



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, April 7, 2025

Day 94

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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## Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 1

Vacant: 2

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Nate Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
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Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridor Development
Chelsae Petrovic	Parliamentary Secretary for Health Workforce Engagement
Ron Wiebe	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (North)
Justin Wright	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (South)
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

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

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Brar  
Kasawski  
Kayande  
Stephan  
Wiebe  
Wright, J.

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

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Deputy Chair: Vacant

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Cyr  
de Jonge  
Elmeligi  
Hoyle  
Stephan  
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Wright, J.

### **Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee**

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Long

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Ellingson  
Hunter  
Ip  
Lovely  
Rowswell  
Sabir  
Wright, J.

### **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

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Batten  
Haji  
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Lunty  
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### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

Chair: Mr. Getson

Deputy Chair: Mr. van Dijken

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Dyck  
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### **Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. Cooper

Deputy Chair: Mr. Getson

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Hunter  
Metz  
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Sabir  
Singh  
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### **Standing Committee on Private Bills**

Chair: Ms Pitt

Deputy Chair: Mr. Cyr

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

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Wiebe

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Bouchard  
Ceci  
Cyr  
Dach  
Gray  
Sinclair  
Stephan

### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Chair: Mr. Sabir

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

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de Jonge  
Ellingson  
Johnson  
Lunty  
McDougall  
Renaud  
Schmidt

### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Deputy Chair: Ms Sweet

Al-Guneid  
Armstrong-Homeniuk  
Boitchenko  
Calahoo Stonehouse  
Dyck  
Eggen  
Hunter  
Yao

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 7, 2025

[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 interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Hon. members, it being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Chad Ohman. I invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

### Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!  
True patriot love in all of us command.  
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,  
The True North strong and free!  
From far and wide, O Canada,  
We stand on guard for thee.  
God keep our land glorious and free!  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

### Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

**The Speaker:** The Legislative Assembly is grateful to be situated on Treaty 6 territory. This land has been the traditional region of the Métis people of Alberta, the Inuit, the ancestral territory of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Iroquois, and Nakota Sioux people. The recognition of our history on this land is an act of reconciliation, and we honour those who walk with us. We further acknowledge that the province of Alberta also exists within treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10 territories and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, it's my absolute pleasure to introduce to you and through me a group of Scottish parliamentarians from the Scottish Parliament. I had the pleasure of meeting with them this morning and also had lunch with a number of my colleagues here in the Assembly. They are here as we are addressing and exploring several relevant issues in both jurisdictions. We're pleased to be joined by the deputy presiding officer, MSP Annabelle Ewing; the deputy convener of the Economy and Fair Work Committee, MSP Michelle Thomson; and the deputy convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs, and Culture Committee, MSP Alexander Stewart; the private secretary to the office of the presiding officer, Jennifer Griffin; and the international relations officer, Mr. Steven Bell. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

### Statement by the Speaker

#### Vimy Ridge Day

**The Speaker:** Today my office provided Vimy pins to all members of the Assembly. These pins were supplied by the Vimy Foundation to recognize the national day of remembrance of the

Battle of Vimy Ridge on April 9. Since 2006 the Vimy Foundation has dedicated to raising awareness and educating Canadians about the Battle of Vimy Ridge, one of Canada's most important engagements during the First World War. More than 10,600 Canadians lost their lives during this battle, which took place in northern France from April 9 to 12.

I encourage members to wear these pins as we prepare to commemorate this day of remembrance. Each colour on the pin – red, dark blue, grey blue, and green – symbolizes a respective division while the sequential arrangement of the colours mirrors the alignment of the Canadian troops on that historic day.

Although the human costs were staggering, the battle was a defining historical moment for our country and in the establishment of the Canadian identity and one of national pride. Canada defeated the German army for this strategic position, representing the largest territorial advance of the allies up to the point in the war.

Built between 1925 and 1936, the Canadian National Vimy Memorial monument is at the centre of a 250-acre preserved battlefield that includes the grounds where the famous battle took place. The memorial honours all of the 11,285 Canadians killed in France during the First World War and those who had unknown or known graves.

Most of you are aware of our very own one-fortieth scale depiction of the monument in the Queen Elizabeth II Building. Members of the Northern Alberta Lego Users Group unveiled the Lego constructed in 2017, shortly before the 100th anniversary of the battle.

I hope that you'll join me in remembering those who sacrificed so much as we continue to enjoy the freedoms fought for on that day. Let's we forget.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I have two further introductions today. Today's wonderful rendition of *O Canada* was sung by Chad Ohman. Chad Ohman is a musician originally from Gwynne, Alberta. Now an enthusiastic Edmontonian of 15 years, he's enjoyed singing with the award-winning Chronos Vocal Ensemble chamber choir for the past 11 of those years. When he's not singing, he's proud to serve his neighbourhood of Inglewood as the treasurer of the Inglewood Community League. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Lastly, hon. members, it's my pleasure to introduce members of the public service joining us in the gallery today. They are participating in a full-day public service orientation which explores the legislative, budgetary, and committee processes, enabling each participant to apply their knowledge to their role in the public service. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has a school group to introduce.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce the grade 6 students from Brookside elementary school in my riding of Edmonton-Whitemud along with fantastic parents and their teacher Amanda Thomson. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly students from the Rosedale Christian School, which is in the Rich Valley, Crooked Creek area, who are joining us today

with their teacher Mr. Matt Toews and some of their family members. May they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you the teachers and parents and all 35 students from Soraya Hafez school. If you could all please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

**Mr. Horner:** We're fighting over this school group, Mr. Speaker.

It is my privilege to rise and introduce 24 grade 9 students from St. Thomas Aquinas school in Provost along with their teacher Hilary Mawson. I ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Mr. McIver:** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House seven great members of the Retail Council of Canada. They are relentless advocates for small and large retailers across Alberta and Canada. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Lauren Berlinguette, executive director, and Laura James, director of awareness and outreach, with the Eating Disorder Support Network of Alberta. It was a pleasure meeting with you today and hearing about your valuable work. I ask that you rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you two young ladies from Calgary and one from the outstanding community of Three Hills, Alberta, my daughter, Simone Ellis, and her two friends Landon McKiernan and Catarina. They're here in honour of their friend Malcolm Torrance, who recently passed away from epilepsy a few days ago. He was a huge fan of politics. I ask you to extend them the warm welcome of this House and to remember the incredible life of such a wonderful young man.

Thank you.

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti has a statement to make.

### Acute-care Funding Model

**Mr. Wiebe:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 1 we celebrated the establishment of Alberta's third refocused health care pillar, Acute Care Alberta, and we are thrilled that we can now fully embrace an exciting and refreshing new chapter for acute-care delivery in our province. Acute Care Alberta will help pave the way towards building a more accountable, efficient, and patient-focused delivery model for Albertans. This unique provincial health agency will directly work with acute-care providers to reduce emergency department and surgery wait times, lower response times, and improve access to care in rural communities.

To further support the work of Acute Care Alberta, our government announced today a new patient-focused funding initiative to enhance accountability, transparency, and fair allocation of resources. This new funding initiative will effectively pay hospitals based on the service they provide. This funding will reflect the number of patients that are treated and the complexity of their care. Through this model efficiency is incentivized, ensuring that allocated funds are directly tied to patient care and deliveries. In fact, activity-based funding has been successfully implemented in Australia and many European nations, including Sweden and Norway. British Columbia and Ontario are also using this model in various ways.

Introducing a new funding model is essential to our government's continued improvement to health care delivery for Albertans. We need new ideas and innovative models to ensure that we have an effective health care system that supports increasing demand and population growth. Mr. Speaker, our government will customize the new patient-focused funding through extensive consultation to ensure that we can identify the best approach to utilize this model. As we improve our health care system, we are ensuring that all Albertans can get the health care they need when and where they need it.

Thank you.

### Provincial Response to U.S. Tariffs

**Mr. Kasawski:** Mr. Speaker, like many Albertans, I listened closely to President Trump's tariff announcement last week. While Canada may have avoided the worst of the tariff rates compared to other nations, the Premier needs to know that now is not the time for victory laps. What Trump announced will still hurt a lot of people, hard-working Albertans, families, and businesses of all sizes.

These tariffs threaten to cripple Canadian industries and undermine the livelihoods of workers across this country. Just last month Alberta lost 15,000 jobs and saw a decline in key sectors like manufacturing. Alberta has the highest growth in unemployment rate in Canada. Also, millions of Albertans are watching their RRSPs and pensions evaporate amidst a stock market downturn triggered by these tariffs.

In moments like these we must respond not with panic but with purpose. Alberta must stand with Team Canada, partnering with the federal government and other provinces to craft a smart strategic plan. We need to think long term and act boldly. That means building a robust internal Canadian market. We have an opportunity to build an economic fortress of 40 million people strong. We must expand global trade in agriculture, energy, and manufacturing so we're not overly reliant on one trading partner, and we must deal with the U.S. in a way that makes our value undeniable. We also have a unique opportunity to turn a shield into a sword by attracting top talent from the U.S. and around the world to innovate, grow businesses, and strengthen Alberta.

This moment demands leadership, not showmanship. It's time to build a stronger Alberta and a stronger Canada, but we need to act now.

### Eating Disorder Treatment

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Mr. Speaker, earlier today I had the pleasure of meeting with the Eating Disorder Support Network of Alberta, or EDSNA. Eating disorders include anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating, which are serious illnesses, not choices. Sadly, they're often misunderstood and unrecognized, leaving many untreated and facing significant long-term physical or psychological consequences. Eating disorders have the second-

highest mortality rate of all mental illnesses, with cardiovascular complications and suicide being the two most common causes of death. Anorexia nervosa is particularly deadly as malnutrition can lead to dental issues, organ dysfunction, and osteoporosis. These disorders often co-occur with mental illnesses like depression, anxiety, personality disorders, or other trauma. Approximately 55,000 Albertans are thought to be suffering from symptoms serious enough to be clinically diagnosed as an eating disorder, yet only 10 per cent of those will ever receive treatment.

These alarming statistics show why the work of EDSNA is so valuable. Founded in 2014 by a mother of a youth facing an eating disorder, EDSNA offers low-barrier services province-wide, including virtual supports, outreach, and research to improve approaches to eating disorders. Simply put, their vision is that no Albertan should face an eating disorder alone. Our government shares that vision and is taking steps to help those suffering from eating disorders, particularly our young and youth. Nearly \$10 million was invested across three years to establish Alberta's first residential recovery centre for eating disorders, which recently opened. This facility and program will close a gap in care for young Albertans diagnosed with eating disorders, yet there's more work to be done. I'm confident that both Alberta's government and EDSNA will be part of that work.

To those struggling: you're not alone. Recovery is possible, and you deserve support on that journey.

Thank you.

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

### Green Shirt Day

**Member Miyashiro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wearing a special jersey today, number 27, Boulet, in honour of Green Shirt Day and the Logan Boulet effect on organ donation. Like countless young hockey players growing up in Canada, I rode the bus every season. My coaches, my teammates, and our families were always confident that we would arrive safely back home after our games. On April 6, 2018, the Humboldt Broncos bus was involved in a catastrophic accident that sent shockwaves across the country and through the sports world. Logan's parents, Toby and Bernadine, were following in their car, and they searched the wreckage for their son, Logan, a defenceman on the Broncos, before learning that he'd been rushed to hospital. The severity of Logan's injuries meant that he would not survive, but he had told his family a few months earlier that he wanted to be an organ donor like his mentor and coach Ric Suggitt had been the previous year.

Despite being only 21 years old, Logan knew the importance of organ and tissue donation and that he wanted to be an organ donor like coach Ric. So on that horrible night, in the face of such tragedy, the Boulets knew what Logan wanted. His organ donations meant that six people were given a new lease on life. Immediately after, news spread about this young defenceman's donations, and almost 150,000 Canadians registered to become organ donors. The Logan Boulet effect, as it had been called, even touched me as I actually finally signed up to be an organ donor as well thanks to Logan and the Boulets. Green Shirt Day reminds us all to have those conversations with our families and to register as an organ donor.

Mr. Speaker, Toby, Bernadine, and Logan's sister, Mariko, are constituents of mine in Lethbridge-West. We should all be grateful for their tireless efforts to promote and encourage organ donation, which has created a legacy that will truly save lives.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

### Alberta in Canada

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For a long time Alberta has been the largest contributor to Canada's fiscal balance. However, when the rest of Canada decides to assign blame for various issues, all eyes point west. Our province's strength has been taken for granted time and time again. Despite creating jobs, providing essential resources, and helping this country grow, we never get the recognition we deserve. We have grown used to seeing our federal government and many of its branches turn their backs on Alberta despite claiming to be part of Team Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be part of Team Canada – I really do – but I want to be part of the real Team Canada, the one that's supposed to be about provinces working together, supporting each other, recognizing each other's strengths, and filling the gaps where we can. My constituents tell me how strange it is that when they raised the flag years ago, they were seen as outliers. Now, with every political-amnesia stunned Liberal supporting made-in-China gear celebrating Canadian unity, Team Canada has become nothing more than a convenient political slogan, sadly, a quick fix for those who prefer performative politics over real action.

When things get hard, where is this so-called Team Canada? Seems like nowhere. Where was Team Canada when our Premier was working to reduce tariffs? Nowhere. Where was Team Canada when our oil and gas industry was under attack by policies that hurt our province? Nowhere. Where was Team Canada when jobs and livelihoods of hard-working Albertans came under threat? Nowhere. Where was Team Canada the last 10 years when Alberta was fighting to remove the carbon tax? Nowhere. Where have they ever been when Alberta needed their help, Mr. Speaker? The answer yet again, sadly, is nowhere. Team Canada has been doing what it does best: sitting back, waiting for the moment to claim the glory while Alberta continues to do the heavy lifting.

Mr. Speaker, we're tired of being taken granted of. It's time for this country to recognize the value that we bring to the table and show us the respect we deserve.

1:50

### Oral Question Period

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

### Premier's Remarks on U.S. Tariffs

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, instead of denouncing Trump's tariffs, the Premier took a victory lap. Albertans are seeing their pensions and retirement plans plummet while Trump's tariffs kill investments, tank stock markets, and hurt jobs. How did the Premier respond? She said, "This is precisely what I have been advocating for from the U.S. Administration for months." Why did the Premier celebrate Trump's horrific economic policies that are hurting Albertans and destroying people's retirement savings?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier has the call.

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Diplomacy is clearly the best avenue for us to try to get progress with the United States. I'm glad to see that the vast, vast, vast majority of goods and services that Albertans sell into the American market are tariff-free. We have more work to do to make sure that steel and aluminum and timber and autos also get the same treatment, and it looks like we're going to see an acceleration of negotiations on the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement once the election is over. I think we should all be

happy that we're going to see at least an 18-month acceleration of that process to get over this hump in our relationship.

**Ms Gray:** We should all be happy, Mr. Speaker? The things that the Premier is saying are completely disconnected from what Albertans are thinking and what Canadians are thinking.

The Premier called Trump's tariffs "an important win for Canada and Alberta." With economists suggesting we're headed for a global recession, Albertans do not think of this as a win. Oil prices have plummeted below \$60 a barrel, with one analyst suggesting it could go much, much further. That could add up to \$10 billion to Alberta's deficit and destroy thousands of jobs. Will the Premier admit she was wrong to take a victory lap?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, I know the members opposite only recently discovered that tariffs and advocacy against tariffs was an important issue and that's why they're trying to make up for lost time. I think they forgot that the initial starting point was 25 per cent tariffs on everything. If we had had 25 per cent tariffs on everything, our economy would have shaved off hundreds of thousands if not millions of jobs. We have to use the pathway that we know is working. The pathway is diplomacy; the pathway is identifying the areas of common interest and getting the tariffs removed on those other products.

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, it is not working. The Premier said, "The worst of this tariff dispute is behind us," and that's not what economists say. This is closing Canadian factories, people are losing their jobs, and Canadians are seeing their pensions and retirement accounts take huge losses. The Premier should admit that she was wrong to say the worst is behind us, she should apologize for her pointless efforts to cozy up to American right-wing extremists and for taking a victory lap about Trump's harmful tariffs. Will she do so?

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

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how I could be more clear with the members opposite; 25 per cent tariffs on \$600 billion worth of goods going across the border is demonstrably worse than having targeted tariffs on a handful of products that we know through diplomacy we'll be able to reduce. That to me is a demonstration that you engage with the U.S. administration, you make the argument about how we benefit from mutual trade, and it's going to work over and over and over again. We've got some work to do on autos, on steel, on aluminum, and on timber, and we're going to keep working on it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition for question 2.

#### Investigation of Health Services Procurement

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, on March 3 the Premier said that she'd hired retired judge Raymond Wyant to look into some of the allegations of the corrupt care scandal. Now we know he will not have the power to subpoena, but she claimed that he would be able to look into what he likes to get Albertans some answers. Will the Premier commit that Mr. Wyant will have access to all government records from her office, including those from former and current staff?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier has risen.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General and the retired judge can have access to any of the records that they ask for. We want to get to the bottom of it.

What we announced today, with activity-based funding, is exactly what is going to address what the members opposite have been raising. We will have a single price that is going to be publicly transparent for all surgeries regardless of where an individual receives that treatment, whether it's at an AHS facility, a Covenant Health facility, or a chartered surgical facility. We're looking forward to getting to the implementation on this, Mr. Speaker, and making sure that Albertans know exactly how every single taxpayer dollar is spent in health care.

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, what the members opposite here have been raising are issues with corruption, kickbacks, and making sure we get the money that Albertans deserve to have spent in health care put in the right places.

Now, the government's statement of defence in this scandal included text messages between the former CEO and the Premier's then chief of staff, Marshall Smith, but a freedom of information request for Mr. Smith's work phone messages says that no such records exist. That doesn't make sense. How did the government file a statement of defence with screenshots of texts clearly about government business, from Marshall Smith, if there are no texts?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, at issue is why it is that there are different prices being paid at different facilities for the same surgery. That is what we're trying to get to the bottom of, and that's what we announced we were solving today. With activity-based funding there will be a single price that will follow the patient to whichever surgical centre that they managed to get their surgery at. It will be adjusted on the basis of complexity, and that is exactly the kind of transparency that Albertans expect. We are addressing the issues that the members opposite raised.

**Ms Gray:** Albertans expect accountability for corruption.

Mr. Wyant will not be able to get to the bottom of this if the government is hiding evidence. The terms of Mr. Wyant's contract do not permit him to subpoena those he deems need to give sworn testimony, and that's because it is not a true public inquiry. This is a tightly controlled dog-and-pony show designed to get the government the outcome that they want. Will the government provide Mr. Wyant with all of Marshall Smith's devices so that he can review all the records related to this scandal, or is this the end of ethical, competent government as we know it?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, let's remember what the former CEO's allegations were. She was concerned that there were different prices charged at different facilities for the same procedure. We have a low of about \$3,700 being charged at Clearpoint and a high of \$8,300 being charged at Alberta Surgical Group. Under the policy that we announced today, we are going to have every procedure have the same price and the funding follow the patient to the facility that they wish to go to, adjusted for complexity, so everybody knows what the price is and we have the transparency.

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for question 3.

#### AHS Patient Food Service Policy

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, on March 17 this government sent a memo to all of AHS that said, "Clinics are encouraged to remind patients to bring snacks, meals, or money for food purchases." The result of that memo: kids receiving cancer care were denied Popsicles as a comfort. Why did this government tell children with cancer to bring their own Popsicles to their cancer treatment?



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

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite may now see why it is we needed a new CEO at Alberta Health Services. The policy . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. the Premier is the one with the call.

**Ms Smith:** The policy was announced under the old CEO. The policy was cancelled . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order. I'm not sure if members of the opposition know how this works, but I stand up, correct you, and then after I sit down, it's not licence to continue to be loud and interrupt that who has the call, which is the Premier.

**Ms Smith:** The policy was announced under the old CEO in September. The policy was cancelled under the new CEO when he realized that it was being implemented inappropriately. That's part of the reason why we knew we had to change things at Alberta Health Services, so that we would ensure that we would have the ability to reverse policies when they don't make sense for patients.

2:00

**Ms Gray:** Maybe the Premier could cut her trips to see right-wing American extremists first and then give Popsicles to kids who have cancer.

The government keeps trying to micromanage AHS, and the more they do that, the worse things seem to get. We now have the Minister of Health's former deputy minister running AHS himself, and it's clear this government can't run a Popsicle stand. Will this government apologize for their attacks on child patients, who deserve, as a basic decency, a Popsicle when they're undergoing their cancer treatments?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, this example is actually the exact opposite of what the members opposite said. Acting independently, they made a bad decision. When we discovered they'd made a bad decision, we reversed it. We know that sometimes in implementation is where problems lie, and it is up to us to make sure that patients are getting the care that they need. This was a decision that clearly was not intended to be implemented the way it was implemented, and the new CEO of AHS reversed it.

**Ms Gray:** This government has a credibility problem. When this memo came out, everyone believed that they would take Popsicles from kids because that's how they've been treating the health care system since they became government. Albertans are outraged, and rightfully so, that this government would take Popsicles from cancer patients. They have hundreds of millions of dollars for bloated contracts for friends running private surgical clinics, and it is time to stop wasting Albertans' money. When will the government stop the cuts and chaos in health care and learn to govern with ethics and accountability?

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

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The big change started April 1 with Acute Care Alberta. Alberta Health Services is going to become a service provider of the hospital services and the hospitals they run for us. Acute Care Alberta is going to hold them to account. We're going to have local decision-making at each facility. We're going to have funding following patients, and those facilities that are able to perform more surgeries are going to get more money. Like, this is the way you're going to get accountability in the health

care system, better performance, and you're going to ensure that we get better patient care. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

### Energy Industry Liability Management

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Mr. Speaker, lo and behold, the UCP quietly released the so-called mature asset strategy that has already been rejected by rural municipalities. This R-star scheme will leave Albertans on the hook for billions of dollars for the mess of bankrupt oil and gas companies. The UCP now says that their insurance fund will, quote, be managed by the province instead of, quote, ultimately backstopped by the province. Can the minister explain how much public money is put aside for this insurance fund that is managed by the province?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, zero. We believe in the polluter-pay principle. The problem is that we have a legacy asset problem that has been quantified somewhere around \$30 billion, and successive government after successive government hasn't addressed it. This government will. We want to make sure that property taxes are paid, that landowner leases are paid, that the polluter-pay principle is abided by, that insolvent companies do not receive transfer of assets if they can't afford to clean them up, and that every future well has a closure fund to make sure that it follows the well so that every single one will get cleaned up.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier would know there is no financial model to sustain this multibillion-dollar liability without funding of some sort. The Rural Municipalities of Alberta slammed the province, calling this process a misinformed view of the impacts of municipal property taxes on mature asset viability. This report shows the UCP is not working in the best interests of municipalities, landowners, and rural Albertans, who will be left with the mess on their lands. Why has this government abandoned the responsibility to represent the interests of rural Alberta when it comes to cleaning up this mess?

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, when you talk about who created the mess, the members opposite need to look in the mirror. They had a number of Chinese companies that came into Alberta with the inability to be able to properly take on the liability, and many of them, including Sequoia, went bankrupt and ended up turning those assets over to the Orphan Well Association for cleanup. That happened again and again and again under the members opposite. We are going to make sure that never happens again, that there is never a liability on a well site that is transferred to a company that has an inability to clean it up. We want property taxes paid. We want landowner leases paid.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Mr. Speaker, under the watch of this Premier liabilities have increased by \$10 billion in one year. Rural Alberta is home to 88 per cent of the inactive wells in Alberta. RMA said the scheme is "a narrow focus on keeping companies and wells profitable at any cost to other stakeholders, with no corresponding industry accountability, or consideration of impacts on everyone else." Instead of ethical, competent government, the UCP has abandoned rural landowners with this R-star scheme. Who is this government working for if they are not protecting the municipalities or rural Alberta?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite needs to read the report. It is very clear that what is being proposed is a polluter-pay principle, where individual oil companies are not only going to have

to pay the 3 per cent of liabilities down every single year, but they are also going to have to put aside closure funds for future liability on future drilling. We want to have a system in Alberta where no well is ever orphaned, where it always has money associated with it to clean up. They had the chance to address this when they were in government. They chose not to. This government is going to fix it.

### AHS Patient Food Service Policy (continued)

**Member Batten:** The cuts, chaos, and corruption from this UCP government continue. Last week Albertans learned this government tried to save money by taking away snacks, ginger ale, and Popsicles from children undergoing chemotherapy. These are not luxury items. These are items used for comfort, hydration, and dignity during painful procedures. The only reason this cruel policy was reversed is because they got caught, so let's be honest. How many other heartless cuts are quietly being pushed through across our health care system just to balance your books?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, that line of questioning is just plain insulting because no one – but no one – would ever take away anything that a cancer child requires. In fact, as soon as we were made aware of the misinterpretation of what was supposed to have been a policy that was decided in September . . . [interjections]

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

**Member LaGrange:** . . . that was to take effect in April – when we realized what it was being misinterpreted as, I was glad the CEO actually reversed it.

**Member Batten:** Given that the excuse “It wasn’t me” is not actually an excuse and given that a mother of a toddler with cancer said it best, and I quote, “They’re screaming in pain, and you’re taking away the only thing that comforts them,” end quote, given that families spend eight hours at a time in treatment rooms while their children endure lumbar punctures, IV insertions, and chemotherapy and this government thought that the best cost-saving measure was cutting a fruit cup, a pop, and a Popsicle, what kind of leadership is this? Will the minister apologize to every Albertan family hurt by this cold, heartless decision, or will she punt it?

**Member LaGrange:** I am exceptionally proud of the fact that the new CEO reversed that decision, Mr. Speaker. No one on this side of the House would ever – ever – consider taking away anything that would comfort a child. I’m a mother of seven children. I’ve been with children in hospital and know how comforting it is to get that little bit of a Popsicle or whether it is a cookie, et cetera. It is not what was intended, and in fact it’s why it was reversed.

**Member Batten:** Given that that also sounded like “It wasn’t me,” given that this UCP government tried to cut Popsicles and snacks from children battling cancer, enduring eight-hour chemo sessions, in pain, and denied even a juice box, and given that this heartless decision was done while also putting out bloated contracts to their friends, how can this minister possibly justify a system where parents of sick kids are forced to fight for basic things while she defends handing out millions of dollars to her buddies?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, that’s insulting, and none of that is true. In fact, it is our government that is actually going to build a stand-alone Stollery. The members opposite had a chance; they never did it. We are actually going to make sure that our children have the facilities they need to treat the illnesses they require. The members opposite had their chance. They didn’t do it, but we are absolutely going to make sure that we have that Stollery built.

### 2:10 Water Management

**Mr. Hunter:** Mr. Speaker, many Alberta communities, irrigators, and businesses have asked for more flexibility when it comes to transferring readily available water when and where they need it, but the system requires a 10 per cent holdback, often preventing this water from being safely used. With the strong leadership of our ministers of environment and red tape reduction, I am proud to say that Alberta’s government cut red tape and ended these unnecessary holdbacks. To the minister: can you please tell the great people of Alberta how ending these holdbacks will make more water available for those who need it?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that great question. Until now any time water was transferred, the rules required 10 per cent of it to be held back. This prevented it from going to the farmers or the other water users who desperately needed that water. Water users have repeatedly told us this policy hurts Albertans. It reduces water sharing and increases costs on farmers and communities. That’s why we removed the 10 per cent holdback, to make more water available for all.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the ministers for the work they did on this file. Given how important water is to all our lives, making more readily available water can be critical during times of drought and water shortages and further given that many southern Alberta communities, irrigators, farmers, and ranchers have faced challenges the last few years from drier conditions, this is a needed step to reduce red tape reduction. To the same minister: how does ending these unnecessary holdbacks help Alberta irrigators, businesses, and communities during future drought and water shortages?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much for that question. Mr. Speaker, the automatic holdback limited water supply during droughts and water shortages. Last summer one southern Alberta farmer with extra water could not transfer it to a desperate neighbour without holding back thousands of cubic metres. We heard this from irrigators. We heard it from municipalities, who also lost in some cases nearly their entire allocation because of the holdback. Now water will only be held back when needed for the environment or to protect neighbours downstream. This means more water will be available to go to the people who need it most.

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

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that our UCP government has taken strong and proactive action on drought and water shortages for the last year,

funding critical infrastructure communities need and announcing the largest water-sharing agreement in Alberta's history and further given that this is all part of the great work the minister of environment is doing to increase water storage and availability across our province, to the minister: can you please inform this House on what else we have done on the way to make more water available across our great province?

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

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his great advocacy on this issue. We're stepping up to increase water storage and maximize water availability across Alberta. Work is under way on the Bow River, Ardley, and Eyremore reservoirs, and a province-wide review is under way to determine the next wave of major projects. We heard from thousands of water users about ways to strengthen our current system, and we're now reviewing those great ideas, and we'll use them to keep improving in the months and years ahead.

### Provincial Response to U.S. Tariffs

**Mr. Deol:** The Trump tariffs are already wreaking havoc on Albertans' lives. Last month alone Alberta lost over 1,500 jobs. Our manufacturing sector is shrinking, and now we are facing a global recession. Alberta is entering this crisis from a vulnerable position because of this UCP government, and workers are bracing for even more hardship. Why hasn't this government taken these threats seriously? Where is the plan to protect Albertans, especially the workers and small businesses who will be hit directly?

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report that we've added 50,000 jobs over the past year, and we recognize the tremendous uncertainty with this ongoing tariff and trade dispute with the United States. That's why we're doubling down on our international trade efforts. I just returned from Germany, where I was alongside almost 50 Alberta companies among a delegation of 250 Canadian companies to diversify trade to other markets so that our producers, our manufacturers, our service providers can continue to create jobs, put food on the table for their families.

Thank you.

**Mr. Deol:** Given that because of the stock market crash triggered by Trump's tariffs, west Texas intermediate crude is now crashing towards \$60 a barrel – if that continues, Alberta could add billions to this government's already massive deficit – and given that the UCP cut supports from Alberta's most vulnerable, just like how they were caught trying to take Popsicles from cancer patients, can the minister tell Albertans what cuts they are planning next?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, there's obviously a lot of volatility and uncertainty in the world right now. I think that's why Budget 2025 took a prudent path with conservative estimates around the sensitivities that are so important to Alberta's bottom line, one of only two provinces that actually brought tariff risk into their baseline assumptions. Quebec did as well but only at 10 per cent across the board. I think what you see here is a prudent path that will allow Alberta to weather this storm. That's really what we're hearing from our colleagues right now, that what we have to do is continue with diplomacy.

**Mr. Deol:** Given that our caucus will bring forward an emergency motion to debate the urgent threat these U.S. tariffs cause through rising costs for businesses and consumers, Albertans' pensions, and the looming global recession, given that Alberta companies are

losing billions in value while the price of oil collapses and the tariffs wreak havoc on our jobs and our economy, given the Premier said that this was a big win for Alberta, why doesn't this government take this crisis seriously? Will they sit on their hands when jobs, savings, and Alberta's fiscal future are under threat?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, I was just in a call before question period with the federal Finance minister, the other provincial finance ministers, and the deputy governor of the Bank of Canada, and I can tell you that one thing that gives me a little comfort is the changing tune across this country about what we need to do as a country to grow our economy. The deputy governor was clear with all of us that the best thing we can do to increase productivity and grow our economy is get to a place where people can actually build things again, and that's what we've been advocating for. I think we're hearing it from all sides in this election. Hopefully that's something that comes out past this federal election. We can build things, grow the pie for everyone.

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

### AgriStability Program Changes

**Ms Sweet:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture businesses are facing 100 per cent tariffs from China on canola and peas and 25 per cent on pork production. The Canadian government has announced support for the country's agriculture sector as it deals with tariffs. The federal agriculture department says that the current payment cap under AgriStability will double to \$6 million for the 2025 program year. Supports will also be increasing the compensation rate from 80 per cent to 90 per cent. Does the minister of agriculture support these changes, and is the provincial government prepared to match it?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, it's an ordinary day, Mr. Speaker, because the NDP, in one breath, is complaining when the Premier and others from our government go down to defend Alberta's interests in the U.S., and then they advocate in question period to defend Albertans' interest in the U.S. Fortunately we don't listen to them, and our agriculture minister is in the U.S. right now supporting Alberta's interests, supporting Canada's interests, and standing up for all of the agricultural sectors in Alberta. We will be there till the end because, while those folks cheer against Alberta, we cheer for it.

**The Speaker:** I'm sure it was just an error on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs to refer to the presence or the absence of any member of the Assembly.

**Ms Sweet:** So that's a yes.

Given that the federal government has enabled provincial and territorial governments to proactively enter into agreements for interim payments at higher rates and initiating target advance payments to expediate those supports and given that in regions adopting these measures producers enrolled in AgriStability can apply for interim payments up to 75 per cent of their estimated final payment for the 2025 program year and they are asking for a triggered rate to also be increased, will the minister answer if Alberta will be one of the regions signing on to the changes to AgriStability? Agriculture producers need a yes, Minister.

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure this whole House and all Albertans that there's no stronger advocate for the livestock industry and Alberta's agricultural industry than the minister of agriculture here in Alberta, who has been in the United States

fighting at some time other than now. The fact is: Alberta producers know that Alberta's minister of agriculture will always have their back, will always work with them and squeeze everything out of Canada's government they can on behalf of Alberta agriculture producers because that's his job and he's good at it.

2:20

**Ms Sweet:** Well, given that it's a matching program, I really do hope that's a yes, and given that the AgriStability trigger has long been a problem for farmers and given that the program does not benefit farmers who do not trigger AgriStability this year nor will it benefit farmers who are not enrolled and given that the deadline to enrol is April 20, 2025, and filing of AgriStability claims happened at the end of the production year and given that this means no help for farmers experiencing short-term financial stress and that farmers should not have to take on more debt just because of trade injury, will the minister support the federal government implementing the AgriRecovery program immediately?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to largely repeat my last answer because it applies here. Alberta's minister of agriculture has been to the United States, is advocating for Alberta farmers, Alberta's people that grow crops, and they know they can trust that minister because he listens to them and he works with them to squeeze everything out of Canada's government that rightly can be squeezed for Alberta producers. The hon. member can set their mind at ease knowing that our person in charge is on the job with the support of the Premier. They're never going to get any better support than they're going to get in Alberta right now with this government.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

### Provincial Response to U.S. Tariffs

*(continued)*

**Mr. McDougall:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has taken a proactive approach in addressing U.S. tariff threats, including the Premier's recent visit to Florida, engaging directly with American lawmakers, media, and influencers to defend our key industries and protect Alberta jobs. Last week's announcement by the U.S. administration confirms that most Canadian exports, including Alberta's energy, agriculture, and mineral products, will remain tariff-free here, at least for now. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade: how has Alberta's diplomatic strategy contributed to this positive outcome for both Alberta and Canada?

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta's diplomatic strategy has been direct and effective, and our Premier and ministers have engaged governors, members of Congress, and U.S. industry and labour leaders to defend Alberta's jobs and secure market access. Alberta provides more oil to the U.S. than Saudi Arabia, Mexico, and Iraq combined. That trade supports over 2.4 million jobs. Our focused diplomacy ensured Alberta energy received a reduced tariff rate because our allies know we are essential to North America's energy security and prosperity now and into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

**Mr. McDougall:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Alberta is Canada's economic engine and safeguarding Alberta's industries is essential to protecting the national economy to the benefit of all Canadians and given that our government's direct engagement with U.S. lawmakers has focused

on constructive diplomacy, not political grandstanding, to the same minister: can you explain how Alberta's direct engagement with our largest trading partner of the United States by highlighting the mutual benefits of Canada-U.S. trade to American audiences truly reflects the spirit of Team Canada?

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, with millions of American jobs tied directly to trade with Canada, Canada's provinces are stepping up as a strong, consolidated front, protecting our jobs and economy. Last year alone Alberta exported over \$160 billion to the United States, more than 80 per cent in energy alone. These are facts that can't be ignored. Our direct engagement with the U.S. is yielding measurable results. American decision-makers now better understand that Canadian energy truly fuels their economy. We are proud to play a leading role in fuelling Canada's economic engine, and we are proud to lead the provinces in breaking down barriers to international trade.

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

**Mr. McDougall:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again to the minister. Given that while most Alberta exports remain tariff free, key sectors like steel, aluminum, and auto manufacturing are still facing harmful U.S. tariffs and given the importance of ensuring long-term trade certainty for Alberta workers and industries, to the same minister: what is Alberta's ongoing strategy to secure permanent, tariff-free access for our key sectors and to work with U.S. partners to remove or reduce remaining sector-specific tariffs?

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, we're leveraging our U.S. offices, our Washington presence, and targeted advocacy to industry and labour groups sector by sector for ongoing tariff relief. We're working shoulder to shoulder with allies in Washington and across key U.S. states to oppose tariffs that ultimately hurt families and businesses on both sides of the border. Alberta will continue to lead with facts, build alliances, and push for stable, permanent, tariff-free trade, which will benefit North Americans on both sides of the border. Alberta will keep making the case for free and fair trade because it's in everyone's interest.

### Education Funding

**Ms Chapman:** People from every corner of the world choose to make their home here in Canada. Canadian education is globally recognized for its focus on inclusivity, accommodating students from all backgrounds. But Alberta teachers face growing challenges with a lack of supports and resources needed for inclusive classrooms. Could the Minister of Education perhaps tell Albertans which province in this country has the lowest level of funding per student?

**Mr. Nicolaidis:** Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to report that in Budget '25 we are investing at record levels in our education system, including in specialized supports that students from all backgrounds need in order to succeed. We are investing more in early literacy and numeracy programming to help ensure that students get the right start. We are investing more in supports for . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Education is the only one with the call.

**Mr. Nicolaidis:** We are investing more in supports for refugee students as well as for students who have English as an additional language. Indeed, we will ensure our system is world class.

**Ms Chapman:** Given that it's Alberta – Alberta is the province with the lowest funding per student in the country – given that only three Canadian provinces have seen a decline in education funding over the last decade and one of those provinces is Alberta, where education spending per student is lower today than it was in 2019, and given that 60,000 new Canadians chose to call Alberta home last year, does the minister think these new Canadians don't deserve the same classroom supports they would receive in other provinces?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta continues to lead the way with our results in education. We are number one in Canada when it comes to reading, we are number one in Canada when it comes to math, and we rank against the very top jurisdictions globally when it comes to our rankings. Now, I'm very proud of the fact that thousands and thousands of more individuals are choosing to call Alberta home. We've reversed the trend. When the NDP was in power, they drove Albertans out of the province; they told them to go find work in other provinces. We are making Alberta the place to be again.

**Ms Chapman:** Given that strong public education is the cornerstone of healthy democracies, thriving economies, and vibrant communities, given that Canada is a country of opportunity and it is a quality education system that creates opportunities for individuals to succeed economically and socially, given that public education is one of society's great equalizers, when will the minister get on board with Canadian values and start funding Alberta students appropriately?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to do that right now. As part of Budget '25 we are providing over \$1 billion in additional funding to our school boards over the next three years. We're also investing over \$8.6 billion to build 100 more schools in our fastest-growing communities. We're investing more in literacy and numeracy supports and other specialized supports to ensure that every student has what they need to succeed. Alberta has a world-class education system, and we will ensure that it always is.

### Health Services in Rural Alberta

**Mr. Yao:** Mr. Speaker, across Canada we're in the depths of a health care crisis. Our nation is lacking family doctors and other health professionals. My cousin works in an emergency room in New Brunswick that's threatening to close due to staff shortages. Ontario is asking municipalities to stop using cash incentives to attract physicians because it's simply robbing poorer communities of these valuable professionals. CIHI is even reporting that in other provinces wait times are continuing to increase for hip, knee, and other priority procedures. Can the Minister of Health please expand on her plans for my community of Fort McMurray to address these types of challenges?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the ways that we're doing this is in fact allocating more funds, \$15 million, in Budget 2025 for new urgent care centres in not only Fort McMurray but also west Edmonton; south Edmonton; WestView, which is Stony Plain; Spruce Grove; east Calgary; Lethbridge; Medicine Hat; and Cold Lake. These specialized facilities will help to reduce emergency department wait times by providing timely care for unscheduled patients who arrive with unexpected but non life-threatening conditions. We anticipate they'll be up in three to four years.

2:30

**Mr. Yao:** Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: thank you so much for that answer. It is given that when we are addressing issues in our health care system, we must also look at our education system. Alberta has excellent postsecondary institutions that develop our future health workforce. The question, though, is: are we doing enough? Can the Minister of Advanced Education please explain the investments of rural postsecondary schools like Keyano College to support our health care system and how it will benefit all Albertans?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Thank you to the hon. member for that question. Mr. Speaker, addressing health care staffing challenges in rural Alberta is a priority for our government. That's why we have invested in key health care initiatives at Keyano College, including nearly \$3 million through the targeted enrolment expansion initiative for the expansion of their health care aide, primary care paramedic, and bachelor of science programs as well as about \$800,000 through the mental health professions enrolment expansion and more than \$1 million through the internationally educated nurses program.

Thank you.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you so much to the minister for that. It is given that Alberta's economy is largely impacted by its rural areas, with key industries such as ag and energy playing central roles. These rural regions continue to face challenges in population growth, which impacts their abilities to staff public services such as health care centres and other amenities. The shortage of skilled workers not only affects the delivery of those services but also the broader growth of rural communities. Can the Minister of Health provide further insight into what additional rural health initiatives are currently being developed or planned to ensure better access and quality of care for rural communities?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Supporting rural and remote health care is a top priority for our government. In fact, Budget 2025 increases health operating expenses to \$28 billion, improving access to care closer to home and building capacity at hospitals and rural facilities. Medical schools will also train over 100 additional physicians per year. A partnership with the University of Lethbridge and Northwestern Polytechnic will develop regional training centres both in Lethbridge and in Grande Prairie. We know that when students train in rural communities, they tend to stay in rural communities, and that is a win for rural communities.

### Surgery Wait Times

**Mr. Dach:** The Minister of Health claimed last November that Albertans are waiting 15.9 weeks for a hip replacement. That is not the lived experience of people in my community in Edmonton-McClung. I know seniors are waiting months or even years for hip and knee replacements. One of those people is Heidi, a retired nurse who's been waiting since January 2024, enduring debilitating pain. How can the minister claim that these wait times are 16 weeks when we all know that people like Heidi have been waiting for help for more than a year?

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

**Member LaGrange:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we are having more surgeries done in clinically approved times. We've gone from approximately 40 per cent in clinically approved to over 60 per cent in clinically approved times. But you know what? That's not good enough. We need 100 per cent in clinically approved times. That's why we actually announced the activity-based funding, which is patient-focused funding to increase surgeries. This year we anticipate getting over 316,000 surgeries, but we know we can do even better than that.

**Mr. Dach:** Heidi thinks you can do better, too, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the UCP has diverted money from the public health care system into private surgical facilities and given that private surgical facilities won't take Albertans with complex needs, people like my constituent Heidi, and given that this leaves the public system struggling under the burden of cases requiring hospital stays while more and more dollars get funnelled into private, for-profit care, why are people like Heidi forced to wait longer for the care they need so that this government can funnel money into private surgical facilities, who don't and won't take on the more complicated surgeries that people require?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, how hypocritical of the members opposite. When they were in power, they had 40,000 surgeries per year in chartered surgical facilities. Now we're doing over 62,000, but we have backlogs. Why wouldn't we have all hands on deck? That's exactly what we're going to do through the patient-focused funding that we are going to implement over the course of the next year and years to come. We know that every person deserves to have their surgery done in a timely fashion. We're not going to take any lessons from them. We are actually going to improve health care so that every surgery is done in a clinically approved time.

**Mr. Dach:** Mr. Speaker, let's have this government take a lesson from every Heidi in this province and every constituency.

Given that this government has been investing in private surgical facilities at the expense of the public system with nothing to show for it and given that this government has wasted health care dollars on Turkish Tylenol, questionable antivaccine research, to the minister: do seniors in Edmonton-McClung need to buy the minister a box at an Oilers game to get the medical care they need? What will it take?

**Member LaGrange:** Mr. Speaker, it takes being Albertan so that you can get surgeries done in clinically approved times. Everywhere across this country people are struggling, provinces are struggling. We're actually doing something to counteract that. The members opposite should support us in the activity-based funding that we announced today. Support the working group. Doctors are excited about it. I tell you, this is an opportunity for us to get more surgeries done within clinically approved times; 316,000 surgeries this year. We can take that to the next level, and it involves everyone getting onsite.

### Provincial Response to U.S. Tariffs (continued)

**Member Hoyle:** Mr. Speaker, four days ago the Premier assured Albertans that she solved everything. She ran an early victory lap on Trump's trade war and the looming threat of tariffs. She said that her diplomacy with the Trump administration was a "big win for Alberta and Canada" as a whole. Well, U.S. and Canadian markets are in free fall today, sinking for a third straight day, as economic experts say that Trump's tariffs are going to lead to a global

recession. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade. In March Albertans lost 15,000 jobs. I'd love to know: are Albertans really winning under a looming recession with your UCP government?

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans continue to earn the highest wages in the country and pay the lowest tax. Again, Alberta has added 50,000 jobs over the past 12 months. Alberta will continue to be the economic engine of Canada even through this period of uncertainty thanks to the strong leadership of our Premier and pro-business policies of our government. Let's compare that to the term under the NDP, where Alberta lost billions of dollars of investment and tens of thousands of jobs when there was no trade war.

**Member Hoyle:** Given that the TSX is falling off the cliff this morning, shaving billions of value off Alberta's medium and large companies, with economists everywhere ringing the alarm to brace for a recession because of these tariffs and given that the energy prices are falling, with oil trading at around \$60 per barrel, with thousands of workers worried about losing their jobs and our economy in chaos, to the minister: is the UCP ready to ditch Team Trump, come back to Team Canada, and get to work on doing everything possible to protect Alberta jobs?

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite are concerned about the situation with the United States, perhaps they should get involved. They should join us in our advocacy with U.S. lawmakers, businesses, labour groups. They should perhaps make some recommendations on internal trade, or they should join us in our efforts to diversify trade internationally. We don't need any more complaining. Albertans rejected that. They chose a government of action, not a government of inaction. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

**Member Hoyle:** Given that President Trump has proven to be erratic – threatening tariffs one day, pausing them the next, and then upping them randomly – and given that just a day ago he threatened yet another tariff on Canadian lumber simply because he felt like it and given that Albertans deserve a competent, ethical government that prioritizes them instead of this government spending Alberta's tax dollars to fly around to fancy cocktail parties with extreme right wingers in the U.S., to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade: what is this government's plan to insulate Albertans from a potential recession as a result of Trump's devastating tariffs?

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, it's a multipronged approach. First, we're maintaining the policies that have made Alberta the best place in Canada to do business. We're also pursuing the removal of additional barriers to internal trade. We're close to concluding the financial services chapter of the Canadian free trade agreement. We're looking at mutual recognition in trucking and consumer goods. We are also exploring direct-to-consumer alcohol agreements with other provinces and territories. On the internal trade file we're going out to other countries and we're asking them: would you like the most responsibly produced energy and food? And it turns out they do.

### 2:40 Rural Transportation Programs

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we understand the unique challenges of rural Albertans. Seniors, people with disabilities, and others who have limited mobility often face transportation barriers. It's often more difficult for families in rural areas to get from point A to point B compared to those in the urban centres. To the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social

Services: how is our government making transportation more accessible for rural Albertans?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're actually investing in this budget, a budget the NDP voted against, \$15 million to Healthy Aging Alberta, as an example, including \$3.5 million of that to 19 communities that don't have accessible transportation options for seniors and others, to be able to make sure that communities like that can build more transportation options to help people to get to things like doctor's appointments and to other things that they need in their life. That's a sharp contrast from the NDP when they were in government, who told all Albertans in areas where there were no buses to go take a bus.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the answer. Given that having access to social activities is very important for a healthy and happy life and given that seniors are not the only group of people that face mobility challenges that often make transportation more difficult and given that transportation barriers in the rural areas also impact people with disabilities, to the same minister: how will this program help Albertans with disabilities?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the transportation options that we're building aren't just for seniors. Those seniors are an important part of the work that we're doing when it comes to this investment, but it's also for all Albertans, including those facing disabilities. Some of the work that we're doing with this investment is investing in helping communities be able to invest in more accessible vehicles that can help individuals be able to get to things like doctor appointments and things like that as well as \$105 million being invested in FCSS, again, to help with programs like Meals on Wheels and other aspects of this important investment across the province.

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

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that a program like this ensures that our rural communities can continue to thrive and grow and given that our government is committed to supporting the most vulnerable in Alberta and given that this transportation program is just one of the many ways Alberta's government supports facing mobility challenges, to the same minister: what other programs and supports are helping improve the lives of those living with mobility challenges in rural Alberta?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we're investing in things like ramps in people's homes, upgrades to washrooms, even helping with low-interest loans to be able to help seniors be able to remain inside the homes that they built in the communities that they built. Sadly, when the NDP were in government, we saw thousands of people forced into beds, into programs that they didn't belong in, that were not right for them. That's why this government ultimately is making assisted living Alberta our new health authority that's going to make sure that everybody is in the appropriate place to receive the services that they need in every community, urban and rural, unlike the NDP, who have rejected almost all of rural Alberta.

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

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

## Members' Statements

*(continued)*

### Wildlife Corridors in the Bow Valley

**Dr. Elmeli:** Thirty-four thousand vehicles a day transect an internationally significant wildlife corridor on the Trans-Canada highway, making crossing the road risky for drivers and wildlife. Solving this problem is why the Bow Valley is the international leader when it comes to wildlife connectivity and corridor ecology. Today 47 overpasses and underpasses combined with highway fencing in the Bow Valley facilitate hundreds of thousands of wildlife crossings each year and have reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions by more than 80 per cent.

Now Alberta Transportation has plans to fence 10 kilometres of highway through Canmore – yay – but no wildlife crossing structures are included. That means bears, elk, wolves, and even weasels won't be able to cross the road at all. While local experts have shared recommendations for good crossing locations based on data, they've been ignored. This once great project will now sever wildlife movement, and it's not just the fence. The Three Sisters Mountain Village development moves forward despite local opposition and an approval based on a 32-year-old NRCB decision and an outdated, inadequate environmental impact assessment. The UCP government even narrowed the south Canmore wildlife corridor to make this development even bigger.

To add salt to the wound, the owner of TSMV also owns oil and gas companies that owe Albertans \$180 million in municipal taxes. They're telling the people of Canmore: don't worry about wildlife and local services while this company skips out on paying its taxes; that's just what fuels the economy, right?

Research shows that trails in the Bow Valley are already dramatically impacting wildlife movement, displacing bears and wolves hundreds of metres from trails.

[The Speaker in the chair]

For communities that take pride in coexisting with wildlife, every day is another UCP failure, from forcing a massive housing development in a wildlife corridor for their friends to utter incompetence at building a fence without crossing structures and their inability to better manage recreation's impacts. Hopefully, our wildlife will survive the UCP cuts, corruption, and chaos until a better NDP government takes over in 2027.

## Notices of Motions

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

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time under Standing Order 42 I intend to move the following motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta (a) acknowledge that the recently implemented tariffs by the government of the United States will have serious negative impacts on Alberta's workers, small-business owners, and key industries, including energy, agriculture, and manufacturing; (b) recognize the urgent threat presented by these tariffs to Albertans' retirement plans as a result of ongoing economic

instability and investment losses; and (c) urge the government to (i) publicly express its opposition to the tariffs announced by President Donald Trump on behalf of the government of the United States which are harming Alberta's economy, and (ii) take all necessary steps to protect major industries in Alberta by strengthening and expanding domestic and international markets for Alberta products and implement comprehensive supports for impacted workers and families to help mitigate any negative impacts on jobs, pensions, and retirement savings.

### Introduction of Bills

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services and Deputy Premier.

#### Bill 49 Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

**Mr. Ellis:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce Bill 49, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

If passed, the legislation would make effective changes to combat illicit scrap metal theft, support safer and disaster-resilient communities, provide further framework for the new independent agency police service and the Police Review Commission.

I hereby move first reading of Bill 49, the Public Safety and Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a first time]

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

**Mr. Cyr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of this wonderful petition that one of my local grade 6 classes had done up. Apparently, they hate daylight savings time, and all 17 of them decided to put a petition for it. It brings a tear to my heart.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a report I had to FOIP to get, and it was supposed to go to the minister. It's Accessible Alberta: Recommendations for Provincial Accessibility Legislation from the office of the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities. Guess what? It's recommending the legislation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future I have something that was provided during answer period at the review of the estimates. It's from the Jobs, Economy and Trade minister, and it's answers to questions from the members opposite.

2:50

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

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a media release from Parkland Institute announcing their report on Operation Profit: Private Surgical Contracts Deliver Higher Costs and Longer Waits. I encourage all Albertans to read it.

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

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have six tablings and five copies of each. The first one showcases a money trail from researchers who have made tracking Chinese Communist Party influence on Canadian Prime Ministers and elections.

The second one is an article that goes into depth on Chinese interference on our current federal election.

The third one is an article by CSIS highlighting Beijing's control over media in Canada enabling election interference.

The fourth one discusses international intelligence agencies warning Canada is losing the fight against Chinese criminal networks.

The fifth one is an article about a known sympathizer and praiser of terrorist organizations Hamas and Hezbollah having been too extreme for the federal Liberals but just extreme enough for the Alberta NDP, who he represented just a few weeks ago.

The sixth one shows that if the Liberals win the federal election, they will continue to block Canadian energy from getting to Canadian markets by upholding C-69.

**Member Irwin:** It's now been nearly a month since the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton experienced egregious cuts due to this UCP government. I've got another of the countless e-mails that I've received and my colleagues have received urging this UCP government to do the right thing, reverse their cuts, and fund the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton.

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

**Member Miyashiro:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a guest opinion that was published on April 2, 2025, in the *Lethbridge Herald*. The writer, Richard Quinlan, is a retired biologist from Alberta fish and wildlife, and his piece against surface mining in southern Alberta is titled We Can't Trust Headwaters to the Government.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

Seeing none, I do have a tabling. Under section 9.1(4) of the Child and Youth Advocate Act I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of the six-month update letter on behalf of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

Hon. members, that brings us to points of order, of which there were none, successfully bringing us to one day without a point of order.

Orders of the day: we'll proceed to those immediately after hearing the notice of motion from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

### Motions under Standing Order 42

#### Provincial Response to U.S. Tariffs

Ms Pancholi:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta (a) acknowledge that the recently implemented tariffs by the government of the United States will have serious negative impacts on Alberta's workers, small-business owners, and key industries, including energy, agriculture, and manufacturing; (b) recognize the urgent threat presented by these tariffs to Albertans' retirement plans as a result of ongoing economic instability and investment losses; and (c) urge the government to (i) publicly express its opposition to the tariffs announced by President Donald Trump on behalf of the government of the United States which are harming Alberta's economy, and (ii) take all necessary steps to protect major industries in Alberta by strengthening and expanding domestic and



international markets for Alberta products and implement comprehensive supports for impacted workers and families to help mitigate any negative impacts on jobs, pensions, and retirement savings.

**Ms Panholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 42 to request that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to debate a motion that is urgent and pressing and which I read out under Notices of Motions. I'd like to acknowledge that pursuant to Standing Order 42 I've provided the members of the Assembly with the appropriate number of copies, and I provided your office notice of my intention to move this motion as well as notified the government.

Mr. Speaker, the significant and incoherent U.S. tariffs announced last week are having an immediate and devastating impact on the world economy, and it is directly hitting Alberta and Albertans. Despite the Premier alarmingly referring to this crisis as, quote, a big win for Alberta and Canada, Albertans, Canadians, and most of the world feel very differently, showing once again that the Premier is so focused on her own self-interest that she has lost touch with what the people of this province and country care about.

In the last few days since President Trump's announcement we've seen crude oil prices drop, global stock markets plummet, and multiple job losses across the country. By all accounts the world is now on the brink of a global recession, and this is already having an immediate and devastating impact on Alberta. Within 48 hours of Trump's tariff announcement WTI dropped \$10 per barrel. At this rate we could be facing a \$10 billion hit to Alberta's revenue on a budget that only allocated \$2 billion for tariff contingencies and that already projects a \$5 billion deficit.

The severity of these impacts that the tariffs will and are having on all of Canada, including our province, cannot be understated. Albertans are worried about their businesses, their jobs, and their personal investments. The state of our economy is at risk, and we have a responsibility to support Albertans.

Canada lost 33,000 jobs last month across various sectors, which is the biggest drop in jobs since 2022. Last week our province saw the highest growth in the country for unemployment, losing 15,000 jobs in March according to StatsCan. We also saw the S&P and TSX close down 1,142 points last Friday, one of the biggest single-day point changes since 2020. Canadian stocks are deep in the red since the tariff announcement. Albertans are watching their retirement savings and pensions disappear in front of their eyes. It was painfully out of touch for the Premier to declare that what happened last week was a big win for Alberta and Canada. That kind of tone-deaf response is a direct result of the Premier spending more time listening to Trump social media influencers in the U.S. than to hard-working Albertans and Canadians across our country.

Now is the time to focus attention on what's happening here in Canada and rededicate our efforts to ensure we are in a strong position going forward. We need to work with all orders of government on a Team Canada approach to craft a thoughtful, rational, and sharp strategy to face these tariffs. We need this emergency debate to determine how our government can best protect and serve Albertans in the face of this economic crisis. We need to talk about building a strong Canadian internal market, breaking down interprovincial trade barriers, and standardizing licensing and building codes across the country. We need to deal strategically with the United States to ensure they understand that Canada is more important to them than they are to us. We need to build global markets for our industries, including agriculture, agrifoods, manufacturing, and energy. We need to protect our workers and businesses who will be the most impacted by these tariffs. And we need to go on the offensive and attract the best

people from the United States and around the world to come to our province and provide their expertise to build great companies here in Alberta. None of this will be easy, but it will be necessary to protect our province and Albertans. It will require commitment and purpose. Most importantly, it's going to take a government that can work with others to ensure we can build a stronger Alberta and a stronger Canada.

The actions of the Premier and the UCP to date have resulted in no big wins for Albertans and have isolated us from other Canadians, the same partners we need to build our strength for the months and the years ahead. Despite the misguided response from the Premier, these are urgent issues for Albertans, and it's about time she started listening to them. I call on all members of this Assembly to support this motion and to have the urgent conversations that Albertans need us to have.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 42 allows for up to five minutes for a member of Executive Council to respond to the request for the SO 42. The hon. the Government House Leader has risen.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me be clear, as has the Premier, that we believe a tariff-free relationship with the United States is essential. Alberta's government has been working tirelessly to protect our province against these unjust tariffs. I've said it before and I'm repeating it now. Since session started in late February, the topic of tariffs, their potential impact, and our government's response has been the topic of discussion in this Chamber multiple times. Time and again Alberta's government has stood not only to express the seriousness of this moment but also to share the actions our government and our Premier have been taking to meet the moment and stand up for Albertans.

On the very first day of session, back in February of this year, I stood in this Chamber and moved emergency debate on the proposed U.S. tariffs and the impact they would have on Alberta's consumers and the Alberta economy. The Assembly debated this for three hours, Mr. Speaker, talking in detail about the potential impact of tariffs and how our government would respond, ensuring we're standing up for Albertans at each and every turn.

February 27 our government introduced Budget 2025, about meeting the challenges ahead, both the challenge of tariffs, Mr. Speaker, and the challenge of keeping life affordable for Albertan families amidst the shifting economic and geopolitical landscape. Tariffs were a main topic of conversation not only when the budget was debated in the House but also during estimates in committees, meaning that several more hours of debate took place on this very topic.

The Premier herself, Mr. Speaker, rose and gave an impassioned speech on March 26 about her continued advocacy to the United States, detailing how she has been and will continue to be standing up for Albertans and Alberta industries at every turn, speaking to these very folks who had the President's ear, reminding them of the importance of trade with Alberta and Canada and of the harms that tariffs posed on both our great nations.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I looked, and tariffs have been the discussion every single day in this House since this session has begun. I know myself I have stood countless times to answer opposition questions about our government's response to the threat of tariffs and defending the Premier when the NDP decided that they'd rather throw stones at our Premier and they'd rather our Premier sit at home on her hands like their leader is doing. They'd rather that than to speak to American influencers and fight for Alberta. I know that the NDP have been asleep at the wheel, focused on how their new leader Mark Carney and his Liberals – how they

can help him win rather than the Albertans who elected them and that they represent. It's hard to imagine they've suddenly forgotten a month's worth of discussions that took place right here in this Chamber.

Alberta's government has not and will not stand by idly while Albertan industries, Albertan workers, and Alberta families are harmed. Our government and, most especially, our Premier have been fighting tooth and nail for Alberta, and we will continue to do everything in our power to ensure these tariffs do not go unchallenged.

3:00

UCP ministers, me included, officials, and the Premier herself have spent hundreds of hours over the last several months lobbying, educating, and persuading every U.S. lawmaker and industry leader possible about how damaging imposing tariffs on Canada would be not only for Canadians but also for millions of Americans who would lose their jobs. When Team Canada decided their approach was to encourage all premiers to visit the U.S. and speak with the U.S. media, our Premier went above and beyond sharing Alberta's message with millions of Americans.

Mr. Speaker, let's take a moment to recognize the stark difference between our approach and the NDP's response. While the UCP government has been actively fighting for Alberta at every level, engaging with the U.S. lawmakers, lobbying key figures, and advocating for Alberta economic interests, the NDP has done nothing more than offer empty words, performative outrage, and TikTok videos. Let me be clear. The NDP have been happy to sit on the sidelines pointing fingers, making TikToks, and doing absolutely nothing to mitigate the harm of these potential tariffs, and the NDP have been content to stick to their divisive rhetoric using this crisis to attack the government without offering any meaningful solutions. They have once again failed to put Albertans first.

Alberta's government is actively engaging with stakeholders, working on securing new markets, and providing supports for those most affected by these tariffs. They criticize us, Mr. Speaker, for going overseas to meet with officials and trade partners, yet now they say that we should be doing more of that. You can't have it both ways; you can't turn left and right at the same time. Make up your mind.

We are taking action to protect jobs, protect workers, and protect the future of Alberta's economy. Mr. Speaker, Alberta is stronger than any threat that is ever going to be thrown our way, and if the NDP had been paying attention, they know that already. With that said, I encourage all members of the House to vote against this motion.

[Unanimous consent denied]

**The Speaker:** Ordres du jour.

### Orders of the Day

#### Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

##### Bill 208

#### Psycho-Educational Assessment Access Act

[Debate adjourned May 13: Mrs. Petrovic speaking]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has nine minutes remaining should she choose to use it.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

**Ms Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to speak on Bill 208, the Psycho-Educational Assessment Access Act. As we know, of course, education is a right, not merely a privilege. We know that every child has the right to learn in a safe, supportive environment where they can thrive, and that really is the heart of my colleague's bill.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We know a few things, Madam Speaker. We know that, right now, far too many kids are falling behind daily, simply because they are not able to receive a psychoeducational assessment at an appropriate time, that is if they get that assessment at all. Children who need these vital assessments are struggling to access them for a number of reasons.

In today's classroom, Madam Speaker, school board funded psycho-eds are limited, and in many ways they are limited simply because of the cost that happens to be involved, but they are also limited because of the amount of time it takes and the amount of expertise that is required in order to deliver those assessments and get an appropriate diagnosis. There are waiting lists, and certainly the school board that I most recently came from, the waiting list would stretch into the next year. This certainly is something that I have, I guess, a great deal of passion for because I know how limited things there, in terms of the access, are that parents and their kids have to these really vital assessments, these assessments and the ability to make sure that these assessments happen at the right time. The fact that we are not at all providing an equitable arrangement for kids in our classrooms means that education in Alberta, in fact, isn't equitable. It isn't doing what it should do.

One of the first things that we know about what a psychoeducational assessment can do is that it can answer some of the questions. I think about all those parents out there where they might notice something when their child is three or four or five, but they're not quite clear about what that might be. Perhaps they're lucky enough to have a primary care provider, and perhaps they get an appointment with that primary care provider, who also isn't quite sure what might be going on. So that child very often, even at that early stage, doesn't have the opportunity to find out, kind of, where they are.

I've been in meetings with both students and their parents. When they finally get that assessment – I'm here to tell everyone in this House – it is a sense of relief. Most often those kids are older. Not all the time, sometimes there are some of the little kids. But certainly for those kids who are older, when they finally get that assessment, they know that there's something that they can hang on to, that the issue that they're having with their schooling, Madam Speaker, whether it's reading or perhaps with writing or perhaps with something to do with math, they know now that it isn't something that they necessarily have any control over; they know that they are not stupid. They know that it isn't something that they just don't get; it's that they think differently. This can open education finally for kids and give them that sense that because there is this other thing going on with their brain, maybe there's hope left for them. Maybe if the right interventions are happening, if the right materials and the right resources are there, then maybe they're going to be okay, and maybe they'll actually be able to have a future. I can't overstate that sense of relief.

There, of course, is also a sense of relief on the part of parents who know as well that perhaps it's a learning disability, perhaps it's simply in reading or in writing or simply in one very tiny aspect of math. The relief that parents feel is also a very real thing.

All of these assessments, of course, can be relevant to learning, development, and mental health because they reveal the strengths and challenges of who that child is at that moment. They can reveal

the areas of need. They can also point to other disorders like ADHD. They can point to why that child is feeling an immense sense of anxiety. They can point to other mental health concerns, which really is what this bill seeks to answer.

We know, of course, that those diagnoses can and often do come together with other assessments that might already have been done. They come together with the support of professionals, supportive teachers, and also perhaps with the support of family doctors and other paraprofessionals, but mostly the psycho-ed assessments and what they reveal is about the kids. It's about their own individual, unique learning journey.

Not only will this bill make sure and provide a pathway to ensure that children who need the psycho-eds will get them, but it also allows for extra teacher training and funding. I know, as a teacher who taught for a number of years and who, unfortunately, had to sit in many of those triage meetings where we'd have a list of 50, 60, 70 kids in a school where we'd have to triage the top five or the top 10 because we knew we simply weren't going to be able to get to everybody that year, that's a real heart-rending thing. You don't want to know that because you're having to do this triage, you will probably be leaving a child behind. You don't want to know that because you're having to do this triage, that child, who maybe could benefit from that diagnosis – because then all of that work that you do every day will have that foundation to it, but you're still going to have to continue to use your best guess, which isn't serving the kids.

I'm very happy that in this bill it can look at training and supports available to teachers and all sorts of jurisdictions, that the committee that will be established will pay particular attention to classroom complexity, that it will be looking at things like systemic barriers that are experienced by students in Alberta who either require or who have already had that psycho-ed assessment.

Honestly, there are so many barriers to kids, and with those barriers, Madam Speaker, comes some bias as well. Teaching, as I have for a number of years, we know that there is indeed a bias when we look at the kids in our classrooms. That bias could be anything from something like an unconscious stereotype. You're perhaps looking at a child who comes from some difficult circumstances, and perhaps their inability or difficulty or challenge learning has more to do with the fact that they simply didn't have breakfast that day rather than any other kind of intellectual complexity that they might have. We need to make sure that this end of education is free of bias.

We also need to make sure, Madam Speaker, that, in addition to all of that, we're making sure that the resources are allocated appropriately. That, too, is something that this committee will be looking at because they'll be doing a crossjurisdictional analysis.

One of the other considerations this bill deals with, in terms of the establishment of the committee, is that it allows time to consult with teachers and students, parents, boards, and others. It provides recommendations after a year. All of these things, Madam Speaker, seem to me to be perfectly reasonable. Once in a while, in fact, it's good to stop and it's good to look and it's good to examine at a real, deep level to see if what it is you're doing is actually working. The establishment of this particular committee is exactly what would be able to happen.

**3:10**

I do want to take some time to answer some of the concerns that have come from our colleagues across the aisle, and one of the concerns expressed a number of times was that there was a sense that the establishment of the committee would be duplicating work already being completed by Alberta Education. We heard an awful lot as well, Madam Speaker, about literacy and numeracy

screening, about the screeners that kids are now taking every single year they appear to be in school. While it might be true the screeners can provide a wealth of information – they might even be able to point the way – they are still informal in the sense that they don't lend themselves and they are not intended to provide any sort of a learning diagnosis. What they're intended to do is point to a gap that perhaps that particular child missed some foundational learning along the way whether it be reading or writing or math.

Things are not always as straightforward as some folks might like. Screeners are not psycho-ed assessments. They're just sort of one big part of that big tool box that educators have at their disposal. Screeners can, of course, lead to intervention programs, but, again, an intervention program is not a diagnosis. It can work hand in hand with a diagnosis, but it's not a diagnosis.

There was an intervention project that was spearheaded by the very excellent Dr. George Georgiou a number of years ago. It came during COVID. But those sorts of intervention programs, Madam Speaker, work best when there is continual professional development with lots of learning, lots of feedback but also when they're delivered in a really specific period of time because they're meant to address a particular learning gap. Again, they are not meant to work as that foundational resource or that foundational educational component for whatever that diagnosis might be; they are simply meant to fill that gap that that child has in their learning.

The other thing that's, of course, important in some interventions that happen is the combination of continual and deep teacher training so that expertise can be developed on the part of teachers. They've got time to analyze, they've got time to look at what those screeners have told them and, therefore, where they need to go for intervention during the course of a school day. Again, these interventions address particular gaps in the day-to-day learning of a child; they do not address a learning diagnosis, and that is what this bill is all about.

Some of my colleagues who have spoken before me have noted, as I just did, that literacy and numeracy screeners are not about making a diagnosis, and I think it would behoove everyone . . . [Ms Wright's speaking time expired]

All right. Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there any other members wishing to speak to Bill 208 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to be able to stand on this lovely Monday afternoon and speak to Bill 208. This particular bill – now, of course, I hope to talk about the benefit of psychoeducational assessments.

If there's anybody here in these Chambers or that is listening at home that isn't familiar with the process, these are assessments that are delivered by either a psychiatrist or a psychologist, counselling therapist, a highly trained professional, who can do a very in-depth assessment with someone's son or daughter. Oftentimes the assessment may include parents to a certain degree to also hear about, you know: "What are you experiencing at home? What would you say is the kind of general assessment of how your kids are doing?" The assessment is then used within the child's classroom, within the child's school board, and within the system to equip them with everything that they need to be successful.

It is a really fundamental kind of service that provides for equity in what should be a universal and public system where there is a place for every child. An assessment is so critical to set them on the right foot. Oftentimes, it culminates in what's called an IPP, an individualized – maybe my colleagues who work in education . . .

**Member Hoyle:** Program plan.

**Member Eremenko:** An individualized program plan. Thank you very much. I should know this by now. It creates an IPP, which is essentially the road map through which we can provide a child with all of the wraparound supports that they need to be successful in the classroom.

It boggles the mind when we think about just how incredibly challenging it is to access one of those precious psychoeducational assessments that are actually provided to a school because they're only afforded so many. You know, my colleague here from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview was talking about maybe five, maybe 10 in a class or in a school in any given year. One can imagine just how much that leaves as far as unmet demand when it comes to psychoeducational assessments. Then what happens is that a lot of families then say: as a mom we just want to know what's going on with our kids; we just want them to be successful and happy and accepted learners in a classroom. The assessment goes a very long way.

Then what parents do: they'll hop on Google. They'll search, Madam Speaker, to figure out: what is this psychoeducational assessment the teacher has kind of flagged for me? Where do I get one? How much do they cost? What's the process? I mean, it is a lot of information to process.

I don't know if my gasp might have been audible on the mic from the speaker just before me, but I quickly googled to see what the average cost of a psychoeducational assessment is, and they're roughly \$3,000, Madam Speaker. A day's worth of an assessment with a child to better understand where their opportunities and where their challenges are: \$3,000. If a family is lucky, maybe they've got some coverage through an employer-paid health plan, but if they're not, this is not the system of public education, the system of public equity that I think every single Albertan child deserves in this province.

I know, based on all of what I've heard from the members opposite, that this is a matter, this is an issue that they care about as much as we do, really and truly. If we are investing in the world-class public education system that the members opposite, that this UCP government claim to want to invest in with all of the new schools and all of the investments despite, in fact, having the lowest per-student funding in the country, the commitment, I believe, is a shared one to create a system that is equitable and accessible for all children where they can succeed, regardless of their learning challenges or their learning complexity.

This Bill 208 seeks to, in the long run, make more psychoeducational assessments available for families. I mean, why wouldn't we do this? Why wouldn't we vote together in support of a bill that will strike a committee to assess the system, to – I don't want to get this wrong. The committee's mandate would be to review legislation and policies in other provinces with respect to assessments, to look at training and supports provided to teachers to help address classroom complexity, to examine the systemic barriers experienced by students in Alberta who require or have had an assessment that includes lack of access, an inability to pay, conscious and unconscious bias around children who get to the top of the list and those who don't.

We know in particular, Madam Speaker, that oftentimes young girls get lost in the mix because they might not be one of the students who is especially disruptive in the classroom. It doesn't mean that their needs or their challenges or opportunities are any different than anybody else, but it is often those kids that get looked past, and that is not fair. It's not okay. That is not the system that we are all seeking to better on behalf of future generations.

This committee is seeking to level the playing field, to even just understand the playing field a little bit better on behalf of all of our constituents. At the rate of \$3,000 an assessment this is not something that is available to many, many families. We here in this room have an opportunity to change that, to change it for the better.

I just want to draw on a couple of other things why I think this committee is so important when it comes to taking a full kind of provincial perspective, a full provincial oversight. I had the privilege of being down in Lethbridge for a couple of meetings last week, Madam Speaker, and it was pointed out to me that right now in southern Alberta there is, like, one pediatric psychiatrist for all of southern Alberta. One of them that was very well known for a very long time and had been practising in the region for many years unfortunately passed away from COVID during the pandemic, and that leaves very, very few, literally one person, to be able to support the kids with some of the most complex needs.

3:20

When we can strike a committee to better assess the system, to better look at where the opportunities and the gaps are in every corner of this province, I think we certainly should. It doesn't commit any dollars. It doesn't challenge the kind of bottom line in Budget 2025 that this government has set. Rather, it just, to my colleague's point, pushes pause so that we can have an in-depth analysis of what's actually happening in the system, because – let's be honest – we all know and can think of the many schools in our ridings, the many families, maybe even some of our own children who are going without as a result of a public system that is absolutely bursting at the seams.

I've talked about southern Alberta down in Lethbridge. Another one, right here, a little bit closer to home, at least in my wonderful riding of Calgary-Currie, is a school that unfortunately is running a program that looks like it's going to be ending at the end of this particular school year. It's the boys' school that's run by the Calgary board of education in Rutland Park. Let me tell you, this school is an incredible community for a group of students who were really kind of at wits' end. They just simply were not thriving in the regular system. The boys' school was created and has become a real haven for children who otherwise were not working to the fullest of their abilities in a regular school system.

Unfortunately, Rutland Park – the particular program is very likely going to be closing at the end of June, and we have to wonder where these kids are going to go. Without the kind of work that this committee is going to be undertaking to better understand the complexities of learners across our system, where are those kids going to go? They're going to go from a community of small classrooms and maximum supports to a class of maybe 35, 40 kids, and they're going to get lost in the shuffle. That is, again, not the kind of equity, not the kind of universality that I think we would all expect from our public education system, one that we all expect but also that we pay for. This is about value for the taxpaying dollars that we all contribute to a system with the understanding that everyone will get what they need from that particular system.

You know, I invite our colleagues across the way to support Bill 208, Madam Speaker, to support what a committee could provide to the system as a whole. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any other members to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Member Hoyle:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise to speak to Bill 208, Psycho-Educational Assessment Access Act, and I want to reiterate my thanks to the Member for Calgary-Edgemont for putting forward such an important bill, a bill that would ensure

that children no longer fall behind because they're not getting the psycho-educational assessments they need.

If passed, Bill 208 would establish a school psychological services committee that would review legislation surrounding psycho-educational assessments and consider financial support. Psycho-educational assessments are a way to collect information about a child's academic and social functioning to better understand their strengths and weaknesses and learning needs. They help determine a child's learning style, identify potential learning disabilities like dyslexia or ADHD and access cognitive abilities, academic skills, and emotional behavioural functioning. They're typically requested by parents and/or teachers and can identify complex disabilities at a young age.

In 2019 over 114,000 students in Alberta schools were coded with special learning need codes. However, experts estimate thousands more students have learning challenges that are going undiagnosed. This is in part due to a lack of access to psycho-eds. Currently in Alberta they're not easy to come by, and that's largely because school board funded psycho-eds are limited and private psycho-eds are costly. Parents and teachers often complain about year-long wait times and financial barriers. The Alberta Teachers' Association's Beyond Capacity report shows that more than half of Alberta's teachers, at 56 per cent, do not think the assessments they requested will be fulfilled within a school year. Receiving a private assessment is not always covered by insurance. Average costs can start at about \$3,000 and can run as high as \$5,000.

We know that far too many kids are falling behind simply because they're not receiving a psychoeducational assessment. Every child has the right to learn in a safe, supportive environment where they can thrive and build confidence and build self-esteem. For children who need them, psycho-eds are critical to achieving this. These assessments offer explanations for why a child may be struggling as well as an individualized recommendation to optimize learning, a critical step toward ensuring that students at all levels can succeed. Moreover, research shows that early intervention is key to ensuring that students and families get the supports they need in place to address learning challenges early. That's because these assessments provide insights for families into how their child's brain works, allowing them to get a fuller picture on how they problem solve, approach tasks, and view new experiences.

Without awareness, early identification, and robust intervention the outcomes for individuals with learning disabilities are bleak. The Canadian Survey on Disability found that of those with a learning disability 33 per cent reported not completing high school, a much higher drop out rate than those without any learning disabilities, at 13.1 per cent. Even when these students do graduate, emerging adults with learning challenges tend to leave high school unprepared to face postschool environments. Few attend postsecondary training, with less than 21 per cent pursuing a four-year degree, and those who don't pursue postsecondary education experience lower rates of degree completion, impacting their overall employability. Consequently, individuals with learning disabilities are twice as likely to remain unemployed compared to the general population.

Having access to psychoeducational assessments is not just about ensuring that students can hit their learning outcomes. It's about making sure that students end up being employable. It decreases financial barriers. It increases access to specialized educational supports, which improves academic, mental health and employment outcomes. In turn, all of this lessens the strain on our education, our health care, our justice systems while allowing diagnosed individuals to more fully participate in all aspects of their relationships, workplaces, and communities in the future.

For parents, who just want the best for their children as they go through their education, having answers and a plan is so important to feeling like they're able to provide for their children and provide the tools they need. There is no doubt that watching your child struggle in school can be super stressful and overwhelming for any parent, but right now many children in need of psychoeducational assessment in Alberta's schools are triaged, meaning assessments often go to the most disruptive children or children exhibiting the most overt challenges.

Our education system is bursting at the seams, and that's largely due to the massive cuts made by this UCP government over the past six years. Alberta currently has the lowest per-student funding in the country. For the fourth year in a row our province has landed squarely at the bottom of the national list for per-student funding, and the gap between Alberta and the national average continues to grow. The newest release from Stats Canada in February covers the 2022-23 school year and pegs the national average school board operating expenditure at \$13,692 per student. Alberta falls well below that standard, coming in at \$11,464 per student. That's over 16 per cent below the national average, increasing the gap by 3 per cent from the previous year. The discrepancy between the average and Albertan spending has grown 11 per cent since Alberta first fell to the bottom of the scale in 2018-2019.

3:30

One area that StatsCan reports where our province is above the national average is the ratio of students per teacher. Close to 200 K to 12 students in Alberta were over capacity in the 2023-24 school year according to statistics from Alberta Education. Another 27 schools were at 100 per cent capacity, having the same number of students enrolled as they were designed to hold.

About three-quarters of full and overcapacity schools are in Edmonton and Calgary. School authorities in 28 other municipalities have also hit enrolment limits. I know this is a huge issue in Edmonton-South, Madam Speaker. Young children, some only in kindergarten, are being told they need to commute 20 to 25 kilometres round trip for school because not only is their catchment school full; all of the surrounding schools are full as well. No funding is provided to expand existing capacity to K to 9 schools in Edmonton-South, which are bursting at the seams, no funding for modular school classrooms or pods, which would significantly benefit young students.

Just recently I heard a quote from a parent who told me, quote: despite the presence of several kindergarten schools within a five-minute radius, my six-year-old daughter experiences a substantial commute, leading to frequent tardiness. Our attempts to register for schools close by have been hindered by the indication that our address falls outside of the school zone and schools that are literally in our neighbourhood. Our child also has learning challenges, and this compounds the challenges of daily going back and forth to school and her success. Being non-Catholic, we do not qualify for the nearby Catholic school, and this leaves us to travel across town for classes. End quote. This is not the first family in Edmonton-South who has told me that they're considering leaving because there simply isn't a school nearby that is able to enrol their children.

It shouldn't be this way, Madam Speaker. The chronic underfunding of public education in Alberta has created a crisis that can no longer be ignored, especially for students with special needs. Anything less is a serious disservice to children and families in our province. I encourage the members opposite to support Bill 208. It's an investment in our children, it's an investment in Alberta families, it's an investment in our province, and it's an investment in the future prosperity of all Albertans' lives.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, just a reminder. If members would like to have conversations in this Assembly, perhaps they could take it to the peace lounge to carry that in this Chamber.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview rising to speak.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yeah. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to add my voice to the debate for Bill 208, the Psycho-Educational Assessment Access Act by the MLA for Calgary-Edgemont. I want to begin by thanking her for bringing this forward. I think that when all members of this House do support this legislation, it'll make a huge difference for Alberta children.

I'm not only saying that because of certainly having worked in the school system, not as a teacher, of course, but as a social worker. I know the need for this type of assessment. Sadly, there are many kids – the Member for Calgary-Edgemont, that's why she brought forward this legislation – who don't have access to this. If there's anything that we as legislators can do to actually create more opportunities, more access for students, I think that that is the best.

As I was saying, not only because of my professional background do I understand and support this legislation, but I also have a personal connection. I have three sons, and they're all adults now for some time, but my youngest son, who many of you know in this Legislature as a page and now works for visitor services giving tours and things like that . . .

**Ms Hoffman:** And he's engaged.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes. I'm being heckled by my own people here. The MLA for Edmonton-Glenora just said, "And he's engaged." That's true, just a couple of weeks ago, and he's marrying another page. They met here working in the Legislature. Jessica Hermery, if anybody remembers her. Very tall blond gal. Anyway, thank you, Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

I got Wade's permission to say this actually because Wade is – well, it's been probably 15 years. When he was in grade 5, he was in a French immersion program, as his older siblings were. You know, my older sons did fine and were able to manage both languages and things went well, and Wade always struggled with that from kindergarten onward. I remember talking to the teachers about that and saying: "It seems like he's not really getting it. He's not starting to read as much." They said: "No, no, no. That's just how French immersion is. Don't worry about it. There's a bit of a delay." So year after year I sort of was concerned that he wasn't grasping all the concepts, but I counted on the teachers to have expertise and understand that. But eventually it got much more difficult, and Wade was coming home and telling me: "Mum, I'm stupid. I can't do this work. I don't understand it." I would of course encourage him and try to sit him down and get him to focus, and he was a difficult child to focus.

He wasn't ever a behavioural problem. Oftentimes these kids if they sit quietly, you know, they're not going to be assessed, and Wade was one of those kids. He had lots of energy, but he didn't want to do anything disruptive in the classroom, so sadly he spent much time not getting it, not understanding what the teachers were saying in pretty much either language. Certainly, my efforts to support him, to sort of be master of his homework and things – it was always very challenging to get him to focus. Of course, at home it's a little bit more of a relaxed environment, and he would act out a lot more and be mad and throw his books on the floor, and I'd be doing my best to support him. I mean, I had some awareness of this, having worked in schools and being a social worker, so I understand things about behavioural stuff, but each time I sort of brought it forward, it was like: "There's a long list. There's no way. He's doing fine. You just have to be patient."

I guess it wasn't until grade 5. This particular teacher was a mature teacher and she had taught one of my older sons, and I said to her: "You know, I don't think he's doing it. I think he needs some significant help." She said: "Well, just let me see. I'll do assessment of him in the first few weeks." She knew my older son, so she sort of – you know, there are sometimes similarities between children but not always – knew how he was operating. So I said, "Okay," and I trusted her and I waited. Then after a couple of weeks she said: "You're right. He's not understanding it. He's missing a whole bunch, and he's below his grade level in many of the subjects." And I said: "Well, I'd like him to be assessed then and that we get him the support he needs."

I'm so grateful to that teacher because, unlike previous teachers who felt like there were so many other children in the queue before him and because his behaviour was not disruptive – there he was – she said: okay. He was, like, grade 5. That's getting older, you know. You're going to be transitioning to junior high. Of course, in junior high there's much more independent learning, and he wasn't even mastering the concepts and what he had to do in the elementary program.

So we did get an assessment, and he was found to have learning disabilities in three areas. He had spelling issues, he had math comprehension and reading comprehension. Those are three pretty big areas. Besides that, we did go see a psychiatrist, and he was diagnosed with ADHD as well. Of course, having a diagnosis helps you be able to know how to treat it. You know, what do you need to do? Because there were so many issues for my son, the teacher really, after the assessment and everything, recommended that he go to the academy at King Edward, which is a specialized program in the Edmonton public school system which is exclusively for students with learning disabilities. It's a very intense program, smaller class sizes and those kinds of things.

3:40

So that's what he did. He ended up there. He went to that program and he was given extensive support, and all of that opened up to him because of that psycho-educational assessment. That changed everything for him. He was able to, you know, learn strategies to calm himself when he got upset. Like, he was able to see when he was getting sort of an elevated mood and he wanted to throw his books on the floor again. They gave him squeeze balls, or it was allowed for him to maybe walk in the back of the class. There were strategies that the teachers used. I'm just giving you a couple of things that they did.

You know, he had two intensive years in grades 5 and 6. The class was, I think, about 13. It wasn't that big. The teacher and there were teachers' aides could really help him to master the concepts. And then in grade 7 he was supposed to – it's a two-year program, and he's integrated back into the regular system. But after the end of those two years the teacher wasn't sure if he would be okay academically. You know, she didn't see him as really thriving that much, but Wade really did want to go to grade 7 at a school that was similar to the one he went to before. She said: you know, I don't know if we can really do much more for him. So he was supported to go back to the regular system.

That kid, from grade 7 to grade 12, got honours every year. Like, it took a lot of work. I mean, my older son sort of could just do things and get good marks. But Wade worked hard and he took time to study and he had a lot of discipline, and all of that he learned in that program at academy at King Edward. It's so vital that parents and children have access to these programs. Without that, you know, I know that Wade's life would have been much different. He really was developing a concept of himself as being . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, I have about five minutes remaining before we move to close debate here.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It just really is an honour to be here. I'm thinking about this Bill 208, Psycho-Educational Assessment Access Act, and thinking a lot about education support workers in particular. You know, frequent watchers of the Legislature, which I know there are at least two, know that particularly . . .

**An Hon. Member:** At least 10.

**Member Irwin:** Maybe 10; you're right.

. . . during the pandemic I would often rise and just give a shout-out to workers on the front lines. So as I rise to this bill, I want to give another shout-out to the incredible education workers across this province who we know do so, so much for our kids every single day for so little.

You know, I very much appreciate my colleague from Calgary-Edgemont for putting this bill forward. I would never refer to her presence or absence, but I am looking at her right now. I don't know how that works; I'm new here. The chair is not sure either. She obviously has a lot of insider knowledge having worked on the front lines as an education support worker. Thank you for putting this forward. I sure hope that the members opposite, despite their unwillingness to engage in debate, are willing to support this bill because it is a critical one.

Also, our colleague from Calgary-Beddington, who is our Education critic, spoke to this in a previous session as well, and I really appreciated her words. I mean, I could talk about Calgary-Currie and Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, who, of course, was a teacher and administrator herself. Grateful for her comments. In fact, fun fact, I remember visiting one of that member's classrooms many, many years ago. I was running for office, wasn't I? So that was over 10 years ago now. I know how much of a dedicated educator she is. Again, she's got that insider information.

You know, we had a number of educators and folks in education speak to this bill, but we also had the perspective of – well, they're all moms as well – a mom who knows first-hand, and that's the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Thank you for sharing Wade's story, and thanks for getting his permission, too, because I wouldn't want to embarrass him. That is truly a lovely personal example of just how important it is that our kids are supported in classrooms.

I've talked about it a lot in this Chamber, my own journey being a teacher and administrator in rural Alberta and knowing . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Bawlf.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you. Yes. Bawlf.

Any opportunity I can talk about Bawlf school, where I started my teaching career at the age of barely 21 and was, you know, just blown away by not just the teachers, of course, in that school but by the support staff as well and by the kids. That's really why we're here. We should be listening to those folks with the lived experience.

Instead, we're hearing – I'm going back to when I heard the minister from Calgary-Bow talk about this bill, and he said something to the effect of how, you know, it wouldn't make a difference, this bill, that it's duplicating, that sort of thing. I just thought, gosh . . .

**Ms Hoffman:** Then vote for it.

**Member Irwin:** Yeah. That, too, as Edmonton-Glenora said. Well, then vote for it. Then support it.

Why wouldn't we be doing everything we could to support young people in schools? In fact, today, that very minister was asked what province in Alberta . . .

**Ms Hoffman:** In Canada.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you. Fix that, *Hansard*.

Which province across Canada has the lowest education funding per student, per pupil? He didn't answer the question, but the Member for Calgary-Beddington provided that answer, and that answer is, of course, Alberta.

At a time, you know, when we have a government talking about how much they want to be supporting and investing in students and in schools, why would they not support a bill like this one, a bill that was developed based on a whole lot of feedback, based on a whole lot of stakeholder engagement, and one that we know will absolutely support students in Alberta classrooms?

But I guess I shouldn't be surprised by a government that allowed education support workers in Fort McMurray and across Edmonton to be on the picket lines in Edmonton at least over two months. In Fort McMurray – what? – we're talking almost three months perhaps. Many of us, well, many of us on this side of the House, were on the picket lines with those workers. They didn't want to be on strike at minus 40, which it was some of those days. They didn't want to be on strike. They wanted to be in the classrooms with kids, but they knew that if they took a stand, it would benefit all kids.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, it is now the time for the mover of the bill to close debate. The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

**Ms Hayter:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all of my colleagues on this side of the House that have shared your personal experiences, whether it being a parent or a teacher. I do wonder how many of us have been touched by knowing a child that's needed extra supports in schools and how many of us can be grateful because we have insurance to help cover that and be able to pay for these very expensive bills.

3:50

I had received a very lovely letter from a constituent who shared her own experiences with me as to why she was supporting my bill, and it was a letter she had sent to the Minister of Education. She writes that she's

writing to express my strong support for Bill 208.

As an Albertan, I believe this bill is crucial for addressing the systemic gaps in our education system that leave many children, particularly girls, struggling and undiagnosed. My . . . experience highlights the urgent need for the changes Bill 208 proposes.

Throughout elementary school, my teachers recognized I was struggling, even without a formal diagnosis. While I received some assistance, such as scribes and occasional access to assistive technology, resources were limited, and due to the lack of an official diagnosis, I was placed at the bottom of a lengthy waiting list. It took nearly three years to finally receive an AlphaSmart device, a delay that significantly impacted my learning. As is [in most cases] with girls, my ADHD presented differently than the typical symptoms, resulting in my [own] struggles being overlooked. My teachers, while concerned, lacked the training and time to recommend a proper psychoeducational assessment. This delay in diagnosis had a profound impact on my mental health. The undiagnosed ADHD

contributed significantly to the anxiety and depression I began experiencing, as I constantly felt like [I was] a failure, unable to perform tasks that seemed effortless for my peers.

By the time I was 15, I was diagnosed with a collection of anxiety and panic disorders. My psychiatrist, while recognizing the signs of ADHD and learning disabilities, felt he couldn't confidently diagnose me due to the limited time we spent together. This highlighted a critical issue: if a trained professional struggles to diagnose in a private setting, how can we expect teachers with minimal psychoeducational training to identify these needs in a classroom of 30+ students? My psychiatrist recommended further assessment for ADHD, dysgraphia, and other learning disabilities, but even with insurance, the cost was prohibitive for my family.

Junior high and high school were a constant struggle. I felt hopeless, stupid, and different. These feelings exacerbated my anxiety, impacting my mood, sleep, and self-esteem. My mental health deteriorated to the point of hospitalization. The experience of being in the ER for 26 hours and then waiting another day for a bed in the psychiatric ward further exposed the underfunding and the strain on our healthcare system.

Finally, after more evaluations and diagnoses, I received the proper medication and support. With this understanding and the right strategies, I began to thrive, significantly improving my anxiety, building confidence, and ultimately earning a BSc degree on the Dean's List. My story, while ultimately positive, is one of the lucky ones. Many women aren't diagnosed with ADHD until their 40s. The thought of what my life could have been if I'd received support earlier is heartbreaking. I grieve the lost potential, the unnecessary struggles, and the years of self-doubt. I can only imagine the even greater hardship others endure. Children, especially girls, should not fall through the cracks of an underfunded and overburdened education system.

Bill 208 represents a crucial step toward preventing stories like mine. It would provide the necessary resources and support to identify and address learning differences early, allowing children to reach their full potential. I urge [everybody in the House] to support Bill 208 and make a real difference in the lives of countless children.

This bill is not political. This bill is not partisan. Its intention is to support Alberta students and our children. The bill is asking for a school psychology service committee. It's to review what other provinces are doing and help improve our processes. It's to help train and support teachers to address classroom complexities. It's to look at the systematic barriers that Alberta students are experiencing, whether it's lack of funding for the assessments – please support the bill. It's for our kids.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:54 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Kayande
Arcand-Paul	Hayter	Metz
Batten	Hoffman	Renaud
Boparai	Hoyle	Sweet
Calahoo Stonehouse	Irwin	Wright, P.
Deol		

4:10

Against the motion:

Amery	Hunter	Petrovic
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Johnson	Rowswell

Boitchenko	Jones	Sawhney
Bouchard	LaGrange	Schow
Cyr	Loewen	Schulz
de Jonge	Long	Singh
Dreeshen	Lovely	Stephan
Dyck	Lunty	van Dijken
Ellis	McDougall	Wiebe
Fir	McIver	Williams
Getson	Nally	Wilson
Glubish	Neudorf	Wright, J.
Guthrie	Nicolaides	Yao
Horner	Nixon	Yaseen
Totals:	For – 16	Against – 42

[Motion for second reading of Bill 208 lost]

### Bill 209 Reconciliation Implementation Act

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

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Nanaskamon. [Remarks in Cree] Today I stand before this House to present a transformative piece of legislation, Bill 209, the Reconciliation Implementation Act.

This bill is a crucial step forward in the journey of reconciliation between the province of Alberta and Indigenous peoples. Okimaw Willie Littlechild often gets attributed with the concept of reconciliation. The spirit of this concept is, in my view, embedded in the Reconciliation Implementation Act.

The context of this work begins with our people. Developing this bill, I travelled to every single treaty area to meet with leadership. I discussed what they would want to see this province do with reconciliation. I consulted deeply and meaningfully on my own to show that it can be done, that we have the means to be true partners, as was intended when our ancestors came together on these lands, that as legislators our job is to further this relationship now and into the future for the next seven generations.

Alberta is home to a diverse Indigenous population of just over a quarter million people. Our province contains 46 First Nations communities across three historic treaty territories, 6, 7, and 8. Alberta also includes Canada's largest and historic Métis settlement system with eight settlements spanning 1.25 million acres.

The path to reconciliation has been challenging, and we must be honest about our progress. Recent findings from the Yellowhead Institute's 2023 report reveal that 81 of the 94 Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action remain unfulfilled. Even more concerning, zero calls to action were completed in 2023, and the Yellowhead Institute halted their progress reports because it became disheartening to see year after year zero calls to action being implemented across the country.

In analyzing Alberta's progress, it is no different, Madam Speaker. Let's change that. In drafting this bill, I've looked at this province's progress, its own admissions of work that has been done, is under way, and its omissions, which signify work that has not yet been completed. And while the website would make it look like the province is leading the way, the heavy work remains incomplete.

Despite only representing 6.5 per cent of the provincial population, Indigenous youth are overrepresented as children in care at over 72 per cent. In Edmonton alone, including in Edmonton-West Henday, which is home to the Edmonton Institution for Women, 72.3 per cent of the inmates identify as Indigenous. Madam Speaker, the TRC calls to action 1 and 30, respectively, outline the province's responsibilities to reduce these



numbers. In regard to reducing the number of Indigenous peoples incarcerated, the TRC recommends that the provinces do this in 10 years. Well, this year marks that benchmark, and look where we are at.

The numbers of my people incarcerated are staggering. Sadly, since the UCP took power, these numbers have gotten worse. With no plan to turn this around, Bill 209 would offer this government the solutions to work with Indigenous nations to reverse these dismal numbers. I know there are members opposite who want to turn these numbers around. I urge them to look inward and consider whether they want to signal to Indigenous people in Alberta, their constituents, that they are committed to reconciliation. They have the chance to support truly transformational legislation today by passing Bill 209. While some provinces such as Manitoba and the Northwest Territories have taken legislative steps forward, Alberta has operated without a comprehensive provincial strategy until now, which is why I would urge this Chamber to truly commit to reconciliation and pass the Reconciliation Implementation Act.

We are facing real and pressing challenges in our communities that demand immediate action. Every day Indigenous families bear the crushing weight of an affordability crisis, forced between choosing food, medicine, diapers for their kids, and heat. A drug poisoning crisis continues to tear through our communities, leaving grief and broken family circles that may take generations to heal while also dropping the life expectancy of our people 20 years below non-Indigenous peoples in this province.

Meanwhile decisions about our traditional and sacred lands are still made without Indigenous peoples and, concerning, without adequate consultation. Our nations are still met with walls when trying to bring dignity to the burial grounds around former residential school sites, and this government has not made it easy to rectify this appalling situation.

I remind this Chamber that this is also a call to action, 75 to be specific. Nations like the Saddle Lake Cree Nation deserve this government's support at the former Sacred Heart Catholic Indian residential school, also known as former Blue Quills Indian residential school, and the work they need to do to bring the dignity to the children that never made it home and whose remains are being exposed to the elements as we speak. We need the chief coroner and Chief Medical Examiner to intervene in this. These bodies need to receive dignity. Survivors and families of survivors deserve dignity and closure. Madam Speaker, passing Bill 209 will ensure that the province and Indigenous peoples will have certainty that this work will be done in partnership and, in fact, will be done.

The incomplete implementation of treaty rights and inadequate consultation practices have hindered progress in trust building between our governments, but it does not have to be that way. I've heard from countless Indigenous leaders in this province that current consultation framework in Alberta requires significant reform. Our existing policy has allowed Indigenous consultation processes to denigrate into rubber-stamping exercises. More concerning is that many of these policies were developed without meaningful input with Indigenous peoples and that adequacy is determined by the government itself, not Indigenous nations. When consultation does occur, it often lacks the depth of genuine consideration of Indigenous perspectives that true reconciliation demands. This surface-level engagement only solidifies disconnect between government actions and community needs.

That brings me to the heart of Bill 209 and its transformative provisions. Under the legislation the Minister of Indigenous Relations will be required to establish concrete, measurable actions for advancing reconciliation throughout government programs and services. The minister will have to develop and publish a comprehensive truth and reconciliation action plan, created in

genuine partnership with Indigenous leadership. This isn't a one-time effort. The legislation mandates ongoing consultation and annual progress reports to ensure accountability. All action plans and reports must be translated into our languages, ensuring accessibility for all our communities.

#### 4:20

The Executive Council must also include reconciliation principles in every decision they make, fundamentally changing how our government operates. MLAs must also engage in meaningful consultation with Indigenous nations on any bills that affect Indigenous people or relate to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action.

The potential impact of this legislation cannot be overstated. For the first time we will have a framework that demands real government accountability in a reconciliation effort in true collaboration, as treaty intended. Indigenous leadership will have a meaningful voice in decision-making processes that affect their communities, and treaty rights will receive better protection and respect under the law. Our consultation practices will be transformed to honour traditional processes and ways of knowing. Through the translation requirement we acknowledge and support the vital importance of Indigenous languages in maintaining culture and identity. Perhaps most importantly, this bill creates a genuine opportunity for Indigenous nations to shape the reconciliation process in Alberta according to their own vision and needs.

Looking ahead, our path is clear. We will actively engage in the consultation process for the action plan, ensuring all voices are heard and respected. If passed, the government of Alberta will vigilantly monitor the implementation of this legislation and ensure that commitments have adequate follow-through in collaboration with First Nations and Métis governments. Ultimately, we are working toward a comprehensive provincial strategy for reconciliation that can serve as a model for other jurisdictions.

Bill 209 represents more than just words on paper. It embodies this province's commitment to transformative change. Through careful consultation, respect for Indigenous ways of knowing, and clear accountability measures, we can create a framework that advances reconciliation in meaningful ways.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, can I just clarify that you moved second reading of your bill?

**Member Arcand-Paul:** I do move second reading. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Perfect. Thank you so much.

I see the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The word "reconciliation" is used quite commonly across the country. I can assure you and the members opposite that I have personally made it a key priority for myself along with my colleagues for reconciliation to be a focal point across this government.

On this side of the House, Madam Speaker, we take reconciliation very seriously. Alberta is leading the country on economic reconciliation, ensuring that Indigenous peoples remain at the forefront of discussions around energy projects, land and business development, tourism, and many others. We've made historical progress with the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, or the AIOC, providing loan guarantees to Indigenous communities to ensure they can become equity partners in major projects in Alberta across a wide variety of sectors, including

natural resources, agriculture, transportation, telecommunications, and tourism, with more on the horizon.

Created in 2019 by this government, the first Crown corporation of its kind in Canada, the AIOC has proven to be a game changer for Indigenous communities across the province, giving them the chance to become major partners in projects, which, in turn, creates generational revenue that flows back to the community, creating jobs and driving economic growth and sustainability.

Since its creation we have tripled the AIOC's loan capacity from \$1 billion to \$3 billion. That's three times more than any other province's similar programs, who have recently taken note of our incredible program and are modelling it, after what we did in Alberta with the AIOC.

That is serious economic reconciliation, Madam Speaker. Job creation, participation in the economy, generational revenue, all directly benefiting Indigenous communities across Alberta. I'm extremely proud of the progress we've made with this program, but in reality we're only getting started. With an expanded mandate and capacity, the sky is truly the limit for the AIOC.

Another program that's seen incredible success under this government is the Aboriginal business investment fund, or what I call ABIF. This program provides grants up to \$750,000 to Indigenous community-owned businesses to help create more jobs and improve socioeconomic outcomes for communities, supporting the capital costs of economic development projects. This means helping communities construct new buildings and infrastructure and purchase necessary equipment needed to grow their businesses, hire more people, and contribute to their communities. Since launching, the ABIF has supported 109 community-owned businesses with more than \$58 million in capital grants and has helped create more than 1,000 permanent jobs for Indigenous people in Alberta. That's why we increased the grant's capacity to \$10 million in '24-25 and continue this level of support this year through Budget 2025.

With our suite of economic programs and initiatives we've truly created pathways for Indigenous businesses and organizations to grow and move from one economic support to another. From initial funding through our Indigenous reconciliation initiative, which we call the IRI, to larger programs like ABIF and the AIOC, there are more options than ever before that support meaningful reconciliation for Indigenous communities across the province, and I'm extremely proud of the work this government is doing.

The other side of reconciliation that this government is taking meaningful action on is through cultural and social initiatives. These programs and initiatives have a lot of transformational meaning and impact for Indigenous peoples all across this province. One of the most important issues we're addressing is the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people. This is an ongoing tragedy that is affecting Indigenous people across the country, and this government recognizes how vitally important this work is and that it must continue. Alberta's government is working diligently to address and prevent violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit-plus people and to increase their safety and economic security.

Ministries across Alberta's government are collaborating with the Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit Plus People, which is providing advice to help address that important issue. Members of the Premier's Council have lived experience as service providers and family members of missing and murdered Indigenous women and two-spirit people. Appointees bring diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives from urban and rural communities across Alberta. I'm thrilled with the important work this council has done so far, and I look forward to a brighter future for Indigenous women

and girls. Everyone in this province deserves to live a life safe from violence, and this work is helping to bring that to fruition.

As part of that, we implemented a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Roadmap, and that launched the community support fund in 2023. That's an external grant review committee. We have elders and First Nations and Métis people to look at these grants. You can get up to \$200,000 on that grant to do projects all across the province. It's really been a game changer for us.

I also want to take a minute to highlight some of the incredible work this government has accomplished in relation to the calls to action laid out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Alberta's government has made progress on 24 out of the 29 calls to action that relate to the province. This includes initiatives in the areas of: education, justice, child welfare, health, and more. A few examples include: Alberta Health Services responded to calls to action 22 and 23 by working with an Indigenous wisdom council to produce a framework that set out a clear path to better treatment for Indigenous people in Alberta's health system.

Alberta permanently waived fees for Indigenous name changes. That's call to action 17.

In response to call to action 5, Alberta's family resource network is ensuring Indigenous families in Alberta have access to culturally appropriate, high-quality family supports.

Developing and implementing strategies and procedures for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, and commemoration and protection of residential school cemeteries or other sites at which residential school children were buried, including providing appropriate memorial ceremonies and commemorative markers. We also provided \$8 million to 43 Indigenous communities and organizations through the residential schools community research grant to support Indigenous-led engagement and research into the documented and undocumented death and burials of Indigenous children at residential school sites across Alberta. We did this before any other government or any community did anything across Canada.

We're working in partnership with elders and Indigenous communities when we unveiled a reconciliation garden right on the Legislature grounds here: call to action 82.

Educating the public service on Indigenous histories, experiences, and cultures and the legacy of residential schools: call to action 57. We launched the Indigenous Knowledge Keepers Circle, which provides opportunities for Alberta public service members to meet with elders to learn about teachings connected to various Indigenous cultures. And providing relevant vital statistics to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: call to action 71.

**4:30**

Madam Speaker, Alberta is committed to a crossgovernment collaborative approach with our Indigenous partners as we walk towards reconciliation together. That's what this government is about, collaborative approaches that result in real, meaningful change for Indigenous communities. We're making historical progress on reconciliation, ensuring Indigenous peoples have a bright future here in Alberta. Prosperity and success can only happen if it happens for all of us.

Alberta's government is leading the nation on economic and cultural reconciliation, and we continue to take cues from the First Nations and Métis communities that we have built such incredible relationships with while we've been in government, so we do not require a bill to be passed, as we would build reconciliation into all the important work that we do. On this side of the House we will stay the course and continue the incredible work that we're doing across government to walk the path of reconciliation with

Indigenous peoples, because, Madam Speaker, when Indigenous people succeed, we all succeed.

Thank you.

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

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** [Remarks in Cree]

I want to give thanks and acknowledge the land, the water. Nanaskamon, Member for Edmonton-West Henday, for your good mind, your good body, your good heart, and for breathing life into this bill and into this work. Nanaskamon, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this immensely important bill.

I want to show my appreciation that, in general terms, the government of Alberta has yet another opportunity, symbolically and practically, to do the right thing by Indigenous peoples, for us, the Indigenous peoples of Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8. I acknowledge that making gains on reconciliation is interconnected according to the Nehiyaw world view. This is about all of us and how we move forward in a good way together as relatives, as treaty intended us to do so.

I want to give thanks to the truth and reconciliation commissioners for the gift that they have given each and every one of us with their commitment to the unravelling and complex and devastating history upon Indigenous peoples that has had generational impacts. Their work is a gift to all of us.

Reconciliation, as a First Nations woman serving as an elected official here in this place, is deeply personal and multifaceted and a commitment that intertwines my identity, my responsibilities, and my vision for justice and healing. My colleague the Member for Edmonton-West Henday has so clearly articulated not just my vision but the vision and dream of our elders and leadership from across this beautiful province.

Bill 209 is an honouring of ancestral legacies while building bridges. Reconciliation means carrying the stories of resilience and the wisdom of our ancestors into this work while navigating these colonial systems that have historically excluded and harmed Indigenous peoples. It is about being a bridge between the worlds, advocating for First Nation sovereignty within these institutions that once sought to erase us.

Knowledge transmission, our pedagogical approaches are rooted in our stories, songs, berry picking, harvesting, medicines, and hunting – my daughter is a hide scraper in these traditional ways – especially in Nehiyaw, teach us good behaviour, intentionality, showing us, you know, how to cross-stitch or make bannock and flip it at the right time. It's not just about telling someone; it's about showing, because sometimes when you tell a little one that they're not ready to understand, they'll get impatient and obstinate. We don't want impatience. We want absorption. We want a deeper learning. We want development.

It may feel like, to the members opposite, Madam Speaker, Bill 209, the Reconciliation Implementation Act, is functionally a First Nations MLA telling the government that they must implement reconciliation, but if it's read only one way, with hostility, then like when kids dig in their heels on what jacket they should wear on a blustery spring day – what I think is a really hopeful way to read this act is: instead, think of it as a gesture. My dear friend and colleague did it by bringing to bear his immense talent, training, wisdom, and finely tuned ear to code switch for the members opposite that which we as Indigenous peoples already know. Maybe if we show you, you'll understand. That may sound hopeful; I think it sounds thoughtful and extremely compassionate.

Bill 209, then, is the legislative equivalent of showing this government or any future governments how reconciliation is

implemented, not simply saying that it must be implemented. The gift of Bill 209, if passed, has a great potential to install safety nets, cover the intellectual blind spots of settler governments on Indigenous rights, and prevent reconciliation from being kicked down the road or, worse, slipping through our collective fingers. Reconciliation in this province needs resuscitation. Bill 209 provides a life-saving breath of fresh air, full of considerate checks and balances that all citizens expect of a responsible government on accountability, transparency, and mutual respect, fashioned by an Indigenous MLA in deep consultation with Indigenous representative governments and laid out in clear and accessible terms. Bill 209 continues to pay forward the gift of reconciliation that the truth and reconciliation commissioners in their infinite wisdom gave us back in 2015, a road map to a reconciled future where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have put behind us the wrongs of the past and are instead foraging ahead toward a mutually prosperous future.

I would guess that this is one of the few times, if ever, that our seven sacred teachings have been written directly into provincial legislation before. Codifying our ways as a guiding framework or legislative implementation takes incredible vision. Our teachings, which I think of and pray on continuously: kitapamew, respect; sohki itehewin, courage; sakihtowin, love; tapwewin, truth; tapahteyimisowin, humility; kwayask-itatisiwin, honesty; iyinisiwin, wisdom. The deployment of guiding teachings in implementing reconciliation is profoundly moving work with adept cultural nuance.

I want to lay out how Bill 209 does this. It starts with the call for truth and forming through dutiful consultation and understanding of Indigenous peoples', our peoples', hopes and aspirations for a well-lived life. Truth naturally leads to wisdom and an increased awareness by this government of the history and rights of Indigenous peoples as decided by the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples as upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada and as enacted daily by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples who live and move through Alberta daily. In seeking that truth, Bill 209 then asks the government to lead with love and deepen their and by extension the public's appreciation for Indigenous languages, cultures, customs, and legal traditions. By starting with truth and love, that leads to courage and the government having the conviction to commit to constructive action that will legitimately improve Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships. If the commitment is honest, then government will engage and its engagement will be purposeful. If the engagement is respectful, then the government will seek to promote initiatives that advance reconciliation based on mutual recognition of the contributions of Indigenous peoples to this province. The hard work is doing so with humility.

Bill 209 calls for the establishment of standards that advance reconciliation while providing oversight on legislative action that is public, timely, and transparent. It is easy to defend our teachings because they give us direction and give us the freedom to strive towards the full implementation of reconciliation with humility and respect. This requires setting out towards a goal with clarity and purpose. We do not sew our moccasins with the lights off.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Bill 209 has high expectations because the teachings drive us forward with purpose. Reconciliation can only be implemented with a clear purpose and a reconciliation-focused vision that makes economic development, responsible land management, dutiful consultation, and mutually beneficial resource stewardship priorities.

4:40

I try not to speak for all Indigenous peoples when I speak in this Assembly. I am Indigenous, yes, but I'm not all Indigenous people. We are a beautifully diverse group of languages, customs, traditions, and belief. We also have a colourful array of attitudes and anxieties. Although we may be unique in our world views, we are all pretty well united in the distrust of elected governments to act in our collective best interests. Remember, the residential schools may have been run by the churches, but it was funded by the governments, which means that all levels of government, as pointed out by the TRC commissioners' 94 calls to action and final report, must meaningfully take up the work of reconciliation, and they must take it up with gusto, a spirit that is focused on building and striving for a reconciled future. Bill 209 gives this government the right tools for that work.

Like any good tool, the TRC action plan is simple, effective, and efficient. We as a government have been thinking about reconciliation for over 10 years and as a society for so much longer, so establishing a plan to implement all 94 calls to action under the authority is imperative.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

Are there any others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 209, Reconciliation Implementation Act. It wasn't lost on me that the two speakers from this side of the House are actually Indigenous. The creator, the mover of this particular bill is Indigenous and I think did an amazing job talking about why this piece of legislation was so important, then only to be followed by another colleague who so eloquently added her voice to the first speaker's voice about why this was essential.

It wasn't lost on me that it wasn't that long ago that this wouldn't have happened in this Chamber. It wasn't until we as a caucus or we as an organization and a party set out to look at how we represented people in this place. We looked at the fact that we needed to have diversity of our own members, and I think that we all spent some time thinking about what the best ways were to do that. We on this side of the House firmly believe that when you have different perspectives, different ages, different backgrounds, different ethnicities, different abilities, you're going to get better legislation because you have all different points of view. I think this particular piece of legislation speaks to that very well. It is my hope, Mr. Speaker, that one day, the next time that we see maybe an amendment to this bill, because this will naturally pass in this place – I'm being a little presumptuous – we'll also have a minister who's Indigenous, that can stand up and speak to this legislation and talk about why that's important. I think it's important. Again, my immense thanks to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-West Heday for bringing forward this important piece of legislation.

What is really kind of alarming is that the other side, so the UCP, the government members, put up the minister of Indigenous affairs to talk about some adjacent things that are also very, very important. To address the violence – the extreme violence – against Indigenous women and girls: I mean, things aren't getting much better. There are so many other things he said that are important. He almost sort of brought up those issues as a way to flick this piece of legislation away, and that really did bother me, Mr. Speaker. It bothered me because this piece of legislation – I would suspect that if the minister actually wants to move this file forward and make things better, this would be the perfect piece of legislation to do that because it requires an all-of-government approach to ensuring that we're doing the important work of reconciliation. I think it's clear

– it's very clear; it's not a point of view – that this UCP government has failed – has failed – to actively engage on reconciliation.

I think there is a number here. I thank my colleague for spelling that out for us. Our tangible lack of progress on Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action is demonstrable. There are 81 that remain unfilled, with zero completed in 2023. [interjection] I know. That's more than disappointing. That's actually shameful.

I think we can all remember when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission finally sort of let us know, let all Canadians know what the calls to action were. I felt like we were all pretty clear in this place that it was time to roll up our sleeves and get to work because we all know that things are not going to get better here in this country for all of us until we start to systematically address and get to work and meet these recommendations. They're must-haves.

We have got to do this work, yet this government has completely failed and instead will talk about, well, you know, "There's a red dress hanging over there" or "We've got this corporation that we started," which is all great. These are all great things. These are fabulous things, but that is not what we're talking about today. You are missing the point. The point is that this member is bringing forward a private member's bill. He didn't have to use his draw to do this, but he recognizes how incredibly important this is, to bring forward Bill 209, Reconciliation Implementation Act, to urge this government to get it together. Let's go. There is a lot of work to be done, and you're dragging your feet.

Yeah, still they're dragging their feet; can't even look up. They can't even stand more people up, Mr. Speaker, to debate this. If, in fact, there is a real reason other than they're too busy doing what I'm not sure – if there is a real reason that they cannot implement this piece of legislation, I would actually really like to hear what that is. Are they too busy with the red dress, too busy with the corporation, too busy with other stuff? Let us know. Happy to hear it.

Now, I'm going to focus a little bit on one particular area because it's an area that maybe I'm, you know, a little bit more familiar – can I just get a time check, Mr. Speaker?

**Member Irwin:** Five minutes.

**Ms Renaud:** Five minutes.

**Mr. Getson:** Two thousand twenty-five.

**Ms Renaud:** Two thousand what?

**Mr. Getson:** Twenty-five.

**Ms Renaud:** Oh, that was hilarious.

Okay. I'm going to focus on Indigenous people with disabilities. One of the reasons I'm going to do that, obviously, is that it's an area that I'm maybe more comfortable with, more familiar with. As I looked through, just to remind myself about all of the calls to action, there were so many. Some of the calls to action, I know, we all know in this place – I think it was only a couple of weeks ago that we were debating another private member's bill or motion about kids in care. We know that Indigenous children are overrepresented in the child welfare system. That is a fact. That's not up for debate. It is a fact. We also know that of the children that are investigated, so the OCYA, of the children who die in care and these investigations happen, far too many of those children are also disabled.

The disability prevalence: I want to read this to you because I think it's important.

Disability increases with age for both men and women among all three Indigenous groups.

This is from Statistics Canada, the most recent stuff I could find in 2019.

Disability prevalence tends to increase with age for the overall population, and Indigenous people tend to be younger than the non-Indigenous population. Inuit were the youngest of the three Indigenous groups, with an average age of 28 years [old],

when they were acquiring the disability,

followed by First Nations people, at 31 . . . Métis, at 35. The average age of the non-Indigenous population was 41.

That tells you we are seeing these disabilities at an earlier age, and they are very prevalent.

Disability increased with age among First Nations people living off reserve, Métis and Inuit. Among all three Indigenous groups, disability rates among men and women aged 40 and older were higher than those of people . . . 15 to 24.

Now, that is significant. Those of you who know, understand some of the disability stats, we understand that a lot of people are injured between that 15 to 24. Unfortunately, you see a lot more high-risk behaviour, where people are being injured.

Exceptions to this were found among Métis women and Inuit men, where an increase in disability was observed among those aged 55 . . . and older.

The reason I'm going through this is because a lot of the calls to action relate specifically to Indigenous people who are also disabled.

Four disability severity classes were established: mild, moderate, severe and very severe. Among all groups, the most prevalent level of disability severity was mild. About half of Inuit (49%) and over one-third of Métis (39%) . . .

It goes on. People can look that up in StatsCan. It's available online.

In all cases, the disability was severe enough to cause limitations in their daily lives.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, that is sort of the definition of barrier and disability.

Now, why this is so important: because we know that the number of kids in care isn't going down. It's not getting any better. The work that we're doing, the investments this government is making are not working. This number is not going down. People that are Indigenous and people that have disabilities: we know that they're living in poverty at a far higher rate than their nondisabled peers. That isn't changing either. None of that is changing. We know that they're far more likely to be homeless. We know they're far more likely to be accessing the food bank. We know all of these things, and none of these stats are changing because this government is not making the correct investments to make those changes.

4:50

I mean, we learned a lot over the last 10 years about systemic discrimination and racism and all of those things, yet this government doesn't seem willing to recognize that fact and move towards getting rid of them, eliminating systemic racism. I think that this particular bill from a private member who is also Indigenous would be an excellent first start if this government was truly interested in making progress. Clearly, they're not. They're hard pressed to look up.

Why wouldn't this government pass this legislation that could actually assist with this instead of maybe lecturing us about the few little things they've done here and there that relate to the Indigenous ministry? Why not talk about the progress you're making towards reconciliation? That's very important. We don't see much progress coming from this government, which is why we will be supporting this private member's bill.

Now, passing this legislation – and I think my colleague said it when he was first talking about it – would establish clear ministerial responsibilities for advancing reconciliation through government programs and services.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Acadia.

**Member Batten:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of the thoughtful private member's bill brought forward by my friend the Member for Edmonton-West Henday. As someone on the other side reminded us not too long ago, the year is 2025. Thinking about that – it's 2025 – the calls to action were 17 years ago, 2008. Goodness. There are people in this room that may not – no, not quite. Anyhoo. Okay. The minister made a comment about staying the course. Well, I'm sorry; that is not the answer to this. Staying the course means we're going to continue to see these ridiculous numbers, these populations unsupported and really not even consulted.

You can't use the "I didn't know" excuse anymore. You know, I didn't learn about residential schools in school, right? None of us did, I think, inside this space. We have all learned as adults as part of being Canadian and recognizing when harms have happened and how to correct them.

Going back to this, Alberta apparently has no provincial strategy for reconciliation whatsoever. The calls to action: according to the government Alberta has made some progress, which the minister has shared. However, there's no further information on that. Other provinces have made serious effort and are starting to see the fruits of their labour. If we look over to Manitoba, The Path to Reconciliation Act came into force back in 2016, and if you pay attention to what acts they're bringing through right now in the Manitoba Legislature, it's all of this legislation that addresses the true cause and tries to work past where we've sat, right? Yes. Why aren't we seeing that here in Alberta? Why is it that Manitoba is so much more committed than we are? Hmm.

Now, today the office of the Child and Youth Advocate tabled a report, and I recognize that probably those inside the Chamber haven't had a chance to read it, so let me just give you some highlights on what's in there. In the last six months investigations into severe injury and death for children or youth in care of the government or involved in the judicial system: over 67 per cent of the lives lost, which are all we're paying attention to now, Mr. Speaker – and I'll explain that in a minute, because Bill 38 is a problem. Sixty-seven per cent of the lives lost: Indigenous. If memory serves, more than 70 per cent of children in care identify as Indigenous. So, yeah. No, we're not going to stay the course. This is not okay.

As I'd mentioned briefly there, there's a bill that's being debated in the House, Bill 38, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, now in its second reading. It is trying to dilute and disempower the office of the Child and Youth Advocate with massive changes like cutting off any investigations after 18; that is, of course, unless the advocate decides that maybe the 18- to 19-year-olds deserve a little attention, too. Anyone over 20: no, we're not going to look at you. We're not going to look at the outcomes of our actions. We're not going to worry about consequences because, well, they don't really affect me, so that's cool. At least, that's the feeling coming from this UCP government.

Now, I want to go back to that report because "stay the course" is not the answer. What is happening is not working, so it would make sense to maybe change what we're doing. Let me just share a few stories of the lives that we've lost that have been mentioned

inside this report that was released today. Kenneth, an 18-year-old, just turned 18: he was in the transition to adulthood program, and he died from drug poisoning.

Now, I wanted to look into this a little bit because, of course, when we see these stories, they tell us about the entire experience of that child or at least the amount that we know about it. What we knew about Kenneth is that in his early years he was an above-average student. He had some behavioural issues, but he loved school. There was even a psychoeducational assessment that was asked for him but never delivered. You know, something like a private member's bill that would bring that for all children would be certainly helpful. Kenneth later ended up – he was supposed to go to PChAD, right? There was no room. Shocking. There was no room in the shelters. Shocking. So Kenneth passed away.

Kelly, 19 years old, died from drug poisoning. As a young First Nations child she was artistic and had a great sense of humour. But when she was born, she was in drug withdrawal, so she spent some time in the neonatal intensive care unit. Everyone in this room has heard me talk about my time inside there and working with these families as they go through withdrawal, and a baby withdrawing is really quite something to experience. It really is. It truly is something that, obviously, none of us want for any child. Of course, if we had prenatal care in Alberta that actually could serve this population, this child wouldn't have been born that way. I know I always like to give a little science lesson in here, but exposure to drugs early in life, especially in utero, can lead to lifelong usage. That's what the research is telling us, so why are we risking these children by not providing prenatal care?

Further, Kelly was assumed – they were not diagnosed completely of having fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. I described that a number of weeks ago inside this House. It is a hundred per cent preventable, and all it takes is education. As I said, I found it really sad that in 2025 I'm seeing the same posters up in bathrooms telling women not to drink. It's 2025. That is a failure of our education. That's a failure of this government.

Cleo, 12 months old, died from cardiac arrest due to pneumonia. Now, I don't know if any other member here has had pneumonia, but it's pretty freaking terrible, and it's even worse when it's in a 12-month-old. It's pretty obvious when they're sick. Well, unfortunately, it wasn't noticed that she was this sick, and she ended up passing away from pneumonia. When she was a month old, she was exposed to pepper spray. Now, how does one get exposed to pepper spray when you're inside your own home? Well, again, failure of educating, right? Pepper spray should be used only when necessary and certainly not around a one-month-old. She later was apprehended at four months because of the unstable, violent home she was living in, but they didn't apprehend her after the pepper spray. They waited. Our system has problems here.

In my last little bit I want to share that everyone should read the report that came out today and should all vote for this bill.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

The time for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

## 5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

### Public Inquiry into AHS Procurement

521. Ms Hoffman moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to take all necessary steps to

- (a) commence a public inquiry in accordance with section 2 of the Public Inquiries Act into recent allegations of

improper procurement contracts entered into by Alberta Health Services, including with respect to chartered surgical facilities,

- (b) appoint at least one commissioner who is a judge of the Court of Appeal, the Court of King's Bench, or the Court of Justice in Alberta, and
- (c) declare that section 7 of the Public Inquiries Act applies with respect to the public inquiry.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I read that very specific language into the record because when we have asked about the government finally taking action to move forward on calling a public inquiry, we keep being told that there are inquiries under way. Sure, there are a variety of investigations, most of them internal to Alberta Health Services or internal by government, where government gets to set the parameters, government gets to set the timeline, government gets to determine what documents get handed over. There is something far more concerning than just what government wants to have brought forward. This is a question of public trust, public confidence, and we have an opportunity today in this place to say that there is nothing that we as legislators are choosing to hide, that we have full confidence in the act as was outlined in here, the Public Inquiries Act.

I have the relevant section here, Mr. Speaker. I'll just talk about section 2. Here we go. Section 2 specifically outlines what it is that we're calling for, which is that the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers – I'm trying to read off my phone; small Internet versus big Internet – that at least one commissioner be appointed – we are saying specifically that it should be a judge of one of those three courts – on matters of serious concern and that they deserve the ability to be able to subpoena witnesses and gather all documents. That is especially important because we've seen through statements of claim, statements of defence, and response to statements of defence very specific language. The former CEO has what appear to be audio recordings based on how specific the quotes are.

**An Hon. Member:** Where's the phone?

**Ms Hoffman:** Pardon me?

**Mr. Amery:** Through the chair.

**Ms Hoffman:** Sorry. Somebody spoke to me, so I asked what they were saying, through you, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member cares to respond to the question, I certainly would welcome that.

They appear to be very specific audio recordings because of the vernacular that's being used in particular. I doubt that the government has asked that those specific audio recordings, that appear to be in the possession of the former CEO, be turned over to the investigator that the government has chosen, Mr. Speaker. Something like this would give far more abilities to be able to acquire those documents and to be able to have clarity in this place of what the actual facts are. This is the biggest question. The question right now when it comes to governing, period, but specifically as it relates to the health care system is: can we trust this government to be able to act in Albertans' best interests? There have certainly been a lot of allegations that that is not the case.

When the former CEO through statements in the court has identified that some of the contracts were far more superior than others and that all of them essentially were costing more money than public surgeries, it's alleged that the minister responded by saying – I'm going to use a parliamentary word in place of the unparliamentary word – that there are some sweet contracts – let's say "sweet" – and that we're just going to have to live with that. Mr. Speaker, I don't think that is good enough for the people of

Alberta to trust the government to be able . . . [interjections] Yeah; it wasn't "sweet." It was definitely an unparliamentary word. I don't know if I can – I can probably say that on the record, but I'm just going to stick with "sweet."

They might be sweet for those on the receiving end, MHCare and Sam Mraiche specifically, Mr. Speaker, but they certainly aren't sweet for the taxpayer, and the government should come to this place wanting full transparency and full accountability.

I'm going to read one other thing here. It is a letter from February 25 of this year. It says:

In recent months, I have voiced concerns regarding the Government of Alberta's procurement practices across all departments.

Far more sweeping than what the Minister of Justice has put parameters through the Premier's office around this investigation: all departments.

As Minister of Infrastructure [then], I had line of sight into these processes and took steps to address inconsistencies and recommended improvements as part of my fiduciary duty.

I want to commend the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane for taking that action and for shining some light on what's happening here. He goes on in his February 25 letter to say:

For this reason, I have decided to step down and return to caucus, and goes on later to say:

It is essential that the public has confidence in its government and its processes. We were elected to be open, transparent, fiscally responsible and – above all – honest with Albertans.

I couldn't agree more. I hope that every single one of us, when we put our name forward, came to this place with those intentions.

The corrupt care scandal and attempted cover-up has cast doubt on every single one of us in this Chamber. The best way for us to be able to move forward with integrity is to tell the truth and to ensure that the whole truth gets out there, not just documents that the Premier's office is okay with having be passed on to a retired judge but appointing an active member of the court to be able to roll up their sleeves and get to the bottom of this. As that letter says, this isn't just about AHS. This goes far deeper, into – what's alleged – every single department.

For us to come to this place and live with those principles that were so clearly articulated: I want to say let's make it happen. And we can; members of this Assembly have the ability to urge the government to do something. The government can still ignore us. They can still ignore private members even if we're the majority and vote in a way, but at least it says that we as members of this place who are active in this debate want to be able to get to the truth and the whole truth.

The reason why there is a Public Inquiries Act that outlines what a public inquiry looks like is because a prior government had the wisdom to say: "You know what? It's not right for government to investigate themselves. There will be times where we need to be able to step back and say that we were completely impartial in the investigation and that we let the truth be presented." This isn't something that was thought of in regard to this specific situation. It was thought of with regard to ensuring the public has confidence and the full confidence of the Assembly.

We've just passed a budget, I believe the biggest budget in Alberta history, the biggest spending budget. We regularly hear the Premier talk about not having trust in the health care system and those who are delivering health care services. Well, if the Premier wants us to be able to trust the head of the government, the Premier should have no hesitation to let all of this information come forward, all of the evidence that probably exists in these audio recordings. I will say that the way that they were quoted is probably not – if you were writing what somebody would say, you wouldn't

paraphrase it that way. You wouldn't use ums and likes and ahs in the same way as was presented.

I don't believe that the government has handed over that information or requested that that information be handed over to their investigator. The government has a very slim focus. They want to know: is AHS doing what government asked them to do? The people deserve to know: is the government acting with integrity; is the government telling the truth; is the government being open and transparent?

It's very simple. We have the ability here to say that we have nothing to hide, that we aren't going to stay focused on corruption, that we're going to move forward with openness and honesty. I want to commend my colleagues from Airdrie-Cochrane, Lesser Slave Lake and my colleagues within the NDP caucus for the courage that they've shown to date on this file. This is something that I think speaks to the heart of what it is that we were elected to do, to provide essential public services – health care, education, clean air, safe environment – and to make sure that we all can live in this province with confidence that our government cares about us and is focused on our needs, not corruption.

Thank you.

5:10

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

I will recognize the Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I simply rise to make a motion to request unanimous consent for the Assembly to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of the afternoon sitting.

[Unanimous consent granted]

**The Acting Speaker:** Returning to the motion on the table, Motion 521. Are there any other speakers wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Dr. Metz:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of Motion 521, which calls for a public inquiry according to section 2 of the Public Inquiries Act. Albertans deserve full transparency on what has been going on within this government with regard to the corrupt care scandal. We need to know what has happened with regard to contracting out, with regard to if there are kickbacks to the contractors or who was involved from this government, in the ministries and in AHS, with regard to the whole story. If there's nothing to hide, there should be no reason to run away from this corrupt care scandal.

The separate sham investigations that are going on are all limited in scope and will take one little picture of what the process is. It's like the blind men trying to identify an elephant by someone feeling the tail, someone feeling the ears, and thinking that this is going to give you some transparency around what has been happening.

Many employees and former employees of AHS, Recovery Alberta, and related ministries such as Health; Mental Health and Addiction; Seniors, Community and Social Services; Alberta Infrastructure; and possibly others such as Advanced Education and Treasury Board, which can be very tied to what goes on in the health system, probably know things. We know many of them know things, but they all have nondisclosure agreements, and this prevents them from saying anything that might make this government look bad. These nondisclosure agreements are not even about what's true and not true. They're about something that will make the government look bad. Let that sink in.

We are just limited in what we can find if we only do the 'shamvestigations' that are going on right now. These people cannot tell us anything unless it is compelled up from them by a

judge under section 2 of the Public Inquiries Act. They should be able to tell us if these allegations actually were true according to all of the things that they saw. They cannot tell us now who was putting pressure on them to perhaps sign very egregious, bad contracts. They cannot tell us who was pressuring them and who knew what and when.

If these allegations are not true, get to the bottom of it and let Albertans know so that we can move on from this. However, it seems pretty unlikely that the allegations are untrue because we keep running up against barriers to getting to the truth, and all of these people still remain gagged. Lawyers have told them that it's limited as to under what circumstances they can speak, and all of the investigations that are now going on do not allow that.

This motion really highlights the pattern of avoiding and denying any responsibility for actions and blaming AHS rather than letting us see what really went on. Only through a full public disclosure can the elected government really build trust with Albertans.

We can think about trust. Trust goes back to the very early days of this UCP government, when trust started to be broken with the medical community. This was even before COVID. We need to get back to where we can start rebuilding that, so that we have people willing to even work for this government, as there are still many roles that we just cannot fill because of that feeling of both mistrust and knowing that the role as a professional is just going to force them to do what the government is telling them to do.

For example, we don't have a chief medical officer of health who is trained in public health, and public health is a very big thing. It's not just about infections, although that's an important aspect. It's about a lot of knowledge of immunizations and good programs to lead them, which is part of public health not about infectious disease, for example. It's about protecting people from wildfire smoke, protecting people from selenium. We have a lot of things going on at this time, and we don't have a government that is trusted by professionals in the field such that they will even take the job on and work with this government.

This motion calls for this UCP government to put a stop to the tomfoolery that's going on and get an independent inquiry. Who in government knew what, when? Who in the ministries knew what, when? Who was told they needed to sign these contracts? Who was putting the pressure on them, and what did they know about whether these were appropriate or not? The members of the UCP who are not in cabinet, I'm sure, also want to know this because it is making us all look bad. It is making anyone who's a politician look bad at this time, and we all need this cleared up. So I am hoping that the government will set aside their current plans, think about a better strategy, which is to have one good investigation that's going to open all the doors, not be limited by what information they decide to provide, that is not going to be limited such that the report has to go back to the government to determine if it's got anything in it that perhaps the public shouldn't hear about. We need to hear, and we need all of these people to be able to speak to it.

We want to know what happened about the purchase of the Tylenol. As soon as that came out, myself and anyone who had done any work in drug development knew that this was a ridiculous idea and it was never going to happen in the timeline that was needed. We've seen now that, indeed, those recommendations, that information was provided before there was a decision to go ahead with the purchase of an enormous amount of Tylenol, or acetaminophen really, that was far more than could ever be used and that there were many processes that had to be undertaken for it to be allowed to come into the country and that no matter how fast those move along, it's going to still take too long when the processes to get Tylenol that was needed were already well under way and would be much faster. Why did we spend all this money?

Why did we agree to purchase such huge amounts that would never be needed and could not be used? We need to understand where the money goes. Follow the money: where did it go? What were all of these agreements?

5:20

We also need to understand more about what was happening with the storage of the PPE, \$600 million or more for defective PPE and health supplies. What's going on here, and why are we still paying for this? We need a full public inquiry to understand all of these issues. We have been going forward with this, we've been asking for this, and all we're hearing back is: well, we have this investigation but then, of course, it has limits. In conclusion, I say: please bring forward a full public inquiry.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to private member's Motion 521 calling for a public inquiry into the corrupt care scandal. Now, we hear the Premier, we hear the Minister of Health, we hear them try to tell us that this is just a small thing; it's about a handful of contracts at Alberta Health Services, that it actually didn't have anything to do with the minister or the Premier or the Premier's chief of staff, that the problem is all over there, and we need to investigate those people, solve their problem, and we'll be good.

But what we know, Mr. Speaker, is that it goes far beyond a handful of contracts at AHS. This is a scandal about an unprecedented level of political interference from a minister's office, from staff in the Premier's office to award these contracts.

Dr. Jared Wesley I think published a great summary, a couple of sentences. His summary: "Allegedly, the Premier's staff pressured health officials to approve over half a billion dollars in private health care contracts to a friend and supporter of the UCP who bought them seats in NHL luxury boxes. Then the government fired the CEO of Alberta Health Services when she tried to investigate."

I think an apt summary, Mr. Speaker, that captures the gravity and the unprecedented nature of this. Now, Dr. Wesley also published an excellent blog post talking about the situation and breaking down where we are. In it he notes that currently this scandal, the corrupt care scandal, is the subject of six separate investigations.

Now, the government likes to pull those out and say that that's enough; that's all we need. Dr. Wesley says that, in fact, no, it is not. To quote Dr. Wesley: "the Alberta government's current patchwork of investigations, audits, and court cases involving UCPayToPlay lacks that crucial element of comprehensive, independent, and public accountability."

Let's talk about why, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we have the AHS internal review that's going to be able to look at if the procurement rules were followed when they handed out the contracts. Now, the last we heard from the lawsuit is that there was a report under way. It was completed, it was handed off from the CEO to the Health minister, and then it disappeared into the ether. If this government was looking to be honest and transparent with Albertans at all, that report would be released to the public today. This government has chosen not to do that. Those findings are sitting on the Premier's desk, on the Minister of Health's desk. That means it lacks the kind of independence and transparency that Albertans deserve.

Then we have the Auditor General's investigation. Now, the Auditor General reports to the Legislature. He will be able to look at whether public funds were mismanaged in awarding the contracts at the heart of the scandal. The problem here is that while the



Auditor General is independent, he is limited to financial oversight, so his investigation can't cover political interference, which again is one of the key allegations here, ethical breaches, or systemic democratic failures, all of the problems that come with this government that they are trying to hide and deny and deflect. Now, I have faith in the Auditor General, Mr. Speaker, but I'll tell you that I have none in this government.

One of the other challenges we have – we just look at the example of DynaLife, a multimillion-dollar boondoggle. It was once the crown jewel of the UCP's drive to privatize health services. They spent three years setting up that deal, and it fell apart in three months. Now, the Auditor General launched an investigation into that deal in October 2023. The report was supposed to be released in early 2024; it still is not released yet. And early last year, when the media reached out to the Auditor General to ask why it was being delayed, here's what he had to say: we've experienced delays in our ability to interview people and gather the necessary information needed to complete our examination work. In other words, Mr. Speaker, people, whether in government or outside, are dragging their feet and actively blocking the Auditor General's ability to investigate and get this crucial information out to Albertans. That's why the Auditor General's investigation is not enough.

We have a third-party review. The UCP government have contracted a former Manitoba judge to conduct an independent review. Now, is the judge independent? Yes. Do I trust him? Absolutely, I do, but this government limited the scope of what he's allowed to look at. He can only look at the legislation, the regulations and policies on procurement that are typically used by the government of Alberta, specifically AHS, and how that applies to the procurement of pharmaceuticals and services offered by a chartered surgical facility. So again, Mr. Speaker, the core issue of allegations of deep corruption and political interference stemming from the Premier's office, the Health minister's office, and potentially other ministers and offices of this government: that independent judge cannot look at that.

Fourth, we have the actual lawsuit itself, and, of course, that can look into the wrongful dismissal. We have had some information come out from that, and we are thankful for what we've had come out from that, because it certainly wouldn't have gotten that level of transparency from the government themselves, but, again, that lawsuit is a private legal matter to resolve the disputes between these parties. It could reveal more useful evidence, and I'm sure it will, but it can't investigate the systemic failures over the political interference and allegations of deep corruption. That requires something more.

The Ethics Commissioner's inquiry: well, that too is limited. It can only look at whether they broke ethics laws, and what we've seen, Mr. Speaker, is that even when it is found that the Premier broke ethics laws by actively trying to interfere in a criminal court case, there was no penalty applied and this Minister of Justice just sort of said: well, everyone just needs a little refresher course. Again, it is not acceptable for the level of accountability that Albertans deserve.

Lastly, we have the RCMP investigation. They can look into whether criminal laws are broken, but they don't look into the political or ethical failures that we know this government is frankly riddled with, because we have seen it time and time again. We've never seen a government so fond of political interference in the work of public bodies, so we need an actual, proper public inquiry to get to the bottom of it.

As Dr. Wesley says, each of these investigations serves a function, but they're piecemeal, they're fragmented, they are

limited in scope, and without a public inquiry, Albertans will never get a full account of this scandal, including just how deep and broad the rot and corruption go. Without a public inquiry, we will never have an actual public forum with the key players involved: the Premier's chief of staff, perhaps the Premier, perhaps the Minister of Health, perhaps the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, where those individuals would be forced to testify under oath about those crucial questions, which this government still ducks and avoids, about who knew what, when: answers that Albertans deserve. Without a full public inquiry, that means, then, we will never get the comprehensive set of reforms that would prevent future abuse, to ensure we never see the kinds of behaviour that have been alleged in this lawsuit.

Now, Dr. Wesley also talks about a great example. He talks about the sponsorship scandal. Now, I'm sure members of the government are fond of that one. They love to rail against federal Liberals, and I'll join them on this one. That was a pretty dirty play, where the federal Liberal government was found to have, somewhat familiarly, given some sweetheart contracts to friends and supporters using public money. Imagine that. Déjà vu. But the fact is – you know what? – there was an Auditor General's report, there was a parliamentary committee, there was an internal review by the Liberal Party – and, of course, they believe in internal reviews; I'm sure they trusted that one, Mr. Speaker – an RCMP criminal investigation, and, finally, what actually got to the bottom of it, what actually gave the truth to Canadians, what actually brought accountability and reform and eventually toppled the government was a public inquiry, the Gomery commission. Again, requiring people to testify under oath, giving subpoena power: that's what rooted out the corruption. That's what stopped a government from deflecting and hiding and refusing to own up to their actions. That's what got Canadians the truth. That's what rooted out corruption in the federal government.

5:30

Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Justice can stand and talk about his independent, third-party investigation all he likes. It is not enough. It is an attempt by this government to drag their feet and hope they can deflect this long enough that their constituents stop e-mailing them, stop phoning their offices, and – they're hoping – forget about it, but Albertans will not. This information is going to continue to trickle and dribble out. We're not letting go of this because Albertans deserve transparency, and we're going to make sure they get it.

At some point this government may be dragged kicking and screaming to what they should have done to begin with, calling an actual public inquiry to get Albertans the truth. They could take a small step and support this motion for that today.

**The Acting Speaker:** I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Elbow to speak.

**Member Kayande:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to speak in favour of this motion. There are many reasons why a public inquiry is required in this matter. The first is, of course, that governments have a tendency and a nature of just wanting to cover up that information. I believe it was Ralph Klein who once said: shoot, shovel, and shut up. That's how governments deal with scandal, by managing the information flow, by taking great care to make sure that the public only knows what the government wants them to know. So the tendency of governments to manage information and to try and sweep scandals under the carpet, to shoot, shovel, and shut up, has to be met with an equal amount of concern and care from all of the legislators who were not involved.

This is the critical element that – you know, like, I address the private members in this House for whichever party they stand for. All the private members in here didn't get hockey tickets. They didn't get flights. They didn't go to Florida. Instead, the private members in this House who are helping the government cover up this scandal are the ones who, by being good and loyal soldiers, hope to manage their own political careers in the face of this absolutely incredible scandal. To them I say: what's in it for them? What is in it for warming a chair and having ministers get hockey tickets in return for turning a blind eye to massive alleged overpayments? To every private member in this House I would respectfully ask: why not have a public inquiry and get to the bottom of this? Why not? If there is actually nothing to see here, have a full public inquiry to make sure that there's nothing to see.

You know, this is a government that has the entire sweep of legislation available to it, that has chosen time and time again to carve out and to give the people of Alberta less and less say and less and less transparency. We have a Public Inquiries Act that the government is not following, deciding that – you know what? – that Public Inquiries Act is not going to be what we use. We have a Referendum Act that the government decided to toss into the Dumpster instead of having, like, an authentic referendum on the CPP, a referendum that we're still waiting for. There is an Arbitration Act, and the government is not going to be incorporating the Arbitration Act in its future insurance rewrite to make sure that any arbitrations are fair. What this means is that the people of Alberta get slowly shut out of their government. Government becomes less and less democratic. That's something that we really need to worry about. I know it's not fashionable to worry about a government being particularly democratic right now, except we see the consequences of that in the United States. We see consequences of that impacting us today.

I think the people of Alberta want to know the truth, I think they deserve to know the truth, and I think that the private members in this House deserve to know the truth as well. If there are shenanigans, if there are ministers who are implicated in this massive, massive scandal, I would think that private members on the UCP side would also want to know so that they could go back to their constituents and tell them: "I did everything I could. I can hold my head up high. You can count on me because I care about transparency."

You know, I get it. The government has probably said at some point: "Look, we shoot, we shovel, we shut up. It all goes away, and nothing happens. It just all dies off, and nobody gets hurt." Well, except there's a website, [corruptcare.ca](http://corruptcare.ca). I encourage everyone in Alberta to check it out. We the NDP Party have set up this website to allow people who are sensing fraud or who know something or someone to come in and – to every member in this House I will tell you that there is an avalanche of tips coming in, just an absolute avalanche. It's an avalanche that could stand to block the money river.

How big is this money river? Well, let me tell you. The Premier herself, under questioning in this House, said that there are 20,000 new surgeries being done privately this year, every year as opposed to public surgeries which were done in the past. Every surgery, according to the *Globe and Mail*, costs \$500 more done privately than it does publicly. Well, I mean, I can't do a lot of math in my head anymore, but it turns out that, you know, 500 times 20,000 surgeries is a billion dollars a year. That's the money river that we're talking about. And in order for some of that money river to find its way into the right friendly hands, what has the government done? It has stopped disclosing gifts. It has made it okay to go into luxury skyboxes. It has made it okay to accept flights. Again, I can't

help but emphasize that it's not the private members in this House who are getting those flights. It's not the private members who are getting the sweetheart deals. It's not the private members who are going to get fancy employment deals after the fact. No, no, no. Those belong to the ministers, allegedly.

Now, I asked the minister: why is a public inquiry required? Well, I asked the Minister of Justice in this House if the police were to question ministers, ministerial staff, or members of Alberta Health Services or any member of the government in an employment relationship, if those people – let's face it. We are in a country with a properly functioning legal system, and for sure one of the key elements of a properly functioning legal system is that we have the right to remain silent. We don't have to testify against ourselves. It's a core fundamental human right. But should somebody who invokes their right to remain silent from a criminal investigation keep their job? That's a different question. I think it would be very shocking to the people of Alberta if somebody were investigated by the RCMP, that if a minister were investigated by the RCMP and invoked their right to remain silent, which no one would know. It's their business. I think it would be shocking to the people of Alberta.

So I asked the minister in this House: if somebody invokes their right to remain silent, is that person going to be fired? He refused to answer. He refused to answer, which, you know, I mean, in one sense I'm in admiration because, of course, he has the right to remain silent as well. But the reality is that only in a public inquiry, when somebody is compelled to testify and if they invoke their constitutional right to avoid self-incrimination, only in that setting is that known. So in the most base and basic sense what the government is trying to do by avoiding a public inquiry is to make sure the people of Alberta don't know the truth because – let's face it – the truth must be embarrassing and even worse than we imagine, even worse than \$70 billion blown on Turkish Tylenol, even worse than the hockey ticket kickbacks, even worse than the sweetheart deals that have already been noticed, even worse than the \$600 million paid to Sam Mraiche for who knows what services. Even worse. It's even worse.

5:40

That's why [corruptcare.ca](http://corruptcare.ca) exists, and that's why we're getting an avalanche of tips that are coming in about the shocking level of corruption in this government. That's why the ministers who are charged with holding their hands and keeping the lid on this pressure cooker will be unable to do so. The lid is going to blow. Why don't the members get in front of it?

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

I will recognize the Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Motion 521, a motion that calls for a public inquiry into the procurement practices of Alberta Health Services, particularly related to and concerning chartered surgical facilities. I want to be absolutely and abundantly clear before we begin. This government takes these allegations very seriously, as I've said time and again in this Chamber. We will always be committed to supporting transparency and accountability in matters like these. I appreciate the comments of other members in this Chamber, but time and again the NDP has demonstrated that it is only loosely concerned with the facts. The hypocrisy typically – and today is no different – knows no end.

This motion is not only unnecessary, but it's also incredibly redundant given the extensive reviews and the investigations that are going on already. My friend from Edmonton-City Centre did a

remarkable job of summarizing the extensive reviews and the investigations that are taking place right now.

As I said, our government takes these allegations very seriously, and that's precisely why, Mr. Speaker, we've already taken decisive action in reviewing the contract procurement processes of AHS. One of the first things that happened was that the Acting Deputy Minister of Executive Council was tasked with ensuring a credible, independent, third-party review to investigate the allegations independently from government, and that's exactly what we did.

As we've said before, the hon. Raymond Wyant, the former Chief Justice of the provincial court of Manitoba, will be conducting this review. I cannot imagine a more independent process than having a former Chief Justice of another province, an NDP province for that matter, conducting and leading this review. Mr. Speaker, like the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, Judge Wyant brings extensive experience in law and judicial oversight. He is a well-respected former judge, he is a well-respected individual of our communities, and he will do a thorough job of reviewing this matter in an impartial way.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Judge Wyant's investigation is well under way, in fact, with an interim report due on May 30, 2025, and, as I've mentioned in this Chamber many times before, a final report due by June 30, 2025. These findings will be made public for everyone to see on [alberta.ca](http://alberta.ca), and I am very encouraged by those results.

I have to wonder: what do these NDP members actually want? An additional, redundant public inquiry will not serve the people of Alberta any better than the rigorous processes that are already in place, and there are many. Our government has fully supported the Auditor General's review of this matter. [interjection] I, again, am pleased by my friend from Edmonton-City Centre, who used up all of his time but still wants to continue to ramble on from the floor.

Mr. Speaker, my friend from Edmonton-City Centre outlined the plethora of investigations, processes, all independent that are taking place right now. He mentioned the faith that he has in the Auditor General. I, too, have faith in the Auditor General, and we will continue to work with that independent office, a completely independent office, to provide all the necessary documentation and will assist in their thorough examination in any way that we can.

We're also aware that the RCMP is conducting its own investigation. The government of Alberta, of course, Mr. Speaker, will provide the required co-operation to the RCMP should the government be requested to do so.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Elbow spent a great deal of time criticizing the Charter right to silence, Mr. Speaker. I will stand up publicly in this House and say that I will do everything that I can to ensure that individuals have the right to silence, as is afforded to every single Canadian in this country. I'm not embarrassed to say that. He might want to get up and reiterate his comments again, but I think it's embarrassing for any member of this Chamber, let alone a member who uses the opportunity to spend his time criticizing our Charter rights, to suggest that we are embarrassed to say that. I have no concerns whatsoever.

Since the RCMP operates independently, it would be highly inappropriate for this government to interfere or comment on that investigation, but, of course, let me be very clear, Mr. Speaker: we're not ignoring concerns, we're not ignoring inquiries, we're not ignoring requests. We will work with whatever independent body to furnish or provide it with whatever it needs in order to conduct its investigation, and we'll address it in an efficient, transparent, and responsible manner. That's what Albertans want us to do, and that's exactly what we're doing.

Let's talk about what this motion is actually about. Now, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora got up and introduced the motion

to talk about the things that she wants to see, but let's look at what it actually is about, Mr. Speaker. It's an attempt to undermine the very hard work that chartered surgical facilities are performing in this province, where thousands of Albertans are receiving publicly funded surgeries as a result of these facilities. These facilities are a key part of Alberta's health care system. They're not going anywhere. As I said, they are publicly funded surgeries that are reducing wait times and freeing up operating rooms in our hospitals all across the province, and I think that's incredibly important to note.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans rely on these chartered surgical facilities for thousands of essential services, and the NDP members bringing these matters forward seek nothing but to try and score cheap political points, to try to criticize and attack the processes that have been in place for many, many years at the cost of the health care of Albertans. It's no secret that the NDP, in their short term in government, failed miserably when it came to public health. They were responsible for the highest record spending, the highest levels of deficits, the highest levels of debts, the highest net migration out of our province, and everything that they did, they did improperly or incorrectly. This is not an opposition that has the experience or the capabilities to manage this province.

Albertans deserve a health care system that prioritizes patient care over political ideology, over cheap political points, over the opportunity to grandstand in this Chamber and pretend that they have an opportunity to effect change in this province. They certainly do not, and they have demonstrated that they're incapable of doing so, Mr. Speaker.

In the 2023-2024 fiscal year alone this province set a record of over 304,595 surgeries, which was an increase from 294,300 in the previous year alone. Chartered surgical facilities played a crucial role in delivering those numbers, completing over 62,000 surgeries. I heard one of the members of the NDP allege that it was 20,000. It's actually 62,000. The results speak for themselves, Mr. Speaker.

**5:50**

It's no secret that this government has been critical of AHS and their performance. The inability of AHS to deliver timely and quality health care is well known to many people, but that's exactly why our government is taking a strong approach to refocus this health system.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite were content with status quo, but we're not. We're committed to making difficult decisions, sometimes unpopular, sometimes challenging decisions but necessary to make sure that Albertans receive the health care that they deserve. In 2019 AHS was provided with \$13.9 billion dollars. In 2024-2025 that funding increased to \$17.4 billion. Where did that money go? That's the question we should be asking. That's the question that this government has been asking, not wasting time by duplicating and replicating redundant investigations [interjections] as that member, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, might suggest.

We need accountability, Mr. Speaker. We need action, not political showmanship, not grandstanding in this Chamber. Our government has committed to enhancing the transparency of procurement where necessary.

I would recommend that the members of this Chamber certainly vote down this motion. It is redundant and unnecessary.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Falconridge to speak.

**Member Boparai:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak in full support of private member's Motion 521, which calls for a public inquiry into the recent allegations of improper procurement

contracts within Alberta Health Services, particularly concerning contracts with chartered surgical facilities.

This motion, introduced by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, urges the government of Alberta to take all necessary steps to initiate an independent inquiry under section 2 of the Public Inquiries Act, appoint a judicial commissioner, and apply section 7 of the Public Inquiries Act to ensure transparency and accountability in the investigation.

The Official Opposition stands firmly behind this motion, believing that it is critical for restoring trust in Alberta's health care system and ensuring that any wrongdoings are thoroughly examined. We will look at background on the motion. The Official Opposition's stance: the impact on Alberta's health care system contrasts with the UCP's approach and a proposed solution for transparency and accountability.

We'll go with the background on the motion. The motion calls for an independent public inquiry into the procurement practices at AHS, particularly surrounding chartered surgical facilities. This issue came to light after the former AHS CEO was dismissed under controversial circumstances, allegedly because she was investigating the involvement of political influence in the awarding of multimillion-dollar contracts to their friends at private surgical facilities.

The former AHS CEO filed a \$1.7 million wrongful dismissal lawsuit in February, claiming that she had been removed for attempting to investigate potential political interference in AHS contracts, including those with Alberta's chartered surgical facilities. She contended that she was subject to political pressure to suppress her findings, including pressure to stop investigating inflated contracts, prices, and preferential treatment for certain private companies. As reported by CBC, she has alleged that she was, and I quote, dismissed two days before meeting with Alberta's Auditor General, which raises concerns about the government's desire to keep the truth from reaching the public.

This motion calls for a public inquiry that would allow for full disclosure of the facts surrounding these procurement contracts and ensure that the investigation is conducted independently under judicial oversight by recommending that at least one commissioner be a judge from the Court of Appeal, the Court of King's Bench, or the Court of Justice in Alberta to ensure that the inquiry will be impartial, transparent, and robust enough to uncover the truth. It is crucial that this inquiry be independent of political influence, especially given the current government's track record of political interference in key matters of public concern.

Second is the Alberta NDP's, the Official Opposition's, stance. My colleagues and I strongly support this motion because Albertans deserve . . .

**The Acting Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt the Member for Calgary-Falconridge, but under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close debate on Motion 521.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I heard the remarks from the Justice minister, and I have to say that I am not shocked, but I definitely continue to be disappointed not just with the canned talking points that have been the same since February 25 but with a lack of compassion for all private members of this Assembly, who I know are being asked. I imagine cabinet ministers, too, but private members, when they go home to their community, are held to a different standard in terms of accessibility and in terms of accountability.

I think a lot of people understand when the Justice minister might not be available in Calgary-Cross for a bunch of one-on-one meetings, but everyone expects private members to be available and to answer for what government is doing, and I assume that you are. I've been CCed on many of the letters that private members of this Assembly have received, Mr. Speaker, and they, too, are frustrated and outraged by the level of corruption that they are seeing from this government. They expect better from elected representatives, and I know elected representatives expect better themselves.

I know the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane. I have had many opportunities to get to know the hon. member over the years, and I am grateful for what he had the courage to put pen to paper and say that he was standing up for accountability and transparency and that it was important that he step down from his role because he saw widespread corruption, Mr. Speaker, through all departments and that there deserved to be a higher level of transparency and accountability. He stepped aside, and I think it would be incumbent upon all of us in this Chamber to call an actual public inquiry.

Again, I know the minister says: well, it's redundant. It is absolutely not, and I know the minister is smarter than those talking points. He deserves far better notes than he has been given on this topic because he is a learned colleague. A learned colleague. He is a lawyer, he understands the Public Inquiries Act, and he knows that it is far more sweeping than the directed mandate that the Premier's office has passed down to a retired judge from another province.

Again, lots of respect for that judge and for the work that I'm sure he is embarking upon, but it is far from a public inquiry, where it is independent, where the person has the ability to sequester documents, including audio recordings that clearly are out there that relate to this huge corruption scandal. The minister asks: where are the audio recordings? Exactly. The minister certainly hasn't turned them over, but when you look at the response to the statement of defence, Mr. Speaker, through you, the response to the statement of defence very clearly has mastered the vernacular that certain members who are quoted in that document have used.

**Mr. Schow:** Point of order.

**The Acting Speaker:** A point of order has been called. The Government House Leader.

#### **Point of Order Imputing Motives**

**Mr. Schow:** Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order for 23(h), (i), and (j), insinuating false motives against the Minister of Justice, a suggestion that he has access or has something with regard to recordings that – the member is clearly insinuating that the Justice minister is acting untoward, is doing something inappropriate in this Chamber. It was absolutely an accusation, and I think it's absolutely ridiculous that the member thinks that just because there is parliamentary privilege in this Chamber, she can go and make these kinds of accusations against a member in good standing, particularly the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, this is totally inappropriate. The member needs to be very cautious about the kind of language we use in this Chamber because people are watching. People are watching, and they're listening, and they understand the truth, but I can tell you that what that member is saying is totally out of line. To suggest that the Minister of Justice has – was it audio recordings? – audio recordings.

**Ms Hoffman:** I didn't say he has them.

**Mr. Schow:** If the member opposite has something to say on this point of order, the member opposite is more than welcome to get up and defend that member's self, but at this moment in time I'm arguing that that member is out of line.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Official Opposition Deputy House Leader.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate that the

Government House Leader is choosing to raise what is, frankly, frivolous in the middle of private members' business, wasting the time of the House, wasting the time of private members. What the member said is that those recordings exist, not that the minister had them. Shameful.

**The Acting Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt, but the time is now 6 p.m., and the House stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]



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For inquiries contact:

Editor

*Alberta Hansard*

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: [AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca](mailto:AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca)