay and lesbian youth. She said: "Most of them, their parents didn't know that they were out yet. Most of them knew that if their parents knew, there would be some consequences to that. One individual I spoke with said that two lesbian girls had come out at her school and been kicked out of school. Another young boy told me that he came out to his parents and his dad rejected him. Another young woman was beaten by her father."

This is when it became very clear to me that this government knows exactly what they're doing, and they know exactly what is at stake for youth, and they are still choosing to punch down on this vulnerable group.

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is called. The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the truth is every member in this House cares for all who are vulnerable, and to imply otherwise would be to impute the character of members of this House and the government. It's also language that I believe will cause disorder in the House, to be referring to punching down, which is by definition an act of violence and an attack. I would ask that it be ruled a point of order and that the member stand up, apologize, and withdraw the comments.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition Deputy House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not a point of order. After your caution, the member did move to the Premier's actual words from 2013. As I said earlier, it's a matter of debate. I think the government is a bit too sensitive talking about their record, but it's totally a matter of debate. It's not a point of order.

The Speaker: I am prepared to rule if there are no others.

With respect to the words that the Premier used or otherwise, I again will reiterate. I think the Premier's record is a matter of debate on which members will have a variety of opinions. I am concerned about the use of the words "punch down." I have heard it be used on a number of occasions inside the Chamber over the past number of days. I did take the opportunity to google such a word. That implies to attack or criticize, and I appreciate that criticizing is very different than attacking, so there may be some grey around the use of this word.

But if members are implying that other members are punching individuals, Albertans, young people, of course this is a point of order. I am certain that over any period of time the repeated use of this language is likely to become a point of order. I would encourage members that there are lots of other things that you can say that aren't going to create such disorder, and I hope that they will do that.

Debate Continued

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will look for some better colloquialisms.

I'm going to change tack here, and I'm just going to move right into the change to opt-in for sexual health information because that's an area where the UCP knows what they're doing there, too, because they're adding a lot of red tape. They're adding barriers, barriers between our kids and factual, age-appropriate information about their bodies, consent, safe and unsafe touch, and healthy relationships.

Now, if you tuned in to the minister on morning drive-in shows, you might be led to believe that this change will ensure there's more clarity, transparency, and awareness, but of course if you listen to the entire interview, you will be quickly disabused of that notion because the minister simply isn't able to answer the question of: how? How will changing from opt-in to opt-out increase clarity, transparency, or awareness of the content in our sexual health curriculum? The best the minister was able to offer was that it would be helpful for parents to know when sexual health education is happening, but of course parents already know that because the school board sends notifications to all parents when they have the opportunity to opt their child out.

Now, the minister was correct in one thing when he said that parents in Alberta have always had the ability to have their child participate in sex education. The Edmonton public school board made this very clear in the letter they sent the Premier in February of this year, where the board says:

Our factual, age-appropriate instruction, coupled with transparent parental notification and opt out offer . . . respects both student well-being and parental input. Requiring parents to opt in does not serve to add any additional parental control; it simply adds administrative red tape to important lessons set out in the Alberta provincial curriculum.

This is the position of the vast majority of school boards we have consulted with on this issue, so why is this change happening? Who was asking for this change?

Now, unfortunately, the minister hasn't been able to answer these questions. When I asked him in question period just last week who was asking for the change, the minister's response was that parents should be integral partners in the education of their children, and I couldn't agree more.

The minister went on to say that he wanted "to hear from the NDP if they don't believe that parents are partners in education, if they don't believe in the responsibility of parents and families in the education of their children." Well, let me assure the minister

that, yes, of course the NDP believes that parents should be partners in education. This is exactly the reason why we are speaking out against this change towards an opt-in, because evidence is really clear about the benefits for youth who receive comprehensive sexual health education. Some of the top-line benefits include lower teen pregnancy rates, lower sexually transmitted infection rates, and delayed timing for first sexual encounters.

If I want parents to be partners in education, I would want them to understand the benefits of the sexual health curriculum. I would want them to understand that the best way for young people to make informed, safe, and positive choices about their sexuality and sexual health is to receive developmentally appropriate and comprehensive sex education.

There is a lot of evidence to support the benefits of comprehensive sexual health education. The American Academy of Pediatrics speaks to the need for

comprehensive [sexual health] education [to] occur across the developmental spectrum, beginning at early ages and continuing throughout childhood and adolescence . . .

- Sex education programs should build an early foundation and scaffold learning with developmentally appropriate content across grade levels.

5:50

The reason for that is all the known benefits of comprehensive sexual health education, which include: reductions in homophobic bullying; improved knowledge, attitudes, and reporting of domestic violence and intimate partner violence; prevention of childhood sexual abuse by way of improved knowledge, attitude, skills, and social-emotional outcomes related to personal safety and touch; delayed initiation of sexual intercourse; reduced sexual risk taking; increased knowledge about sexuality; safer sex behaviours; the risks of pregnancy, HIV, and other STIs. I would ask the minister why he isn't speaking to parents about these benefits. Why is the minister putting barriers between kids and this critical information?

There was a great study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* that was published in 2020. The article title is Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education authored by Dr. Eva S. Goldfarb and Dr. Lisa D. Lieberman. As the title suggests, this was a review of the literature around the role that school-based sex education plays in the sexual health and well-being of young people, a review of 30 years of literature. There were a number of outcomes that I want to draw attention to on the effectiveness of sex education efforts.

On the issue of gender-based violence, the report says that a comprehensive sexual health curriculum results in improved knowledge and attitudes about and reporting of domestic violence and intimate partner violence.

There is extensive evidence that school-based programs have resulted in improved knowledge and attitudes related to [domestic violence] and [intimate partner violence], including reduction in rape myths, victim blaming, and sexist attitudes . . . and increased knowledge and attitudes about [intimate partner violence].

I would ask why the minister doesn't want to communicate with parents about this benefit of comprehensive sexual health education.

This report looks specifically at a program run for 8th and 9th graders that was run as part of a sexual health curriculum that demonstrated reduction of sexual violence perpetration at immediate post-test . . . as well as reduced perpetration and victimization of physical violence at the 4-year follow-up.

These are long-term impacts.

Compared with controls, treatment schools reported 25% less psychological abuse perpetration, 60% less sexual violence perpetration, and 60% less physical violence perpetration with a current dating partner.

I would ask again: why doesn't the minister want to talk to parents about this benefit of sexual health education?

You know, I'm very flattered that the Premier has gone to such great lengths to quote me this week in the House. I'm looking forward to the announcement of a return of financial supports for youth in government care. It's gratifying to hear that the government agrees with us that youth need support right up to their mid-20s. But mostly I'm gratified because that understanding of developmental psychology can be applied here because if you understand that kids are still in key developmental phases at this time in their life, then it's not too far a stretch to understand why it is that we need to work to get more kids, not fewer, into our sexual health units.

This bill ignores evidence and best practice around sexual health education, it does nothing to increase parent engagement with their child's education, and it actively causes harm to a very vulnerable group of youth. I encourage all members of this House to vote against Bill 27.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would just like to provide an additional clarification with respect to the ruling on the point of order, because I'm concerned with one of the comments that the hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington made in her decision to "change tack."

I want to reiterate to the Assembly that the Speaker has no desire to limit your ability to criticize the record of any member of this Assembly. I want you to know that you are able to do that and it is important. That's what we are here to do, to scrutinize, to provide all of the comments that we would like to about the record. At no point in time was I trying to prevent you or any member of this Assembly from criticizing the record of another. The language which we use to do that is important, and that was the purpose in my intervention, not to prevent anyone from criticizing the record of another member.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think I have much time left, but I will still make some brief remarks. I listened to the minister's comments on second reading. When the bill was introduced, I read it. When I heard the minister's comment, I realized that that's not what I read in the bill, so I got the bill out to try to read that again.

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to ensuring strong learning opportunities regardless of whether those opportunities are in-person, online or in a home education [setting].

However, the minister in his remarks just focused on how they will ban all kinds of education except for in-person learning. It doesn't matter if there is a pandemic, there are floods, there are wars. That's the preferred way that they will choose to go and will reject all kinds of safety measures which may otherwise be seen as health measures put forward by the school board in their schools. I think a forward-looking government will focus on what lies ahead of us, what challenges lie ahead of us, and this government is still litigating the pandemic just to kind of please and rile up their base about whether masks should have been worn or not.

There are so many issues that the education system is facing. They could have focused on that. Our classrooms are overcrowded. They could have focused on that. Our classrooms are lacking support staff with the firing during the pandemic. If they want, we can litigate that, whether that was the right thing to do or not. They let go of EAs via tweet during the pandemic. Those schools never got those EAs back. There are students who need help with English as a second language. They're not getting those supports. There are issues with assessments that are done in school. Parents are not getting those assessments done in a timely manner. We have been asking for mental health supports in our schools. The government is not listening to that.

But out of everything, out of all these issues, they decided to relitigate what happened during the pandemic and just signal to the fringe right-wing element here that next time should something happen like that, we will not close down the schools or something along those lines. That's not what a forward-looking government that is serious about education does.

Then they are giving the minister a lot of powers through this act, a lot of regulatory power, even in areas where this government lacks expertise instead of working with teachers, working with students, working with those who know about . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time for debate on this matter has concluded. Pursuant to Standing Order 3(1) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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