Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 4, 2025

Day 7

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature
Second Session

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Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m. Tuesday, November 4, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray.

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, today we are joined by representatives from the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation along with three Stollery families who are sharing their stories in support of children's health care in Alberta. Each family has experienced the expert compassionate care that makes the Stollery the most specialized children's hospital in western Canada. Harper from Spruce Grove was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy type 1 and continues to thrive thanks to innovative treatment. Canaan from Sherwood Park lives with a rare heart and lung condition that requires ongoing co-ordinated care, and Okimasis from Saddle Lake Cree Nation was told he'd never walk or talk after a traumatic brain injury as an infant, but today he'll skate laps around you. Thank you to the support of the Stollery team. They are here today with their supportive families, and I ask that they all please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

School groups today, starting with the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lunty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a group of students from the Father Leduc Catholic school in Leduc. I got a chance to chat with them earlier. They were very excited to take the legislative tour here today and very excited to be back in their classrooms. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you 35 students and their teacher, Amy Badger, from Soraya Hafez school. I would ask that they all please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Richard Roy, a champion of Alberta's innovation and tech ecosystem through his extensive community work with organizations such as ERIN, Technology Alberta startup team, among many others. He was recently voted MVP at the 2025 YEG startup awards. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce Karen and Darrell Teeling. They're both residents of Edmonton-Glenora, living specifically in North Glenora. Karen is one of the most committed volunteers on campaigns but also in between helping me serve the constituents of Edmonton-Glenora as a volunteer in my office weekly. Both Karen and Darrell are retired educators, Karen in postsecondary and Darrell a teacher and principal, and they're watching the legislation of this place very closely. Please rise and receive our warm welcome.

The Speaker: The Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I introduce executive members Mohan and Anand of the International Society of Ancient Wisdom. This society purchases, cooks, and shares food through a feed the hunger program in Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver. I recently attended one of their events and was deeply impressed with the great families and children there. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you an exceptional Albertan, Vijoy Prasad. She's an electrical engineer by training and an outstanding community leader who makes a meaningful difference in our province. She's accompanied by her husband, Dr. Amit Kumar, who will be representing Alberta, Canada at COP 30 in Brazil. Dr. Kumar is a driving force of our hydrogen initiative, a valued member of our India advisory committee, and I'd like that power couple to rise so we could give them the warm reception of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the minister's behalf I rise to introduce to you and through you Dr. Colleen Forestier, registrar and CEO of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta and former command surgeon with the Canadian Armed Forces. We are very honoured to have her as a guest today. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jonathan Kraft, third-year law student at the U of A, along with other wonderful law students from the U of A. These represent some of the best future legal minds of our province. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce my better half, my wife, Devinder Brar, who has always been with me through thick and thin. She's joined by our two sons, Sidik and Josh Brar. I'm so pleased to have them and ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. member, was that your first introduction?

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Yes.

The Speaker: Well done.

Member Gurinder Brar: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce Pirthipal Brar and Harpreet Brar, the brother and sister-in-law of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. Pirthipal is a small-business owner and community organizer. They have both played a key role in the

member's success, and I ask Pirthipal and Harpreet to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce a special guest today, Jaskiran Sekhon. Jaskiran is the niece of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. She is a health care professional and an artist. She has worked hard on the member's campaign and was excited to see her Mama ji in action in the House today. I ask Jaskiran to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure when people visit from the community of Sherwood Park. You've already met Amy, Lindsey, and Canaan Lauber. They are a Stollery family. Canaan is a one-in-a-trillion kid with complex needs being treated with complex care at the Stollery, a world-class team that is treating children there. The families there are always generous with heart and spirit, and Canaan was kind enough to even invite me to come play a game of volt hockey with him sometime.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

Bill 2 and Charter Rights

Mr. Shepherd: "We have rights that are independent of particular laws . . . They are not rights that are granted by this Legislature . . . They are inalienable . . . they don't get suspended in times of emergency. Rights, being inalienable, exist at all times." Those are the words of the Premier, spoken here in this Legislature just one year ago, just one year before she and her colleagues tortured the rules of this Legislature to force through in a single day a law stripping Alberta teachers of their Charter right to strike. It seems, Mr. Speaker, the Premier's respect for rights ends when they become inconvenient for her. When it serves her political interests, she's more than willing – indeed, she's proud – to trample on the rights of Albertans, but Albertans are watching and speaking out.

1:40

Just yesterday Stephen London, bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Edmonton, wrote:

> The Alberta government has taken a step in suspending a fundamental freedom of our society, the freedom of association . . . The deeper implications of this action are sobering because when one fundamental freedom is denied, it is possible to imagine other fundamental freedoms being denied, including our own "freedom of conscience and religion." In a time when democratic institutions around the world are becoming fragile, I believe it would be wise to step back from this action.

But it appears the Premier and her government lack the wisdom or the moral principle to step back. Instead, they're barrelling ahead.

We fully expect in the weeks to come that they'll exercise that same power to deny parents the Charter right to choose medical care for their child, to bar young women from playing sports unless they prove they're female. This Premier and government don't love freedom; they love power, and they'll do anything and sacrifice anyone to get it and hang on to it. Albertans' rights don't matter. It's cynical, unconscionable, and unacceptable.

Alberta's New Democrats stand against this government's abuse of Albertans' rights. When we form government, we'll pass a law to protect against any future government's abuses because better is possible, and as we face down this power-hungry Premier, it's never been needed more.

The Speaker: A caution that when you are saying things about individuals rather than the group, the government or the party, one needs to be more careful.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

Bill 6

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about a transformative step our government is taking to support Alberta's youngest learners. The proposed amendments to the Education Act will require reading and math screeners for students from kindergarten through grade 3, ensuring that every child can build strong foundational skills in literacy and numeracy.

Our government knows that Alberta's classrooms are more diverse and complex than ever. We are seeing a growing number of students with unique learning needs, behavioural challenges, and language barriers. Early identification is critical. By implementing mandatory screenings, we can pinpoint students who will require additional support at the earliest stage, before learning gaps widen and become harder to address.

Under these amendments school boards and independent early childhood service operators will conduct regular screenings and share the results with parents. This keeps families informed and engaged and ensures data is available to the department and the Minister of Education and Childcare. Such transparency and accountability will help us respond more effectively to classroom complexity and tailor interventions.

Mr. Speaker, we are backing these changes with significant investments in classroom support. Budget 2025 allocates $11 million for math and reading support, with funding increasing to $15 million by 2027-28. Since 2021 our government has provided $92.5 million to help students needing extra assistance.

If passed, the legislation will empower the minister to set regulations around timing, frequency, and methods of assessment as well as exemption criteria. Annual reports on screening results will help track progress and guide future policy decisions.

Mr. Speaker, helping children master reading and math in their early years is one of the most important investments that we can make. These amendments will strengthen Alberta's education system, support teachers and families, and give every child the best possible start.

Support for Education

Ms Ganley: It can alter the course of a life. It can make the difference between a life spent in and out of the justice system and one as a productive member of our society. It can make the difference between struggling just to get by and creating a business that supports hundreds more. Access to public education can change the course of a life, but right now in Alberta today under the UCP many kids are being denied that right, being denied an education. They are being denied the supports that they need to access it. A few hours of time with an EA is all it would take to change these lives, and they deserve it. Every child deserves it.

That is what teachers were fighting for, for those kids and their rights, for our kids and their future. They left their classrooms. They went without pay. They were vilified by a government that refused to even listen to their concerns about classroom conditions. Still they fought, and what did they get for their trouble? A government that trampled on their rights, that refused to bargain in good faith, that forced them and our kids back to the same conditions that caused the strike in the first place.

The right to come together and fight for fair pay and working conditions makes our world better. It increases average incomes

and makes our society more fair. It gave teachers the right to fight to change the course of all of those lives until the UCP took those rights away. If you think the UCP is going to stop there, that they will take teachers' rights and just stop, well, might I recommend that you consult a history teacher. Once they see that they can take one group's rights, it never stops there.

Physician Recruitment and Retention

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, Alberta continues to see steady growth in its physician workforce, which is a testament to our government's ongoing investment in medical education, recruitment, and retention efforts. Our province has not once but twice shattered doctor recruitment records for the past two quarters, and we've seen exponential growth over the past year. According to the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta over the past 12 months our province has successfully added 643 new registered physicians. In fact, as of September 30 Alberta now has 12,769 registered physicians, which is the highest ever recorded number in the province. That's a 5.3 per cent increase in doctors compared to Alberta's 2.5 per cent population growth. All five health zones experienced significant physician growth, including the north zone, which holds a 10 per cent increase.

Mr. Speaker, we are seeing incredible recruitment and retainment advancements through the province, especially within our rural communities. More Albertans will have access to a family physician or specialist closer to home, which increases patient choice and promotes overall healthier communities across the province. Our government remains committed to supporting physicians by encouraging team-based care and innovative collaboration. We value and continue to invest in primary care as it's the backbone of our health care system. Through the successful launch of the primary care physicians' compensation model for family physicians and rural generalists we have made it easier for physicians to practise comprehensive and longitudinal patient care. Additionally, we're increasing the number of medical training seats in Alberta universities, so more than 100 additional physicians can graduate annually.

By supporting physicians and improving access to care, we will continue to build a stronger, more resilient health care system for all Albertans. Mr. Speaker, we are incredibly fortunate.

Government Priorities

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, the UCP government is totally disconnected from the issues which concern Albertans today: food, shelter, health care, and education, basic government responsibilities anywhere in a democratic world. Not in UCP Alberta, however. While Alberta families struggle through an affordability crisis, a housing crisis, a health care system in shambles, and an education system in an induced meltdown, let's examine the Alberta government's legislative hit parade of top priorities.

Topping the charts is Bill 1, the International Agreements Act, the government's signature piece of legislation, that should be about the most pressing needs in Alberta right now. No Alberta family was clamouring for this piece of legislation while on their way to the food bank, and no homeless Albertan was demanding this as they wondered where they were going to sleep at night.

Then we have the most egregious piece of legislation ever enacted by any government in this province, Bill 2. The sardonically named Back to School Act imposed a twice rejected contract offer onto striking Alberta teachers, using the notwithstanding clause to strip away their rights to collectively bargain or even object to the back-to-work legislation through the courts. It would also throw massive fines to teachers for noncompliance. All this to hammer the union into submission as they try to trigger a wider fight against organized labour and workers' Charter rights.

To top it off, immediately upon introducing this unprecedented Charter-busting bill, the Premier did not vote for it. She's got more time for fancy meetings in lavish boardrooms in Saudi Arabia for Lord knows what purpose, abandoning her caucus on a rudderless ship that is lost in a puddle of libertarian liabilities. That puddle, Mr. Speaker, resembles none of the ocean of troubles Albertans are facing today.

There's hope, Mr. Speaker, though. As the UCP caucus may recall right now, Albertans are poised to pull the plug on this government and send this floundering UCP ship down the drain.

1:50 Women's Income Equality

Ms Hayter: When the government talks about the Alberta advantage, I have to ask: advantage for who? Right now it's not for the single mom serving tables, the nursing aide pulling double shifts, or the cashier holding down three jobs just to make rent. Women are concentrated in the lowest paid sectors, the ones that rely on minimum wage, and it's not easy. Jobs are emotionally demanding, physically exhausting, and absolutely essential to our communities. Women's work is undervalued and underpaid and has been for generations.

Alberta has the lowest minimum wage in all of Canada, but it also has the highest cost of living. Sixty per cent of minimum wage earners are women. The wages don't cover the cost of living. It's not an advantage when women are working full-time and still living in poverty and can't afford child care. Women take these jobs because of the flexible hours that are necessary to balance paid work with unpaid work and caregiving. We take these jobs not by choice but because affordable child care and stable full-time opportunities are out of reach, dealing with discrimination and a lack of family-friendly policies. The gender pay gap is a system that undervalues care work, expecting women to fill the gaps and paying them less while we still do more.

That's why Bill 201 is so important. Mr. Speaker, it's why every member in this House should be supporting it. It addresses equality issues. It raises minimum wage. It protects workers' tips. It will give every Albertan a chance for stability, showing that we value people's time, their labour, and their contributions to this province. It is one concrete way we can narrow the gap for those struggling the most today. We cannot call it an advantage when people are working multiple full-time jobs and they still cannot make ends meet. Alberta women are working harder than ever.

Oral Question Period

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

Auditor General's Investigations

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not a lot of people pay attention to the Legislative Offices Committee, and perhaps the government was taking advantage of that yesterday, because a number of bizarre things happened. Let's start, first of all, with the horrific treatment of Alberta's Auditor General. He had asked some weeks ago in a letter for an extension to his contract to finish all the investigations he has under way. He never heard back. Much to his surprise, he found out yesterday that he was being fired. Is this how

the government normally treats senior public servants? Who would ever apply for the job of Auditor General of Alberta?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, that's categorically not the case. The Auditor General's eight-year contract had elapsed, which is the norm with Alberta. Every Auditor General in history has served eight years. We thank Mr. Wylie for his service, and of course we're happy to continue seeing him produce the reports he needs to through the transition that will happen until April of next year.

Mr. Nenshi: There is certainly precedent for extensions on this sort of thing, and had the government actually thanked him yesterday before it all hit the fan, perhaps I'd be more inclined to believe it. But this is an Auditor General who is working flat out to complete his investigation into the corrupt care scandal now that he's not convinced that he can actually finish it before the end of his term. Why is the government trying to shut up the Auditor General to ensure that his reporting to the corrupt care scandal will never be tabled?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, no one is shutting anyone up. The office of the Auditor General is an office of the Legislature. We extended a million-dollar addition to his budget last April for exactly this purpose, and this is the best funded office of the Auditor General across the country. Obviously, there are dozens upon dozens of staff that will continue to work there as the transition happens, which is the norm. The contract elapsed. There will be a new Auditor General that I imagine the legislative search committee will find in due time. Everything will continue in that office. They will continue to be the best funded in the country.

The Speaker: Hon. member, carry on. It was drawn to my attention that committee business is not government business, but we're this far down the road. Your second supplemental.

Mr. Nenshi: Nothing to see here. Everything will be fine. The people will continue doing the work. But, of course, if the new Auditor General has to restart the work, that conveniently pushes the time period back beyond potentially a provincial election.

Now, Justice Wyant clearly said that he was prevented from getting to the bottom of the matter because of the government's restrictions. The AG has the power to subpoena witnesses, to compel testimony under oath. He's conducting oath interviews right now. Given that this government has repeatedly refused to call a public inquiry, why aren't they letting the Auditor General do his job?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, eight years ago the members opposite, when they were in government, hired the Auditor General. We worked with that Auditor General. We funded the Auditor General at incredibly high rates, and we continue to give him surplus money as was required for important investigations. These investigations will continue, and the office will continue to do its work. The truth is that the Assembly, as the Speaker noted, made its decision through its committee. If there's a search committee that continues, the government will participate in any way we're required to. That being said, it is the committee's choice to not do extraordinary action and renew an Auditor General that has served eight years, which is the end of his contract.

The Speaker: The second main set of questions. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate that the minister has admitted that this government has had so many scandals to be investigated that they had to fund the Auditor General with even more money.

Funding for Chief Electoral Officer

Mr. Nenshi: But let's now talk about Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer. He has asked for funding to be able to deal with the rash of recall petitions and citizen petition initiatives, and this funding has been denied by the UCP government. They passed the legislation with great fanfare about direct democracy earlier this year, and now they seem scared by what they've unleashed. Does the UCP government actually believe in citizen initiatives and recalls or only when . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the committee did fund an extra million dollars plus for exactly this purpose, and we believe that the office of the Election Commissioner can continue to do the work with the funds that they have. We think it's important to continue. Of course, recall legislation is there to be balanced when we talk about individuals in the office that are not doing their job, when they do criminal or absolutely inappropriate action. Recall will always be there for Albertans as a recourse in between general elections.

Mr. Nenshi: To be clear, the Chief Electoral Officer asked for $13 million. He was granted less than $1 million, and he wrote the government today saying that he does not have the money to do his job. We seem to be in what the Internet calls the find out phase. This government passed the legislation to help themselves, and now citizens are using it against UCP members and suddenly they're scared. The CEO said, quote: this decision places my office in a very difficult position. Will the government listen to Elections Alberta so that these officials can actually do the work this government enabled?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer has millions of dollars at his disposal. We are not in the run-up to a general election. We have afforded another million dollars of surplus this year to make sure that that will continue, the work that they need to do when it comes to recall. As needs require, we will always have the Assembly answer that question, and the committee makes those votes as it sees fit.

Mr. Nenshi: That $13.2 million doesn't even include the cost of an actual referendum campaign.

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

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier said this spring that Albertans have more ways to be directly involved in democracy and to have their say on issues that matter to them. Unquote. She didn't add in "except when it's against us," yet one member of this cabinet has been going around telling his constituents that they plan to repeal the recall legislation, recall the recall now that it's being used against them. Can we expect the UCP government to repeal the recall legislation now or only after . . .

The Speaker: There was a point of order. A point of order was noted at 1:58.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, this government enacted recall because we believe hearing the voice of Albertans matters. Members opposite in government would have been terrified to enact this legislation with their absolute unpopularity in their one-

and-done term, four years under Premier Notley. It was a disaster for the province. We have confidence in the judgment of Albertans. We will make sure that that legislation continues to be balanced and served. I'd like members opposite to stand on their record with recall. When they were in government at the time, they were afraid to. That's the real fear we're seeing here.

The Speaker: For the third set of questions, the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: Well, certainly, somebody is scared over there. Perhaps some people to that minister's left.

New Hospital Construction

Mr. Nenshi: That said, yesterday I also raised the case of Ben, a child receiving cancer treatment at the Stollery. The minister refused to commit to funding and building the stand-alone children's hospital, not to a location, not to a specific timeline. For families in the capital region, for families across northern Alberta this project is sorely needed, but this government has also announced in the throne speech that they will not be building any more stand-alone hospitals ever again in their mandate. Will the minister . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

2:00

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just today meeting with doctors and administrators from the Stollery and also families that have received world-class service for children at the Stollery. I committed to them the same that I did yesterday in question period, that we do intend on building a stand-alone Stollery. In fact, the planning funds are already in place, and there will be an announcement in short order on where this stand-alone facility will be.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Nenshi: Not one dollar has been committed to construction of this hospital. This government's record of cancelling projects already planned or under way is extraordinary: the superlab, the children's mental health hospital, the south Edmonton hospital.

The minister also broke some news yesterday. He said that they want to build three new hospital towers in Edmonton and Calgary, but as always there is no money allocated. Can the Finance minister say what year the first dollar for construction will be allocated to any of these projects?

The Speaker: My apologies to the leader. I almost promoted you to House leader.

Mr. Nenshi: I heard that.

The Speaker: The hon. hospital minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every time the Leader of the Opposition rises, I fear my property tax is increasing and my water pipes are leaking. It doesn't surprise me because the member opposite seems to neglect that there is a process to construction. We tend to plan and then design before deciding how much it's going to cost to build things. We do like our structures to stay intact, unlike the water main in Calgary. We are committed to a stand-alone Stollery. We are going to build three bed towers – two in Edmonton, one in Calgary – but we're going to do it the right way, not the NDP way.

Mr. Nenshi: The minister's failure to answer that question is part of a government's failure. This government failed Ben. This government failed six-year-old Harper, who spent Christmas shoved into a room in an overcrowded Stollery with three other families. This government has failed every mother who can't deliver a baby in her own community. This government has failed 200,000 Albertans who left ERs last year without seeing a doctor. Yet the throne speech clearly said that the UCP will build no new hospitals. Will the minister commit today to renounce the throne speech and allocate construction . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, I can commit that we are going to move forward with the construction of a stand-alone Stollery and move forward with the construction of three bed towers, two in Edmonton – one at the Misericordia, one at the Grey Nuns – and one in Calgary at the South Health Campus to build over a thousand new acute-care spaces that the system needs.

I'll also commit to remain accountable for the health care system in Alberta. What Ben and other children experienced, the 11 who did have their chemo treatments delayed for 48 hours: that is unacceptable. We need to build the capacity. We need to change internal operations so that doesn't happen again. I'm accountable. I'm sorry for that, and we are working on it.

Alberta Separatism

Ms Pancholi: It seems UCP MLAs will do whatever they can to avoid answering a very simple question: do they denounce separatism? They used cowardly tricks in the House yesterday to avoid answering that question, so let's try again. Can one single UCP cabinet member stand up and say unequivocally that they denounce Alberta separatism? If we get an "I believe in a sovereign Alberta in a united Canada" word salad answer, well, we'll know the answer is: no, they can't commit to denouncing separatism. Anyone? Anyone want to do that today?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I love my country. I am Canadian. I love my home.

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

Mr. Williams: I am Albertan. There's a full period, a full stop after that. The members opposite will not tell me in this Chamber that I cannot also believe that Alberta deserves a fair deal in this Confederation. We believe that Alberta should be sovereign within the Constitution for the areas of responsibility we have. Federal encroachment, as we've seen over and over again, is not pro-Canada. It's anti-Alberta. It's anti-Canada. I believe in Canada. I'm a proud Canadian. I'm also a proud Albertan. Can members opposite say the same?

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:04 p.m.

Ms Pancholi: Man, Mr. Speaker, this is really hard for them. Every single one of those UCP MLAs voted multiple times to strip away the Charter rights of teachers, well, except the Premier, of course. Yet those same UCP MLAs: not a single one of them can stand up to publicly denounce separatism. So I'll ask again: is anyone brave enough in that cabinet to represent the majority of the constituents in their ridings and denounce separatism? Can they?

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:05.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is going to be strange for folks watching on TV who don't understand why members opposite won't hear the clear words. We are proud Canadians and proud Albertans. There is no equivocation in the statement. We believe in the Charter and the Constitution. We believe that the notwithstanding clause is an important part of it. Will members opposite agree with us that when it comes to child pornography, it should be used and enacted by the federal government to protect young Albertans who are being victimized by the horrific crime of child pornography, who continue to be traumatized by this act? Can members opposite agree that the notwithstanding clause is an important part . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Well, there are two words they can say, "notwithstanding clause," and two words they won't say: denounce separatism. One more time, because I'm nothing if not an eternal optimist that every person has a moral conscience and a compass. Is any member of the UCP caucus or cabinet willing to stand up and say they denounce separatism?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I'm a proud Canadian. I am not a separatist. This party is founded on the founding principle of loyalty to a united Canada, committed for Alberta to be treated fairly within Confederation. In the throne speech from the regal voice, in the chair with His Majesty's representative, sovereignty does not mean separation. We are proud to be Canadians. We love our nation. Members opposite, take yes for an answer. We are united in loving Canada. Are you united in loving Alberta? Do you want to drive our economy down, be embarrassed about who we are, call ourselves, you know, the ugly cousins of Confederation, or will you join us as Albertans to defend Canada and to make sure we are strong?

The Speaker: I just don't remember whether I already said that a point of order was called at 2:05 p.m., but in case I didn't do it, I've done it now.

We're at question 5, and I know that no one will have a preamble on supplementary, so I just won't look for that.

Cancer Care Wait Times

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, despite a population increase of over 15 per cent since the UCP formed government, the number of prostate cancer surgeries has not increased. Data revealed from a freedom of information request shows that the proportion of men waiting longer than recommended to get care has increased by over 20 per cent. Why hasn't the minister scaled up operating room capacity to match population growth so Albertans get the care they need for treatable conditions like prostate cancer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the thoughtful question. We actually are doing more cancer surgeries today than we did last year. We're up 8 per cent year over year. We've also hired 70 oncologists, 115 clinical operations staff, and 35 hospitalists over the last 18 to 24 months to improve our ability to do more surgeries. That's not all. We'll be announcing in the near future that we will be allocating additional funds to work down the surgical backlog and do additional cancer surgeries.

Thank you.

Dr. Metz: Given that since the UCP formed government, the median wait time for prostate cancer surgery has increased from six to 10 weeks and 10 per cent of people wait more than 10 months and given that this is despite a recommendation of three to 12 weeks, depending on severity, given that these alarming wait times are over 30 per cent worse than the Canadian average, when will the government fund health care delivery instead of ignoring what front-line health care providers have already told them is needed to treat patients?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's one of the reasons that the refocused health care system in Alberta will include Cancer Care Alberta, an organization which will have a stronger and more dedicated focus on the delivery of cancer treatment and surgeries across Alberta. We've also built the Arthur J.E. Child comprehensive cancer centre in Calgary, which includes 160 beds and features extensive clinical and research space and integrated specialized services to provide Albertans with leading treatment. We're going to go one step further. We're working on bringing proton beam therapy to Alberta so we don't have to send patients from Canada to the United States.

2:10

Dr. Metz: Given that cancer wait times that increased under Jason Kenney have accelerated under the current Premier and given that data shows that the median – that's the average – breast cancer surgery wait times have increased by 65 per cent over the past six years and given that data also shows that three-quarters of that increase was in the first 17 months since the Premier promised to fix health care in 90 days, will the minister admit that this government has no clue how to actually fix health care and start listening to experts to help Albertans get cancer treatment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respect the member opposite and her experience and expertise, and I would welcome her contributions to improving health care and cancer care for all Albertans.

We're also increasing cancer surgical volumes, as I mentioned in my first answer, 8 per cent year over year. Our government has also recently partnered with Siemens Healthineers and the Alberta Cancer Foundation in an $800 million partnership to transform cancer care in Alberta. This investment will modernize oncology equipment, leverage artificial intelligence, and create two centres of excellence. It will also establish a medical research and innovation fund to attract and retain top talent in this area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite.

The Speaker: Hon. members and table staff, the first point of order at 1:58 was withdrawn. That's what I was told. I guess I haven't seen – we'll revisit that later. I'm not getting a confirmation of that.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Bill 6

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's classrooms are becoming increasingly complex, with more students facing diverse learning needs and behavioural challenges. Early identification of foundational skill gaps is critical to ensuring students receive timely support. To the Minister of Education and Childcare: can you please explain how the proposed amendments to the Education Act,

specifically the requirements for mandatory reading and math screening for kindergarten to grade 3, will help identify and support students who need extra help with literacy and numeracy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Childcare.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The screeners that we have mandated for all children in kindergarten through to grade 3 help identify students that are below acceptable standards with respect to their literacy and numeracy abilities. This is incredibly valuable and important information for our educators and our school divisions, who, of course, can then provide supplemental intervention to help those kids. We know that getting the foundations right in those early formative years is key to the academic success of those students, and we want to ensure that all resources are available to help them succeed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that response. Given that parents play a vital role in supporting their children's learning and given that the proposed legislation requires school authorities to share screening results with families, to the same minister: can the minister outline how these new requirements will ensure parents are kept informed and involved in their children's progress, and what supports will be available to help families navigate this process?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, Bill 6 creates a requirement that the results of these screening assessments be reported and made available to parents. Of course, this is particularly important because I know that the vast majority of parents are heavily involved and heavily engaged in their child's success and performance. By having a better understanding of how they're doing with respect to their foundational literacy and numeracy abilities, those parents can work to supplement the learning direction that's provided by their teachers and, again, help ensure that their student is set up for success in the best possible way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that successful implementation of these screenings will require resources and support for teachers and school authorities and given that Budget 2025 includes increased funding for math and reading support and further given that ongoing monitoring and reporting will be essential to track progress and guide future policy, to the same minister: can you please update the Chamber on what resources are being provided to help schools implement these requirements and how the government will monitor the effectiveness of these interventions over time?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have allocated $40 million over the course of the next three years, $11 million in the current budget, to help school divisions hire additional staff that will be necessary to conduct these interventions. Of course, conducting the assessments is only one part of the successful equation. The second part requires intervention. Oftentimes our school divisions need to hire EAs or other additional staff to support that work, and that $40 million is being directed specifically to achieve that. In addition, the bill establishes a requirement for the minister to report these results to all Albertans to share.

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

Vaccination Policies

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans used to access publicly covered COVID-19 vaccines through their local pharmacies. This year this government stopped offering free shots at pharmacies, leaving Albertans to pay as much as $165 for their vaccine out of pocket. This decision has consequences. Public health experts advised that expanding access is critical, especially during the measles outbreak and ongoing COVID-19 concerns. How does the minister expect to match last year's vaccine coverage after the government did away with a tried-and-tested model that involves local pharmacies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no shortage of vaccines for Alberta's immunization program. Vaccine supply has been carefully managed to ensure every Albertan who wishes to be immunized can access a dose. The number of COVID-19 vaccinations administered by the end of the first week of this season is consistent with last year's levels, demonstrating strong public uptake and confidence. Our government will continue to work with our health partners to ensure timely distribution and access across the province, and we'll continue to find the science and evidence, including from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization.

Mr. Haji: Given the government has the responsibility to ensure that vaccines are accessible, efficient, and free for all Albertans who choose them and given 80 per cent of last year's COVID vaccines were administered through the local pharmacies – 80 per cent – and given I have heard from Airdrie residents who are immuno-compromised driving to Calgary for vaccines and from seniors in Wetaskiwin forced to drive to Ponoka just to get their vaccine shots, why is the minister of preventative health services implementing a plan that actually prevents public health services?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, this is separate from the government-run fall immunization program. Our government does not manage vaccine supply in the private market. Vaccines provided through Alberta's publicly funded program are procured by the federal government, while pharmacies secure their own supply directly from wholesalers who purchase them from manufacturers. We do not play a role in private procurement or distribution. Pharmacies are responsible for working with their suppliers to address any vaccine supply challenges that may arise.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Haji: Given that Albertans deserve a system that expands access, not one that creates confusion and barriers, but given that the minister did nothing to replace pharmacies in the vaccine delivery system by increasing the vaccine delivery workforce in the public health units and given that the measles outbreak has demonstrated a lack of public health planning, to the minister: where is the chief medical officer of health, and will the minister table the advice received to scale down rather than scale up vaccine access?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our approach aligns with the guidance of the National Advisory Committee on Immunization, and Primary Care Alberta continues to open new immunization appointments daily to meet the growing demand. Health Link has increased staffing and extended its hours to respond to higher call volumes, and these measures will continue as required. While the

start of any large-scale rollout is always the busiest period, we are already seeing wait and call times improve, and we will continue to monitor the situation and fully support Primary Care Alberta in adding resources to ensure timely vaccinations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minimum Wage Rate

Member Gurinder Brar: Alberta has the lowest minimum wage in the country and the highest youth unemployment rate. Young people work hard but can't afford rent, tuition, or even groceries. They can't even find a job at all. But Alberta's lowest paid workers are not just young workers; nearly half are over 24 years old. To the minister of jobs: how can a province that brags about being the economic engine of Canada be the same place that pays workers the least?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During a national youth unemployment crisis and ongoing economic uncertainty we do not believe in putting entry-level jobs at risk. That's what we saw the NDP do when they were in power. In fact, their increases to minimum wage cost more than 21,000 youth their jobs. We need to focus on real solutions that help Albertans keep more money in their pockets, including our new Alberta youth employment incentive, that will help hire 2,500 young people across the province. We are continuing to deliver on our tax cut, which will save individual Albertans an average of $750 a year and $1,500 for . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:20

Member Gurinder Brar: Given that the facts are very different, Mr. Speaker, and given that Alberta's minimum wage has been frozen since 2018 and given that rent, food, and tuition have all skyrocketed and given that Alberta's lowest paid workers are struggling to provide for their families on very small paycheques and given that wages are still stuck in the past while everything has gone up, when will this government stop throwing crumbs at working Albertans and start paying them fair wages?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to know the facts are that roughly 95 per cent of workers in Alberta are earning more than the minimum wage under our government. Under the NDP that number of minimum wage earning workers rose from 2.2 per cent in 2015 to 11 and a half per cent in 2019, and they cost, again, more than 21,000 youth their jobs. Under the NDP more than 137,000 women were earning minimum wage in 2018-2019. I'm very proud to be part of a government that has cut that in half, down to 67,000.

Member Gurinder Brar: Given that Alberta has the highest youth unemployment in the country but no plan to actually create jobs and prosperity for people just starting in their careers and given that the government keeps claiming that Alberta is calling, who exactly is answering that call when young people can't find good jobs and fair pay? When will this government call them back with jobs, opportunity, and dignity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the facts are that Alberta is where all the jobs in Canada are being created, with over 42,000 jobs in the month of September, over 70 per cent of all the jobs in Canada created right here. We won't be taking advice from the reckless NDP, that cost youth jobs when they were in power. They admitted in September that they've done zero consultation on minimum wage and have no intention of doing that consultation. The NDP clearly doesn't listen to Albertans, doesn't care about youth jobs, and doesn't care about how to run this province.

Government Contracts

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, the Wyant report detailed serious conflicts of interest, political interference, and sole-source contracting. At the centre of the findings is Jitendra Prasad, someone I identified to cabinet last February and a reported friend to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. During his tenure as Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, can the minister clarify whether he approved any sole-source contracts directly or via grants and whether Mr. Prasad provided advice to him or his department?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I don't know this Mr. Prasad. I'm not sure I've ever met him in person. I wouldn't consider him my friend. I expect the Wyant report to be accepted. We should make sure that we continue to review all practices within AHS, as the minister is happy to speak to on exactly this matter. I can't speak to those particular allegations as I don't know Mr. Prasad. I think the Wyant report handled it very, very clearly. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we should be hearing from only the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane right now.

Mr. Guthrie: Debate without ethics, Mr. Speaker.

Given the Premier said that she was deeply disappointed with contract failures and given that Bill 35, the All-season Resorts Act, gives the Minister of Tourism and Sport exclusive authority to allocate Crown land development without public tender or scrutiny and given that Infrastructure, the government's real estate arm, requested access and was denied, to the Member for Cardston-Siksika: why was it necessary for your department, one with little or no experience in land contracts, to operate with so little oversight?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the Wyant report was abundantly clear that the problem lies within procurement within AHS. Members opposite can try and make insinuations all they like and make accusations in this House about other members. The truth is that we followed every single procedure we had within government. The Wyant report was abundantly clear that there are procedure challenges within AHS. We plan to address them. We think that needs to be taken seriously. We obviously want to hear any feedback we have from the Wyant report or any other independent investigation from the office of the Auditor General. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.

Ms Hoffman: Sorry.

Mr. Williams: Thank you.

The Speaker: It's better when you self-identify.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, we're very happy to answer questions here in the Legislature. We hope that they are substantive and that they are on government policy or legislation.

Mr. Guthrie: It's the same playbook, Mr. Speaker.

Given the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon built his career as a . . .

The Speaker: Member, I'm going to let you start over again without a preamble.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon built his career as a developer and given that this minister holds exclusive authority over Crown land development and given the Wyant report identifies serious issues of impartiality and potential corruption, to the Minister of Tourism and Sport: with the conflicts of interest identified in the Wyant report, can you see why Albertans might take issue with a developer policing other developers where Crown land is concerned?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member conveniently glossed over the most important thing: Judge Wyant found no improper actions by any member of this front bench, by anybody in the government caucus. What he did find was a problem with AHS procurement, and what the Premier did immediately was that she took action. Judge Wyant made 18 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, it was really easy to hear the question. It needs to be really easy to hear the answer, and whether we like or don't like the answer has nothing to do with it. We need to hear it.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Judge Wyant made 18 recommendations. The Premier implemented them immediately. We're working on it. The hon. member doesn't have to like my answer, but he certainly has to respect Judge Wyant's conclusion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Alberta Disability Assistance Program

Ms Renaud: Merci, M. le Président. Albertans living with severe profound disabilities number over 1 million. There are only 80,000 people currently trying to survive on AISH, which is equivalent to about $12 an hour for a full-time job. AISH recipients have proven many times over that their permanent disability inhibits their capacity to financially support themselves. Now the UCP is blowing up AISH, undertaking a mass reassessment, and saying: it'll be great; people with disabilities can work. Minister, where are the jobs coming from?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, another day, and another day of the NDP struggling with facts. Let me, through you to Albertans, make very clear that AISH is not going anywhere. AISH is legislated by this Chamber. This government remains committed to AISH. AISH will continue to have the highest payments in the country, to be indexed, and to be there to care for Albertans who have severe disabilities in our province. This government is also investing the most in history to be able to help those with disabilities who want to enter the workforce; a $185 million investment alone this year. But to be clear, AISH is going nowhere.

Ms Renaud: Given profoundly disabled Albertans face an unemployment crisis born not of ability but of government neglect and systemic ableism and given disabled Albertans earn only 66 per cent of what their nondisabled peers earn and they are forced to navigate inaccessible transportation, work sites, employer bias, and lack of workplace accommodation but given the UCP is planning to move all 80,000 AISH recipients to their new ableist plan they call ADAP so they can work, to the minister: where are the jobs coming from?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again the hon. member is incorrect. Not everybody who is on AISH will be removed from AISH. That is just factually incorrect. Albertans will not have to requalify for disability supports. Also factually incorrect. We will continue to have AISH. AISH will continue to do its important work that it has done since 1979 in this province, but we are also adding the Alberta Disability Assistance Program, which is going to help thousands of Albertans who are not eligible for AISH to still receive disability supports and receive employment supports. This is good news. It's well supported by the disability community.

Ms Renaud: No comment.

Given tens of thousands of severely, profoundly disabled Albertans will summarily be kicked off AISH July 2026 and then told they can work and given it is astonishing that their solution is to direct more federal funding to generic employment programs that teach resumé writing, interview skills, and they're at best successful 65 per cent of the time according to this government's own documents – without accessibility legislation, an actual employment plan based in reality, and an antipoverty strategy, this will fail. Where are the jobs coming from?

2:30

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, sadly everything the NDP says is not based in reality. The hon. member continues to stand in this Chamber and elsewhere and fearmonger that people will lose their AISH supports.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: That is factually incorrect. AISH remains in place in this province, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate the hon. member continues to do that. It's causing great fear in the disability community, but let me assure the disability community that AISH is going nowhere. This side of the House continues to stand up for AISH, investing almost $4 billion in the disability community in this year alone, significantly more than that member ever did.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the parliamentary . . .

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:30.

Mr. Getson: I just started.

The Speaker: You know what? That's on me. Begin again, please.

International Trade Strategy

Mr. Getson: Thank you, sir. Mr. Speaker, as the parliamentary secretary of the economic corridor development file I've been afforded a unique opportunity to meet with many amazing Albertans and industries across the province. I've also met with many colleagues and industry leaders, ambassadors, and regular salt-of-the-earth folks from other states and provinces and countries. Quite simply, they want what we need and what Alberta can offer. If we connect with those markets, our economy not only diversifies; it thrives. Can the Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration speak to the role that international trade plays in supporting employment across Alberta's industries?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the member. International trade plays a key role in driving Alberta's economy and creating jobs across every region of our province. By expanding access to global markets, our world-class farmers, energy producers, and manufacturers can sell more of what they produce and keep our economy strong. Every new trade corridor partnership means more opportunities for Alberta businesses, more investment, and more good-paying jobs for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the answer. Given that Canada as a whole and, unfortunately, Alberta continue to have high youth unemployment caused mainly by irresponsible freaky-deaky socialist federal policies and further given that many young people are having difficulty finding employment and starting their careers, to the same minister. Trade plays an important role in creating good jobs. How will increasing trade help our youth and young people find meaningful employment right here in this province? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members.
The minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his advocacy on behalf of youth across our great province. Trade directly supports opportunities for Alberta's young people by driving growth in industries that need their skills, from energy and agriculture to technology and advanced manufacturing. As we expand to global markets, Alberta businesses are hiring more and more workers. Couple that with our new youth employment incentive. We're ensuring young Albertans have the skills to seize these trade-driven careers and these opportunities and build a bright future right here at home.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given the importance of our resource sector to Alberta's rural economy many jobs in small towns across this province depend on being able to export our goods to markets not only here but also abroad in international markets as well and further given this government's goal to make it easier to export our products to those markets, even though the opposition still is against pipelines, and further given the necessity to identify, formalize, and expand our economic corridors, to the same minister: how will increasing trade grow rural economies and create rural jobs and help out the entire Alberta economy?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's rural communities are the backbone of our economy, producing the food, energy, and resources that drive growth across our province. Expanding trade allows our rural producers and businesses to reach new markets, attract investment, and create good, long-term paying jobs close to home. Our government is focused on building infrastructure, trade corridors, and partnerships that are rural Alberta competitive and ensure that local communities share in the benefits of a growing provincial economy. We're proud to be a government that puts Albertans first.

School Construction in Edmonton

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have had enough betrayal from this government. First came the betrayal of students and teachers with a dangerous and undemocratic use of the notwithstanding clause. Now parents in Edmonton-West Henday have been told they must wait even longer for new schools that they were promised. When will the Premier stand up and give Alberta students and parents the education system they deserve, including the sorely needed schools in the west end of our city?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, I'm happy to advise that as a consequence of our government's actions and initiatives schools will be built a lot faster than they have been ever before. This is a direct result of the creation of the school construction accelerator program, whereby we can move projects forward in a faster manner to ensure that communities receive the school infrastructure that they need. Of course, over the past couple of years we've seen a significant influx of individuals moving to Alberta. That puts a lot of pressure on our school divisions. However, we're stepping up to the challenge to make sure we're building the schools that are necessary.

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, given that the accelerator program has shown that it's not working and given that soil stability concerns have resulted in delay after delay for public schools in Edmonton-West Henday and Edmonton-South West and given that the UCP seems entirely disconnected from the reality of our education system on the ground from construction plans to classroom sizes, why were these problems not identified earlier? Why are working-class families who need schools forced to bear the weight of the UCP's disastrous management once again?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course soil conditions and sloping and other grading considerations of the site need to be properly addressed before we start building the school. I know that the experts are working on getting that done as diligently and as fast as possible. With respect to Edmonton-West Henday, though, I'm proud to report that we are moving forward with a new 10 to 12 school in Lewis Farms and a new elementary school in Edmonton's Hawks Ridge. These are important projects that our government has recognized that we're moving forward with.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that the members opposite find it funny that we aren't building schools fast enough and that we're also struggling with soil disturbances and given that classroom sizes continue to increase while opening dates for these new schools have been pushed back indeterminately in west Edmonton and given that the UCP seems to be running their own education agenda with no input from experts, educators, and Albertans, even running afoul of our Constitution, will the Premier explain how she expects to fix an education system she can't even build?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, shouting and flailing around is not going to address the challenges that Albertans have with our education system and, of course, meet the expectations that they have. Our government is focused on solutions. That's why we've initiated an $8.6 billion initiative to build and modernize schools. It's why we've increased funding to the classroom complexity grant by over 20 per cent this budget alone. It's why we're convening an action group to address classroom complexity to help ensure that every student has the support that they need. We're taking real action on this side of the House. I'm not sure what the other members are doing.

Food Bank Use and Cost of Living

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I hear from constituents every day who struggle to make ends meet. Given that

visits to the food bank have surged by 134 per cent since this government took office and food bank use in the past year has jumped here by 21 per cent, why hasn't the government ensured with concrete measures that no Albertan will ever have to choose between putting food on the table and paying their bills?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're proud to be part of the only government in Alberta history that has invested in food banks. Consistently since this Premier became the Premier, the government has invested yearly in food banks, supporting them to build capacity, supporting them to put in place programs that could be able to help constituents all across this province, all while making sure that we continue to make affordability the top priority of the government, where we're seeing things like rent go down, as an example, and making sure that life can continue to be affordable. That's a far cry from the NDP's plan, which was to tell them to move away when they couldn't find a job.

Ms Goehring: Given that I didn't hear an answer or a plan and given that as the liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs I have encountered thousands of Canadian Armed Forces members, their families, and the many civilians who work on military bases across this province and given that the future in this province requires that they, like all Albertans, are able to afford healthy meals, will this government explain to our proud Canadian Armed Forces and those employed on military bases why they haven't done anything to make life more affordable here in Alberta?

2:40

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I will do through you to our veterans is apologize for the behaviour of the NDP when they were in government, who never invested in things like affordable housing for veterans, which this government has done, who never invested in employment supports for veterans, which this government has done, who never invested in food bank supports for anybody, including veterans, which this government has done. The reality is that when the NDP were in power, they failed all Albertans but particularly veterans. I'm proud to be part of a government that continues to invest in Alberta, making sure it's the best place to live and raise a family.

Ms Goehring: Given that all workers, not just military and Armed Forces personnel, are very worried about their job security, their rights, their paycheques, and therefore their ability to pay the bills, given that costs keep climbing while unemployment remains high and given that many of those who have unemployment have been forced to strike because this government won't adequately support their vital contributions to our province, why hasn't this government supported workers, protected their paycheques, and ensured that they can afford to pay the bills, just to keep seeing them go up?

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, we're proud to support Albertans, and we're proud to stand up here having invested more than $31 million since 2020 to support food security for Albertans across our province. This includes $5 million in Budget 2025 alone. This funding has enabled food banks in Alberta to establish programs to support food banks during emergency situations, strengthen its existing food redistribution in bulk purchase programs, and build capacity within Alberta's network of food banks. We continue to focus on the economy, we continue to focus on jobs, and we continue to focus on affordability.

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

Highway 28 Capital Plan

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway 28 is the lifeline for the good people of Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. Whether it's for encouraging oil sands development, providing access to scenery for northeast Alberta, or linking people with vital services, highway 28 is key to the success of the lakeland. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: what work is being done to improve highway 28 through the town of Bonnyville?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for his advocacy for highway 28. It is such an important area of this province, and I'm happy to say that this government is investing $18 million in safety and rehabilitation projects between Smoky Lake and Cold Lake. That includes completed upgrades to highway 37 by Waskatenau and a 30-kilometre rehabilitation project that wrapped up this year. We'll continue to invest in rural Alberta, especially along highway 28.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that the plan to twin the heavily used section of highway 28 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members from both sides . . . [interjection] I wasn't actually asking for assistance just there, but I appreciate the spirit of helpfulness. We need to hear only the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul at this time, so let's try that.

Mr. Cyr: . . . the section of highway 28 between Bonnyville and Cold Lake, a vital transportation and economic corridor for the region, is coming not just a moment too soon and further given the importance of this project to the citizens of the lakeland, to the minister: when can the residents of my constituency expect construction on this section of critical highway for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the short answer to that question is very soon because engineering is now under way for three twinning sections along highway 28. That's between Bonnyville to Cold Lake as well as from Edmonton to Bon Accord and highway 28A through to highway 63 near Grassland. These are important investments, but first we have to do the engineering and the land acquisition to make sure that we can do it. There's been over $66 million in capital maintenance and renewal that's also been along highway 28 that this government is proud to invest in.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Given that the safety of highway 28 is the top priority for residents in my constituency and further given the important progress our government has already made in the safety upgrades and planning for the future improvements along this vital corridor, can the minister please elaborate on how upcoming work on highway 28 will further improve safety for drivers and help prevent serious accidents?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, twinning highways is the best way to improve the safety of highways, and we're proud to be doing that along highway 28. But something the NDP leader said yesterday actually triggered me. You had mentioned "deferred maintenance," and when you look at his record when he was mayor of Calgary and the deferred maintenance that he had for the water system, the water main break in 2024 that actually had Calgarians not being able to shower, that's a problem when it comes to deferred maintenance. That's something we're not doing on this side, but it reeks over there when it comes to the NDP and also their leader's record.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or more we will continue.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Government House Leader to give notice pursuant to Government Motion 4 that there will be no evening sitting today, Tuesday, November 4, 2025. Thank you for reminding me so that the House can have the evening.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there any tablings? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with the five requisite copies of an article showcasing that Canadian-made drugs from the Falkland superlab bust are being found across the world, including Mexico and New Zealand.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the five requisite copies of an e-mail letter from Derik Cundal, a constituent of mine who asked the minister who is responsible for the $200 Canada disability clawback to reconsider his actions.

The Speaker: St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of five different e-mails from constituents all over Alberta outlining their issues with the new ADAP program.

The Speaker: Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to table the five copies of the letter sent from the Deputy Premier to the Member for Calgary-Falconridge in response to the member's only correspondence on extortion crimes within the South Asian community.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings? Seeing none.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Ms Schulz, Minister of Environment and Protected Areas, pursuant to the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, proposed amendments to the South Saskatchewan regional plan.

On behalf of hon. Mr. McIver, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, a letter dated November 3, 2025, from hon. Mr. Guthrie, Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, to hon. Mr. McIver, tendering his resignation from the Standing Committee on Private Bills.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have come to that point where we are dealing with points of order. Now there is some debate over the point of order, whether 1:58 p.m. hasn't been withdrawn yet.

The hon. government Justice minister.

Mr. Amery: Withdrawn, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay, thank you. Well, that matter is concluded.

At 2:04 p.m. a point of order was also called.

Mr. Williams: By whom?

The Speaker: I believe the Assisted Living and Social Services minister.

An Hon. Member: Withdrawn.

The Speaker: Also withdrawn. Well, we're speeding right through today.

At 2:05 p.m. a point of order was called by the deputy – it's easy for me to say. The Deputy Government House Leader.

2:50

Point of Order
Referring to the Absence of a Member

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had some tongue twisters today as well. At 2:05 or thereabouts the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was asking a question of government, referring to the passage of Bill 2, and said that members voted for it except for the Premier. Understanding that it's a matter of public record who voted for what, it has been a matter of debate with the Premier's travel schedule. It is our belief that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is attempting to do indirectly what cannot be done directly by trying to point to the absence of the Premier very specifically, quote, except for the Premier.

Of course, we'll leave this in your capable hands. Whether or not it is a point of order today, that is your decision. But we would hope that we don't see members trying to circumvent what are long-standing and long-held and universally accepted rules on not trying to point to members' absences in this Chamber. It's in that spirit that we raised this point of order.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand the Deputy Government House Leader's concern. However, in speaking about the very public voting record, it does not imply the presence or absence of a member. During any recorded vote in this place, by simply not rising from your seat, you can be in this Chamber and vote neither for nor against. This is part of our standing orders. Therefore, speaking about voting record is disconnected from presence or absence and was not the intention of the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. I don't believe this is a point of order, but I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Well, I heard it. I remember hearing it. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is walking a line. Really, I felt that what cannot be done directly was done indirectly. I just caution you. I'll ask you to stand up and withdraw. It's a short hop, and context matters here. So if you just do that, I'd appreciate it.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought, because voting record is on the record, that it would not be – I was not intending to breach. That's why I apologize . . .

The Speaker: A withdrawal is not a really good time for further debate.

Ms Pancholi: I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: That's the way we do it here. Thank you very much.

Point of order 4, raised by the Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order
Imputing Motives

Ms Gray: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) as well as the practices in this Assembly, in response to a question from one of my members, the minister of community and social services – and I do not have the benefit of the Blues, but what I recall being said was that the member stands in the Chamber to fearmonger. Almost exactly this language has been found to be a point of order on December 8, 2020, and on April 8, 2025. In previous cases members have apologized and withdrawn. This kind of blatant language, especially because it is directly speaking to an individual, I believe is a point of order and inappropriate language in this House, and I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: The hon. Justice minister.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, do not have the benefit of the Blues. However, the minister was referring to statements made by that hon. member in her capacity as the critic for community and social services. When a member says something that is incorrect or that is intended to create fear, for example, it's incumbent upon other members – in fact, it is required, and I would expect them to correct that record. That's what the minister was doing in this particular case. The context matters. He went on to clarify and correct the information that he disagreed with as it related to the other member. It was a matter of debate and nothing more.

He wasn't referring to the individual member. He was referring to the member's position and her role and obligations and responsibilities as critic for community and social services, and he was correcting what he felt was an error. This is a matter of debate. If we were to stifle debate in this House, we wouldn't have a whole lot to do here, Mr. Speaker. I don't think it's a point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I do have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. member said, "The hon. member continues to stand in this Chamber and elsewhere and fearmonger that people lose their AISH supports." I would say to the hon. Government House Leader that had he said that the hon. member is wrong, that would be a matter of debate, but "fearmongering" suggests an intent, which under 23(h), (i), and (j) you can't actually impute an intent on another member. And as the Opposition House Leader had correctly talked about, on April 8, 2025, almost the exact thing was said. An apology was required then as it is now.

Mr. Amery: I apologize on behalf of the minister and withdraw his comments.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, this takes us to the point of privilege arguments that we've heard over two days leading into today.

Privilege
Appointments to Assembly Committees
Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to start my ruling on the proposed question of privilege by indicating to the Assembly that questions of privilege are very serious matters and should arise infrequently. In addition, because of their significance, questions of privilege should also be clearly articulated and presented to the Assembly in accordance with the requirements of Standing Order 15.

In the case the Assembly has before it, the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane raised a question of privilege during debate on Government Motion 11 during the afternoon of October 30, 2025. The gist of the question of privilege concerns Motion 11 and the proposed appointment of the member to a committee of the Assembly.

As to the matter of whether the question of privilege was raised at the earliest opportunity, Standing Order 15(6) provides that "the Speaker may allow such debate as he or she thinks appropriate . . . to determine . . . whether the matter is being raised at the earliest opportunity." Government Motion 11 was placed on the notice portion of the Order Paper on Wednesday, October 29. This means that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane knew about the committee changes and specifically which committee he would be assigned to if indeed Government Motion 11 had passed last Wednesday morning. Yet the member waited until Thursday afternoon during debate on the motion to raise this question of privilege.

I would suggest that the appropriate procedure would have been for the member to submit by 11:30 a.m. Wednesday morning a memorandum to the Speaker clearly outlining his question of privilege and provide notice of it to the standing Assembly that afternoon. For those watching at home, this procedure is provided in Standing Order 15(2), which I will now read to you.

> A Member wishing to raise a question of privilege shall give written notice containing a brief statement of the question to the Speaker and, if practicable, to any person whose conduct may be called into question, at least 2 hours before the opening of the afternoon sitting and, before the Orders of the Day are called, shall call attention to the alleged breach of privilege and give a brief statement of the nature of the matter addressed in the complaint.

I would add that in raising the question of privilege when the member did, in the midst of debate on Government Motion 11, the member mixed elements of debate on Government Motion 11 with his arguments in favour of his purported question of privilege.

This situation could have been avoided had the member followed the correct process, which I just read from the Standing Orders, which is what I just read out loud. As a result, I am not convinced that the matter was raised at the earliest opportunity in accordance with Standing Order 15(6).

In any event, I did hear arguments, and I am prepared to rule. The facts of this question of privilege are that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane claims that the government "unilaterally appointed" him to the Standing Committee on Private Bills. Specifically, the member stated on the record that "the Government House Leader informed me Tuesday night, without consultation, notice, or consent, that I was being placed on the Standing Committee on Private Bills." He further contends that the actions of the Government House Leader constitute "an abuse of power, an attempt to impose the will of cabinet upon an independent member, and a clear effort to interfere with [his] duties and freedoms as a Member of this Legislative Assembly." You can find the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane's remarks on pages 130 through 132 of the October 30, 2025, edition of *Alberta Hansard*.

On Monday, November 3, the Deputy Government House Leader made submissions on the question of privilege on behalf of the Government House Leader, which I allowed in accordance with Standing Order 15(4). The Deputy Government House Leader noted a number of allegations and accusations that the Member for

Airdrie-Cochrane made against the Government House Leader during the spring sitting of the Assembly. I would like to deal with these points straight away by indicating to the Assembly that these matters were raised during the spring sitting as a point of order and therefore they have been dealt with and concluded and are not issues for the Assembly to consider today.

The Deputy Government House Leader notes that the substance of the question of privilege, the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane's submission, that the Government House Leader is appointing him to a committee he did not want to be a member of, which is the Standing Committee on Private Bills, interfered with the member's ability to perform his duties. The Deputy Government House Leader also argues that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane is under the misguided impression that it is cabinet and not the Legislative Assembly that appoints members to committees and that to serve on committees is to serve the Assembly as well, which is a principal responsibility of all members. Members can find these comments on pages 152 to 154 of *Alberta Hansard* for November 3, 2025.

3:00

On the facts of the matter I will start by pointing out that determining the membership of all committees of the Assembly happens as a result of the passage of a government motion. This was the case in this instance. With Government Motion 11 this type of motion is debatable and amendable, and of course members vote on it. Therefore, I would agree that the membership of these committees of the Assembly are decisions of the Assembly and not of cabinet or of any caucus.

The Member for Airdrie-Cochrane did in fact have an opportunity to debate and vote on the government motion. Indeed, at the outset of his comments last Thursday afternoon he implored members of this House, including the UCP caucus, to a vote against this motion once hearing his full remarks. These remarks can be found on page 130 of *Alberta Hansard* for October 30, 2025.

Furthermore, Airdrie-Cochrane also had the opportunity to amend the motion, which, if passed, could have seen him be appointed to a different committee. To paraphrase the Deputy Government House Leader, had the member raised his concerns by amendment to Government Motion 11, we would not find ourselves in the current situation. While I can't in an unlimited way agree with that, we certainly would have had a vote on it before we found ourselves in this situation. In short, the member did not avail himself of the procedural tools at his disposal to achieve the results desired.

Hon. members, I would also like to discuss the way the committee membership is proposed in the first place in the government motion that is put on notice. The long-standing practice of this Assembly is that each independent member is entitled to sit on at least one committee of the Assembly. Indeed, had the member been denied a committee assignment, then that may have led to a more credible privilege argument. On April 13, 2010, former Speaker Ken Kowalski ruled that there's always been a tradition that every member must be able to participate in at least one committee. You can find these comments on pages 729-730 of *Alberta Hansard* of April 13, 2010.

The process to develop a draft committee membership motion is for the Government House Leader to work with the opposition, including the independents, to determine which committees the members will be appointed to. In his arguments on the question of privilege the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane acknowledges that the Government House Leader did discuss the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane's pending appointment to the Standing Committee on Private Bills. Now, I do not know exactly what was said during that conversation, but I'm sure that if the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane had objected to the proposal to appoint him to the Private Bills Committee, he could have indicated this at that time and even lobbied for a different committee assignment.

Hon. members, the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane purports that he was obstructed in the performance of his duties as a member by being appointed to a committee to which he did not wish to be appointed. Briefly, hon. members, the category of privilege the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane uses to support his question of privilege is the freedom of a member to do his or her duties without obstruction or intimidation. As defined by Joseph Maingot in *Parliamentary Immunity in Canada,* third edition:

> Members are entitled to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed . . . Any form of intimidation . . . of a person for or on account of his . . . behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament could amount to contempt.

This excerpt can be found on page 212 of *Parliamentary Immunity in Canada*.

After listening to the arguments from all sides and in reviewing the parliamentary law, I conclude that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane was not impeded in his duties by being appointed to a committee to which he did not want to be appointed. Accordingly, I do not find there to be a prima facie case of breach of privilege. Indeed, I do know there are many of us today within this Chamber who have found themselves in the situation of being appointed to a committee that was not their first choice. Not all members are pleased with their committee assignments.

I would note for the Assembly that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane has written to me pursuant to Standing Order 56(3) to indicate that he has resigned from the Standing Committee on Private Bills, a resignation that took effect upon my tabling of the letter of resignation earlier this day.

This matter is therefore dealt with and concluded.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mrs. Sawyer moved, seconded by Mr. Dyck, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To Her Honour the Honourable Salma Lakhani, AOE, BSc, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, His Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

Mr. Nenshi moved that the motion be amended by adding the following after "at the opening of the present session":

> , and to inform Your Honour that the Legislative Assembly affirms that Alberta and the rest of Canada are stronger together, and denounces provincial separatism as extreme, divisive, and economically destructive.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment October 29: Mr. Schmidt]

The Speaker: Hon. member, you have up to five minutes if you want to continue with your debate. No? Okay.

Any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was the summer morning of May 10, 2009, in my village of Akhara, Punjab, and my courtyard was alive with the voices of my friends, relatives, neighbours gathered to say goodbye. I was packing my bags, folding dreams into each piece of clothing, knowing this was the last morning in my home.

My sister Sarabjit Sekhon hovered around me pretending to check if I'm forgetting something, but I could see the sadness behind her smile, the tears she tried to hide. She and her husband, Jagtar Sekhon, are more than family. They are my pillars. My nieces Jaskiran and Sukhsimran brought giggles to my life. Little Nimrat would come into the world only after I had left and met her later in stories and photos.

As I zipped up my suitcase, I turned to my sister. The sound of the zipper felt like a full stop. I wanted to say something, but all that came out was a whisper: thank you, because, truly, I could not have done anything without you. I remember the final goodbyes to my family. I remember the final hugs with my friends. I remember the last time I saw the home where I was born, spent my childhood and my youth.

Before I left home, one of my uncles came to me, kept his hand on my head, looked into my eyes, and said: "Son, we will pray for your success, but never forget your culture, your home, and your roots. Never forget to come back and meet your loved ones." I have always kept that advice close to my heart.

If my father were alive back then, he would have given me this exact same advice. He loved working in the fields and loved books. His name was Sardar Kartar Singh Brar. He wanted us to get the best education. He knew education was the key to unlocking a better future. He did not just teach us to live the life of hard work, dedication, and honesty; he lived it. I will continue to cherish his memories for the rest of my life. He took his last breath on November 25, 2000, and our lives changed forever. When I read books and turn a page, it feels as though I'm sitting beside him again listening to his quiet wisdom, and I hope that wherever he is, he sees his son still holding tight to those values he lived by.

After we lost our father, my mother, Sardarni Harbans Kaur, became our shelter and strength. She asked for nothing, gave everything, and sacrificed her own joys for us. Every book of her own desk, every meal on our table, every dream we dared to chase exists because of her. She is not just only my mother; she is my God on earth. She is the living proof that divinity does not always live in the temples. Sometimes it cooks, cleans, and prays quietly for her children's tomorrow.

My elder brother Pirthipal Brar and his wife, Harpreet Brar, have always been on my side. He is not just my elder brother; he is my best friend. Brother, thank you for being the hand that steadies when I was stumbling. And Japji and Geet Brar, you are more than my nieces; you are my heart and my best door-knocking buddies.

3:10

My elder sister Karamjit Badesha and her husband, Balwinder Badesha, are my strongest umbrella during the heavy storm, who always took the hit and kept our family dry. To my nieces Shana, Jazmine, and Esha, who live in the United States: thank you for your love.

I want to thank all my friends for walking shoulder to shoulder throughout this journey. From the streets of Akhara to Alberta, your friendship gave me strength. I can't repay that, but I will always carry it with me with gratitude, loyalty, and love.

When my hands slipped from the hands of my own land, this land of Treaty 6 and Indigenous people welcomed me with open arms. I will love, respect, and care for this land, and I will be their ally on their path to truth and reconciliation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take you back to the day I was leaving my home with no return date. It was the first time I realized how hard it is to leave your friends behind. It was the first time I realized the importance of having a hope for a better future. It was the first time I realized that if I had that hope, I would have never left my home.

After 17 years of marriage, Mr. Speaker, it may not sound as exciting, but back then I was really excited to see my wife, who was waiting for me in New Zealand. She's here with us, and I want to introduce her to this Assembly. Her name is Devinder Brar. We not only built our home; we built our family together. We welcomed our first son, Sidik Brar, in 2011 and the youngest, Josh Brar, in 2014, and they played a key role in my campaign, too. Devinder, thank you for your support. I could not have asked for a better partner in my journey to build a better future for us, for our family, and for our community.

Mr. Speaker, besides my family and books, the third pillar of my life is radio, a voice for the voiceless. From hosting at Radio Spice in New Zealand to Connect FM, OMNI TV, and *The Gurtej Show* in Canada, I have always used the airways to spark conversation on politics, on culture, and on community.

Mr. Speaker, this is my story. Like me, there are so many others who came to this land carrying hope, courage, and commitment in their heart because Canada is not just a country; it is a promise. Alberta is not just a province; it is an advantage, an advantage that your children will get the best education in the world, that you will access health care with a health card, not a credit card, and that your dreams will not be measured by where you come from but how far you are willing to go. This is the advantage that built communities, educated generations, and shaped our province, and we must now protect and pass it on.

Mr. Speaker, today there are millions of people for whom this advantage has become a distant dream. Public education is crumbling. Public health care has been stretched thin. Affordability has become quite a panic for families. The UCP is tearing apart the Alberta advantage.

It is time to put those pieces together, not with slogans but sincerity, not with hateful rhetoric but with purpose, not by picking fights but lifting people up. People want the best education for their kids because they deserve it. They deserve a government that will take care of them when they fall sick.

How did we end up having the highest youth unemployment rate in Canada? How did we end up with the lowest minimum wage in the country? How did we end up with the lowest per-student funding in the entire country? Mr. Speaker, it is because of this government's failed policies. With the right people in charge we can build more schools, fix our health care system, restore the Alberta advantage. The Alberta NDP did this when oil prices were at the lowest. If the NDP can do this during that time, why can't it be done right now?

My constituents in Edmonton-Ellerslie deserve so much better. Immigrants have worked equally hard in the prosperity of this province. They deserve equal share, not blame. When I stand and speak here, I am reminded of the same hope for a better future and those dreams I folded in my clothes when I left home, and I will work with everything I have to build an Alberta where no child ever has to pack their dreams and leave in search of a better future. Together we can build an Alberta where every voice is heard, every person is valued, and every family can see their tomorrow shining brighter than today. Better is possible, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I move to adjourn the debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 1
International Agreements Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

3:20

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Chair. [Remarks in Cree] I rise today as a Nehiyaw and Haudenosaunee iskwew – that means Cree and Mohawk woman of these lands – to speak to Bill 1, the International Agreements Act. I rise as a treaty person from the Michel band in Treaty 6 and also for my relatives in Treaty 7 and Treaty 8. I stand in full recognition of the sovereign Indigenous nations whose laws, languages, governance systems, and diplomatic traditions long predate this Legislature.

Mr. Chair, Bill 1 is not a simple, administrative bill. It is not routine. It is not neutral. It is a bill that centralizes power in the Premier's office, cuts off the democratically elected Legislature, and bypasses Indigenous nations and their leadership entirely even though the decisions contemplated under this bill touch directly on lands, waters, resources, policing, education, trade, and intergovernment relations. These are not small matters. They are the heart of all treaty matters.

Let me remind this government that treaties are not provincial documents. They are, in fact, international agreements. This government knows that. Canada knows that. The Crown knows that. Our elders know that: knowledge keepers, nations, and our leaders. In fact, we have never forgotten it. The old people continuously remind us that we must do everything we can to protect our treaties, especially for those babies yet to be born. It is our duty to uphold the agreements our forefathers made on our behalf.

Mr. Chair, elders come together annually for the elders treaty gathering. They come from coast to coast to coast, and year after year elders assert and remind leadership that treaties are international agreements, not domestic contracts. Furthermore, the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples, which Canada has adopted, is clear. Also, I may note that when Rachel Notley was the Premier, she directed all cabinet ministers to review policies, programs, and legislation to identify where changes were required to align with the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples. This former Premier of Alberta stated that the government of Alberta must work with Indigenous people as "true partners."

My oh my, Mr. Chair. Oh, how this government has regressed and taken multiple steps backwards. In fact, to be clear, this government is so far backwards that First Nations from the Peace region, the Dene Tha', the Beaver Nation, Tallcree, Little Red River Cree, and the Duncan's First Nation all have lawsuits alleging that this province has failed to uphold treaty obligations and, I might add, also wasted taxpayers' dollars fighting in courts because it appears that this government does not know how to govern without infringing on rights and breaking laws. The rule of law is simply that, the rule of law. First Nations have taken a lead and will not tolerate continued infringements.

This government's actions are in such harsh contrast from when the Notley government was in power. The Notley government simply did not just sign the declaration symbolically; they took the approach that implementation should be collaborative, not imposed, and most importantly, aligned with treaty and section 35 and the Indigenous legal orders of treaties 6, 7, and 8.

Insofar as Bill 1, this government has completely misstepped and negated to recognize what the United Nations, I might remind, states very clearly in paragraph 14. "The rights affirmed in treaties . . . between States and indigenous peoples are . . . matters of international concern."

Mr. Chair, I cannot state it any clearer. Bill 1 disregards the very foundation upon which this province sits. When this government introduces legislation to allow itself to enter international agreements without requiring consultation, without consent, without reference to treaty obligation, it is attempting to rewrite the constitutional and international order upon which Alberta rests. Treaty is not a policy preference. Treaty is the legal foundation of all settlement on this land, and if you remove the foundation, the house collapses.

Mr. Chair, Bill 1 violates the requirement for free, prior, and informed consent. The United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples, article 19 states that "States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples . . . to obtain . . . free, prior and informed consent before adopting . . . legislative . . . measures that may affect them." Bill 1 does not contain a single clause referencing any consultation. Not a single clause acknowledging treaty. Not a single clause recognizing Indigenous jurisdiction or sovereignty. It is designed to avoid these obligations. This is not an oversight; it is the strategy.

This government cannot claim reconciliation in speeches while completely rejecting it in law. You cannot take the part of treaty when it's convenient for you and disregard it when it's not. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action could not be any clearer. In fact, call to action 43 states that all governments must "fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration . . . as the framework for reconciliation."

Might I humbly suggest that this government take a look at the outstanding work of the Notley government that they did in this area. The plan is there. The strategy was clear: collaboration, inclusion, recognition of section 35, and upholding the rule of law.

Mr. Chair, this government continues to contradict principles that have been laid out with absolute clarity. Treaties 6, 7, and 8 are legally binding international agreements that will exist as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the rivers flow. Speaking of rivers flowing – well, I'll wait for debate on Bill 7 for that debate.

Mr. Chair, the most terrifying infringement is that Bill 1 is the continuation of the doctrine of discovery. Even the Pope has formally rejected and repudiated the doctrine of discovery back in March 2023. The Vatican issued an official statement acknowledging that the papal bulls from the 1400s were used to justify colonization, land seizures, and cultural destruction. The Vatican wrote, "The Catholic Church . . . [rejects] those concepts that fail to recognize the inherent human rights of indigenous peoples."

In addition to this, Mr. Chair, the TRC's calls to action 45, 46, and 47 demand that governments repudiate the doctrine of discovery and terra nullius, the racist ideology that claimed Indigenous lands were empty, that Indigenous law did not exist, and that Indigenous peoples had no jurisdiction. Yet Bill 1 proceeds as though Indigenous peoples do not exist as legal partners. That is terra nullius thinking in 2025 in this Chamber. It is unacceptable.

I have overheard some members say that treaty is federal jurisdiction, but that's incorrect. The Library of Parliament states that both provincial and federal governments share responsibility of upholding treaties under section 35 in the honour of the Crown. There is no loophole here. There is no passing the responsibility elsewhere. There is no justification for avoidance. Treaty responsibilities bind all levels of Crown authority, including this Legislature.

Furthermore, the Alberta government has already acknowledged this notion in the Chamber on May 14, 2025. This government itself

amended a legislation to state that nothing shall be "construed as abrogating or derogating from . . . treaty rights." It would seem that this government already acknowledged that treaty concerns are valid, treaty rights must be protected, treaty partners must be respected.

Mr. Chair, why the contradiction? Why is a simple, lawful acknowledgement missing from Bill 1? I'll explain clearly why it's missing. That's because it's the intent of Bill 1. It is to give the province the power to bypass treaty obligations when entering international agreements. That is a breach of the Crown's honour, and I remind this government again it is unconstitutional.

Speaking of constitutionality and legal principles that apply in our country, there is clear precedent set here in our country, the Delgamuukw versus British Columbia case, where the courts remind us that Indigenous oral histories and legal traditions carry equal weight with the written colonial documents.

3:30

Therefore, treaty is not just text; treaty is ceremony. It is the pipe. It is sacred. It is a covenant, and it is legally binding as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the rivers flow. Lord Denning from the House of Lords also affirmed this. "No Parliament should do anything to lessen the worth of these guarantees . . . That promise must never be broken." Yet Bill 1 attempts to do exactly that.

Mr. Chair, let me be clear. This bill endangers everyone, not just Indigenous peoples. If Alberta chooses to sever itself from treaty obligations, the question becomes: on what legal basis does this government and all who live here claim occupation on this land? If you remove treaty, you remove the province's legal right to exist. Without treaty, there's no Alberta. Without treaty, settlers are guests without invitations. Without treaty, the province is landless. I ask every member of this Assembly, even those who may disagree with me politically: how will your grandchildren survive on a land where the government has dissolved the very agreements that make the presence of us here lawful?

This is not only an Indigenous issue; it's everyone's issue. A better path exists, and we all know it. The government of Alberta has a choice. This government can continue down a path of legal conflict, political division, the erosion of the democratic process, or return to the original intent and spirit of treaty, that is: share the land, share the responsibility, share a future. Not domination, not centralization of power, not erasure but, rather, partnership, respect, and free, prior, and informed consent. This is the only sustainable future.

Mr. Chair, Bill 1 in its current form is undemocratic. It completely sidelines the Legislature. It's unconstitutional. It violates section 35, the honour of the Crown. It's colonial. It attempts to bypass treaty. It's dangerous. It destabilizes the legal foundation of our province. This bill threatens the peace, the good order, and the survival of the place that we all call home. For the sake of future generations, Indigenous, non-Indigenous, this bill must be amended.

Mr. Chair, I would like to put forward an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Thank you, Member.

Hon. members, this amendment will be referred to as amendment A1. I would ask the member to read the amendment into the record.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Member Calahoo Stonehouse to move that Bill 1, International Agreements Act, be amended by adding the following after section 3:

> 3.1 For greater certainty, nothing in this Act is to be construed as abrogating or derogating from
>
> (a) the exclusive legislative authority of the Parliament of Canada with respect to the matters described in section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867, or
>
> (b) any existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada that are recognized and affirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

The Deputy Chair: You may proceed with your comments.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you. I appreciate your time, and I would urge my fellow colleagues to take time to reflect upon what is at risk if this amendment is not put forward. Hay-hay, nanaskamon.

The Deputy Chair: On amendment A1 as presented by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, are there any other comments? I will call on the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to address the amendment made by the member opposite, but ultimately I rise in support of Bill 1, the International Agreements Act, as is, without the amendment. At its core Bill 1 is about protecting Alberta's constitutional jurisdiction and ensuring that decisions affecting Albertans are made here at home. Our Constitution clearly divides powers between the federal and provincial governments. Matters such as health, education, natural resources, and municipal affairs fall under provincial jurisdiction. Yet too often Ottawa has made commitments and entered into international agreements that touch on these areas without consulting the provinces that must live with the consequences. A recent example is a federal government signing international climate commitments that directly affect energy development and natural resource management in Alberta.

Decisions like these have a direct impact on jobs, including jobs in Indigenous communities, and provincial revenues, yet Alberta has had no formal opportunity to influence those commitments. Bill 1 ensures that agreements affecting provincial matters cannot be imposed without our consent. This legislation makes it clear that Alberta will not accept that kind of overreach.

International agreements signed by Canada are not automatically binding in Alberta unless a province passes its own legislation. Bill 1 gives Alberta's Legislature the authority to determine if and how these agreements apply to provincial matters, and it provides Alberta with a clear, transparent mechanism to decide what applies within our borders.

I want to be very clear, Mr. Chair. Bill 1 does not . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: A point of order has been called.

The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, the Official Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order
Relevance

Mr. Sabir: I rise pursuant to section 23(b). The minister is making comments about the bill while we are on an amendment, and I have not heard a single word about the amendment. We have plenty of opportunity to debate the bill, but at this point we are on a specific amendment, so I urge you to ask the minister to make comments relevant to the amendment at hand.

The Deputy Chair: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Chair, we are a minute and 48 seconds into the minister's speech. She has spoken substantively about the bill as it relates to the amendment because the bill is the structure which the amendment is trying to change. It is relevant for the minute and 48 seconds that she has spoken, and I'm confident, given the latitude, that the entire speech is substantively addressing the very real amendment that was brought up by the member opposite. I would ask the chair to give leeway so that we can have more than a minute and 48 seconds to continue this speech.

The Deputy Chair: Any others?

I'm not going to rule it a point of order, but I will say that we try and stick as close to the amendment as possible. That being said, we are sometimes needing to bring in context to speak to an amendment, and the chair has typically given great latitude towards that. I will caution the member to try and move towards the amendment in her comments. Now she may proceed.

Thank you.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do want to be very clear that Bill 1 does not change, alter, or take away any constitutional or treaty rights. Treaty rights of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples are recognized and affirmed in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. These rights are constitutionally entrenched and protected. These rights are not negotiable, and these rights certainly cannot be overridden or diminished by provincial legislation or by international agreements. Bill 1 respects this fundamental principle.

Mr. Chair, the members opposite have suggested adding a nonabrogation and derogation clause to the bill. The proposed clause would state that nothing in the act removes federal authority over Indigenous peoples under section 91(24) of the 1867 Constitution Act. It also says that the act does not affect any existing treaty rights under section 35.

3:40

While I completely understand the intent behind these proposals, such clauses are legally unnecessary. Mr. Chair, nonabrogation clauses are meant to state that legislation cannot override constitutional rights, but these rights, including treaty rights, are already guaranteed by the Constitution itself. No provincial law, including Bill 1, can infringe upon them. Similarly, a derogation clause would imply that the legislation might override rights unless explicitly stated otherwise. This simply is not the case.

Some may ask whether Bill 1 interferes with federal jurisdiction, and the answer is no. The bill doesn't limit the federal government's ability to conduct foreign affairs or negotiate on behalf of Canada. What it does is reaffirm that Ottawa cannot impose international obligations on Alberta in areas under provincial control without Alberta's consent.

Mr. Chair, Bill 1 ensures that Alberta, rather than Ottawa, decides how international agreements apply to matters under provincial jurisdiction. Not only does it protect our autonomy; it fully respects and preserves all constitutional treaty protections. As such, the proposed amendment is unnecessary. It's redundant and provides no further legal protections beyond what the Constitution already guarantees.

Mr. Chair, Alberta believes in a strong presence within a united Canada. This is an Alberta that defends its constitutional and treaty rights, protects its people, and exercises its authority responsibly. Bill 1 delivers on that promise. I urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 1, the International Agreements Act, as is, without amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My colleague has made arguments about this clause, and quite frankly it's very unfortunate that the Minister of Indigenous Relations thinks that nonderogation/abrogation clauses are unnecessary and redundant. That is truly shameful, and the reason for that is that what this clause does – it's a direction for anyone who is interpreting a law that they not construe the law in a manner that diminishes Indigenous or treaty rights affirmed by section 35.

Just recently, in 2024, the federal government included that nonderogation/abrogation clause in the Interpretation Act to make sure that any federal law is not construed in a way that diminishes Indigenous or treaty rights affirmed by section 35. I might add that not every federal law will have implication for that, but it's the intent of the Legislature that they are giving clear direction to anyone interpreting laws made by the Legislature that they never construe those laws to trample on people's treaty rights, to trample on treaties or rights affirmed by section 35.

For the minister to get up and say that this is unnecessary and redundant, I think that's ridiculous. That should be something unbecoming of someone as Minister of Indigenous Relations, if they don't understand just a simple, basic nonabrogation/derogation clause.

I still urge all members of the House that I do understand that the provincial Legislature cannot override federal jurisdiction or something in treaties. This clause is not about that. This clause is about that no one should interpret this particular provincial legislation that's before us in a way that diminishes Indigenous rights and treaty rights affirmed by section 35.

And I might add one more thing. There is a long history here in this province, in this country where Indigenous rights, these treaties have been violated. We have a whole jurisprudence coming out of the Supreme Court of Canada on how provinces have passed laws that have resulted in diminishing Indigenous people's rights. If this government is serious about Indigenous rights, if this government has no intention of diminishing Indigenous rights, they could just simply show goodwill and pass this amendment. That will at least send a strong message for everyone and anyone interpreting this Bill 1 that such a bill not be interpreted in a way that diminishes Indigenous and treaty rights affirmed in section 35. Voting for this amendment will tell those interpreting Bill 1 that here in this Legislature we uphold the rights enshrined in section 91(24). We respect those rights. We reaffirm our commitment to truth and reconciliation, and we reaffirm our obligation to uphold section 35 rights enshrined in the Constitution.

As I said, the federal government included this clause in their Interpretation Act, and what that means is that that Interpretation Act applies to every piece of legislation that is passed by the federal government. Whether this clause is in any federal piece of legislation or not, because the clause is included in the Interpretation Act, every piece of legislation will be interpreted in a way that doesn't diminish treaty or Indigenous rights affirmed in section 35.

In Alberta we don't have this clause in our Interpretation Act. Not only will I urge this government to accept this amendment but also to consider adding this clause to our Interpretation Act so that anyone interpreting Alberta's laws should interpret them in a way that respects Indigenous rights and not diminish the rights affirmed in section 35. I would urge all members of this House to vote for this amendment. It's just a simple statement of this Legislature's intent that we do not intend to diminish Indigenous rights. We respect Indigenous rights.

This government also has a track record of not respecting Albertans' rights. Just last week they trampled upon teachers'

rights. In a previous session last sitting they trampled on trans Albertans' rights. That scares everybody else as well. This will give that assurance to Indigenous communities across this province that government is not in any way, shape, or manner trying to diminish Indigenous rights. We should give that assurance. That's our obligation as legislators. That's our responsibility as part of reconciliation.

I urge all members of the House to reflect on your role, think about the importance of this provision, and do not take the minister's advice that it's unnecessary or redundant. It is not. It's an important provision that the federal government recently added to their Interpretation Act. Government should add it to this legislation and down the road consider adding this to the Interpretation Act. With that, I urge members to vote for this amendment.

Thank you so much.

3:50

The Deputy Chair: Any other comments on amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Back on the main bill. Any further comments, questions on Bill 1?

Okay. Are you ready for the question on Bill 1, the International Agreements Act?

[The clauses of Bill 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 1.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 1. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried and so ordered.

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
Bill 3
Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025

[Adjourned debate October 30: Mr. Eggen]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has 14 minutes left to speak if he wishes.

Seeing none, then we will call on Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 3, the Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025. I just so happened to be in Public Accounts this morning, and I have the annual report for Advanced Education handy. I thought it was quite timely. They reference the private career college oversight in fiscal year 2024-25, and I want to reference a couple of things right off the top. Certainly, this issue around private career colleges has been on the radar for, I would say, consecutive governments for quite a long time. Finally, it feels like in the last year there has been some success in getting some traction to actually address what had become a really pernicious issue, not throughout the sector by any means, but some bad actors who, in a very rapidly growing field, were exploiting a situation of kind of weak regulatory oversight and policy and taking tremendous advantage of people who are vulnerable and really deeply exploited.

I just want to read a couple of things into the record from the annual report. "Since 2019, there has been significant growth in Alberta's private career college sector, with unusually high increases in student complaints, student enrolment, and financial assistance applications at some new private career colleges." Clearly, the government has had before them for six years and more the stories and the anecdotes about some of the damages that the bad actors within the private career college industry were wreaking on Albertans and really actually even students from other jurisdictions as well.

I'm pleased to be able to stand and speak to Bill 3. Before I go even further, I really want to commend a terrific organization in Calgary that I've worked with very closely over the years. I know that this is a particular issue that Momentum and the good folks who work there have been working on for a long, long time, five years and more, Mr. Speaker, in fact. I want to say hello to the very good folks there in the organization who have been fighting for decades to enhance and improve access to full financial and economic participation, particularly from newcomers and low-income Albertans. You know, I think that they really deserve recognition for their tireless persistence on this particular issue. They have raised and brought to the forefront stories that are not told enough.

Certainly, there are a couple of areas on Bill 3 that I would really like to be able to speak to today. One is around protecting people's paycheques. I think it speaks very importantly to the private member's Bill 201 that we introduced this week in regard to minimum wage legislation and protecting people's tips. People are working so hard – so hard, Mr. Speaker – and they are just really struggling. Despite putting in a good hard day's work, they are still having to worry about how they can meet their basic needs, how they can feed their families.

This is one of those examples that we simply cannot allow for organizations, employers, private career colleges in this case, to take advantage of people who simply don't know the system or who can't advocate for themselves. We cannot allow it to happen. Bill 3 is long, long overdue. I would argue that we probably could have made some headway on this sooner, but here we are, and I'm glad for it.

One of the things that Bill 3 is able to accomplish is that it provides some legitimacy and some transparency to the credentialing and the programming that are actually offered through private colleges. For many, many years it's been a bit of a Wild West, and individuals kind of had to take a college's word for it when they said, "Oh, this is a legitimate credential; this is a legitimate program," and it will in fact result in the outcomes and

in the employment outcomes that they so kind of wildly claim on their websites.

What was amazing to me in doing a bit of research for debate today is just how much money we're talking about here. Tuitions for private career colleges, some of which might be a year, maybe 18 months: some of them are north of $40,000, Mr. Speaker. I was amazed to see what some of the fees are for some of these private career colleges. They are growing faster than just about anything else when it comes to postsecondary opportunities in Alberta. When we're talking about that amount of money for that concentrated period of time, then it is high time that we have some greater transparency and accountability on the system.

Certainly, Bill 3 when it comes to protecting consumers – that they are in fact getting the real bill of goods when they pay north of $30,000, $40,000 for a program that might be 70, 80 weeks long. Then it is absolutely an element and I think the responsibility of government to ensure that where they are spending their very hard-earned dollars, none of which I think are easily come by – that those are being done in a way that is transparent.

Another piece that I want to talk about that I think is incredibly important and Bill 3 does also address and I think is also a topic of great issue out kind of in the world as far as anecdotes and data goes with the phenomenon of private career colleges is the need for safe financing options.

4:00

There are really heartbreaking stories. If I may, I'd like to read just one of those little stories that, again, the good folks at Momentum Community Economic Development have made available on their website. This is from someone who went into business administration, Mr. Speaker. They say:

> I had almost completed my business administration program at an Alberta university and decided to take a couple of courses at the private career college just because it seemed a bit easier and cheaper. I was planning to transfer the credits to complete my degree and told them this all when I was registering. They told me I could transfer the credits, no problem. They told me the program was $11,000 but charged me $18,000. They did the application for my student loan for me. They assured me the credits could be transferred; they cannot. The diploma from this college is useless, and now I have this huge debt. It's infuriating. I was trying to get ahead, and now I am so many steps back. Then, after all that, they offered me $500 and a free laptop to recruit students for them. I couldn't believe it.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

These are the kinds of stories – I kind of dread the thought of how common these kinds of experiences are for students in Alberta. They were doing everything right, students who were seeking some microcredentials or looking to maybe top up a particular set of skills that are complementary to what they might have in their university degree, and then there are these awful stories of just being terribly taken for granted.

One of the things that Bill 3 does, which, again, I'm pleased to see, is that they limit student financial assistance for online programs. Sorry; this is stuff that's happened in the last fiscal year by the government, and Bill 3 takes it a little bit farther. They have restricted provincial funding for students who attend private career colleges outside of Alberta, and that is even going to be going a little bit farther.

Many of the private career colleges participate in the government-led student aid programs, whether it be federal or provincial, when it comes to the provision of loans and grants, and those certainly happen with the level of oversight that we would expect from those kinds of public lending institutions. But some other private career colleges will use third-party lenders, Madam Speaker, who happen under kind of a different regulatory umbrella with not a great deal of oversight. Of course, it was the Alberta NDP in 2015 to 2019 who implemented really, I think, game-changing legislation when it comes to the controls placed on predatory and payday lenders. But those still do exist in some ways.

One of the stories – I've got a couple of them here today, this afternoon. Another story is a student who took a $9,000 loan having been told it was a grant, but they got a $9,000 loan at 30 per cent interest, Madam Speaker. It's usury, and it really shouldn't be permitted.

Again, it's high time, I think, that government has been made aware of these stories. These are not exceptional. Indeed, it is not the majority. I think that this is exactly why we're standing here today, because the majority of operators in this space and in this industry are stand-up, commendable, doing everything right, providing some really critical educational opportunities for people that they can do in a really condensed way and at the end of it have credentials that will get them good, mortgage-paying jobs. But for those few folks within the industry, those few operators who really are either taking advantage, doing things that are out-and-out illegal, or simply not completely transparent or truthful to the students in terms of the legitimacy of the program and the legitimacy of their claims to be employable at the end of that: those need to be buckled down, and that's exactly what I trust Bill 3 will do. Of course, there is a lot to still come in the regulations, and I'll get to that in a minute.

One other story that really resonated with me, based on so much of the literature and so much of the kind of advocacy that good organizations and students themselves have been providing, is the organization that I used to work for before coming into politics and the amount of time and consideration and care that was provided to newcomers in Canada to be oriented to our financial system, to be oriented to how our lending system works, why it's so important when it comes to establishing good credit. A lot of newcomers come to Canada, Madam Speaker, and it is really, really tough to access any of the major five banks when it comes to legitimate lending opportunities because they just have no credit. Oftentimes they have to go and access an Easyfinancial or another kind of nonfinancial institution lending opportunity because that's all that's available to them.

When I worked for the wonderful organization that I did that provided microloans to newcomers so they could bridge their foreign credentials and get back to work, a lot of time and a lot of effort was spent talking about how these loans worked, the repayment plans, with maximum transparency on what the expectations were, lots of leeway around challenges to repay loans should those come up.

There are so many stories here where people say: "I signed something. I didn't know what I was signing. I only signed half of the document. Somebody else filled it out for me, and I trusted them. I trusted them." What's even more shocking is that some of these individuals, the people who say, "Oh, you know, it's fine; I'll sign this document on your behalf" or "I'll fill it out for you," were incentivized with significant signing bonuses. I've heard of signing bonuses per student of north of $5,000. So some of the tactics that recruiters were using were incredibly aggressive. Incredibly aggressive. They were not honest. They should not be trusted. They held a person's future in the balance, and based on the stories online and based on the stories that have come out in the debate around Bill 3, they ruined people's lives because of this false promise that they offered to just get people through the door.

It's heartbreaking. That is not the kind of opportunity that I think we should be offering to Albertans, and it's all the more reason why

something like Bill 3 is contributing to a totally different conversation about private career colleges. I hope it elevates the industry. I hope it elevates the work, the good people, you know, supporting those educational endeavours, those educational dreams every single day.

I mentioned that there are a couple of things, though, that we're still waiting to see when it comes to the regulations of Bill 3 that we don't have totally kind of shaped out yet. We do want to see those regulations as soon as possible. For example, Bill 3 sets caps on those signing bonuses. They set a cap on the incentives that can be provided to the recruiters who are actually trying to increase enrolment in a particular college or a particular program. We don't know what those caps are yet, Madam Speaker, or if there are any maybe not just monetary caps but particular tactics that need to be limited.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there are others to Bill 3? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 3, the Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025. I want to thank my colleague the Member for Calgary-Currie for her remarks. Given her experience in the community clearly what's laid out in this bill is meaningful for her and many of the people that she's worked with. I do also want to give a shout-out to friends at Momentum and the work that they have been doing to try and raise the attention to some of these issues.

It is clear that the challenges that are faced by students accessing private colleges are valid, and there are very real reasons to be concerned about the services that are provided and the financial practices of some of these colleges, and it is the students that we should be thinking of at the centre of this as we do the work.

4:10

The training that is provided from private colleges does serve an important role for Albertans entering the job market or those that are maybe transitioning in their careers. Whenever receiving or seeking education, Albertans deserve high-quality education and the best opportunity to secure a good-paying job. We should always be thinking about the accessibility, the affordability, the quality, and the application in industry for people to be getting jobs.

There are over 200 of these colleges with approximately 70,000 students enrolled. This is significant. Those numbers are significant, and they have doubled over the past 10 years. Students and other colleges in the system have been sounding the alarm, as well as Momentum, for some time, asking the government to take action.

Madam Speaker, students do deserve better. Our caucus will always stand for a robust, quality, accessible, affordable education system in Alberta, meeting the needs of Albertans. We are, of course, in the moment currently discussing Bill 3, regarding private colleges, but the statement that I just made for robust, quality, accessible education applies to the K to 12 public education system in Alberta, something that this government might not be so supportive of given their passing of Bill 2.

But let's return to Bill 3, Madam Speaker. Students do deserve a system with checks and balances. They deserve a system that is transparent and where there are recourses when the programs aren't being delivered to the degree to which they expected. They do deserve to go into something with their eyes wide open, with full information, where people have dealt with them honestly and transparently and perhaps where this information could be vetted and available in other areas like government websites.

Madam Speaker, I do want to talk about the value of Bill 3, but also – maybe this is something that I'm not used to saying in debating bills – Bill 3 might actually not go far enough in what is being asked for and what is required.

I have the benefit of having a constituent that owns and operates a private vocational college, so I have the opportunity to have had conversations with owners and operators in this space. There are already some regulations that are in place that aren't being necessarily enforced or where the proposed legislation could go further in terms of certifications, enrolment, financial disclosure. There are some questions that can be raised on this bill. Those questions might be around the clarity that is provided, the teeth of the bill, the breadth of the bill, and to ensure that this bill is providing students with real assurances that the system is going to be there for them, to protect them in delivering quality and ensuring that there's some recompense if things go wrong.

Talking about some of the regulations that are already there, in contrast to the bill that we have. The private vocational training regulation Alberta regulation 341/2003 in section 10 already talks about security. Current regulations already require applicants for a licence to "submit security in the form of a surety bond, an irrevocable [line] of credit or in another form, and in an amount, that [is] acceptable to the Director." If the director feels that the security provided is no longer sufficient and they require additional security, they have the ability to do that, and the security must be in place for as long as the licence for the institution is in place, that the college is in place.

There are even provisions, Madam Speaker, of when and how the security would be forfeited to refund tuition fees. If the security is forfeited, the director is responsible for the distribution of those funds, and then if it doesn't cover all of the tuition that has been paid, it would be distributed on a pro rata basis. The regulations in place also already provide details on the refunding of tuition, including the amount to be refunded based on the amount of programming that has ostensibly been delivered and details on how much time is provided for the payment of those funds. Now, Bill 3 does go ostensibly further, introducing a student protection fund, but I think some of the questions around this legislation are that – maybe we'll see it in further amended regulations – it doesn't talk about how much should be deposited into that fund. We can talk about the funds that are already there, that if they were insufficient to protect students, could not the director have increased security requirements in accordance with the existing regulations? And if they didn't, why not? We could have acted before bringing forward Bill 3 today. If securities weren't on deposit or weren't sufficiently being monitored, again, we could ask: why?

While additional provisions might have been required, maybe the director required additional resources to monitor and enforce those regulatory provisions, ensuring that the funds were available for tuition refunds should they be required. I hope with the introduction of Bill 3, presumably with the passing of Bill 3, that, again, in some regulations or funding that is applied to the department that there are additional resources and that we're really honestly listening to the director on the resources required to monitor the more than 200 private vocational colleges that are out there.

Bill 3 also includes the requirement for registration as well as a licence being required for private colleges to offer their services. Again, current regulations already have provisions for application requirements and licences for private colleges. Those current regulations do require that a new college or new programs apply for a licence to operate to the director. Madam Speaker, again I'll ask some questions that could be asked here. Are the resources available to the department, to the director to monitor and enforce those existing licences? Appreciating that maybe we need some more description around registration and licences, but again, it maybe appears that the regulations were already there. Are we

giving due consideration to the resources that are needed to make sure that we can enforce now new provisions for regulations and licensing?

Madam Speaker, the bill also doesn't provide further clarity on the requirements for registration and licensure. Then maybe more details are required in amendments to regulations, but there's an opportunity here to clearly state what is required in registering a private vocational college and receiving the licence for a private vocational college. What prior experience is required? What degrees are required? What industry experience is required? What recommendations from partners in industry should be there vetting the credentials?

Bill 3, Madam Speaker, might not also go far enough in the requirements for the development and the teaching of the curriculum that is offered. Current regulations include text around the curriculum being relevant to industry, but maybe we need some more clarification there. Again, what vetting, what recommendations do we need? And how is that being carried out? Are colleges currently required to post any references, or the vetting that is done for regulation and licensure: are they required to be posted by the college or by the government so that, again, students can go in eyes wide open and see all of that information? Kind of like a Better Business Bureau approach to private vocational colleges.

Madam Speaker, Bill 3 also doesn't talk a lot about financial reporting and financial requirements for private vocational colleges. Outside of the creation of the student protection fund it doesn't really talk about the finances for private vocational colleges. Existing regulations don't require annual audited financial statements. The regulations do say that the director may request audited financial statements, but they are not required. They also are not required, or it doesn't appear to be so, that those audited statements that are reviewed by the department be posted either by the department or the vocational college. Again, if we want students to be fully informed, an understanding of the stability of the college that they are choosing, maybe we should be saying that those audited statements should be posted for students to review. This would increase the transparency and visibility for students.

4:20

Madam Speaker, Bill 3 talks about guiding principles that state that vocational training should align with labour market needs. I'm going to say that existing regulations do touch on industry acknowledgement for the usefulness of the curriculum, but it doesn't really – again, maybe in regulations that will come, we could see a lot more details here on what requirements would need to be there. Public postsecondary institutions have to go through extensive review for new programs, sometimes taking up to two years to gather the evidence of need and showing that the program isn't unnecessarily duplicative of other institutions in the province. Bill 3 isn't requiring the same or suggesting the same kind of requirements for private vocational colleges, and maybe we could.

The guiding principle's clause could go further in defining and ensuring that the need and the quality of the programs meet labour market needs. We could maybe hope that amended or new regulations will go further in detailing how new program applications could come forward, the data that is required for those applications, perhaps documented and vetted recommendations from corporations or private industry that are calling for the need of these programs and suggesting that they would be hiring students coming from these programs.

Madam Speaker, Bill 3 also doesn't talk about the application guidelines for students. I'll talk a little bit about the competitive nature in private vocational colleges. While some private vocational colleges do require, say, high school GED equivalency or standard English proficiency, others don't. That puts those that do at a competitive disadvantage, and that competitive disadvantage may be turning students, perhaps not knowing that they might be duped into programs that aren't going to get them a job, towards programs that have lower qualification requirements or perhaps no qualification requirements. Then maybe through the course of this business we should be thinking about the competitive nature of private vocational colleges and putting forth something in recommendations that provide some basic standards on even the application process for students.

While there are many provisions in Bill 3 that can be useful for students, make things better for students, and improve private vocational colleges for all Albertans, we do want to make sure that the system in place does the very best for all the students that are going through these programs, that every single one of those 70,000 has a real opportunity to secure meaningful employment in their area of study.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to address Bill 3, the Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025. It's a much-needed oversight in a rapidly growing part of Alberta's education and skills ecosystem, and I appreciate that this bill includes some provisions for student protections, transparency, and accountability.

I have heard from so many newcomers who have struggled with finding their first job in their field of training in Canada, and many of them have chosen to retrain. For thousands of Albertans, particularly newcomers, private vocational programs can be a doorway to a first job in Canada, a better job perhaps, with recognized training or the practical skills to convert previous experience into employability in a Canadian context. When these programs are well run, they can offer a leg up, but when they're not, the costs are borne by students, who sometimes can least afford it, through predatory recruiting, hidden fees, poor instruction, and debt that can outlast the training can truly be crippling. Madam Speaker, Bill 3 must tackle those risks and hold bad actors responsible.

First, I want to turn my attention to the folks that this bill will impact and why it's these voices that should inform the next stages of this bill. As my colleagues have referenced, we have all heard stories in our own constituency offices. We've heard about high-interest, nontransparent loans pushed on vulnerable students. I'm going to reference the work that a well-respected not-for-profit has done, Momentum in Calgary, working with newcomers and low-income learners. They've documented the case of a recently arrived refugee, who believed she was enrolling for specialized training only to find out she'd been signed into a $9,000 loan at 30 per cent interest without fully understanding the terms. Momentum have also worked very hard to catalog similar stories where they've documented aggressive sales tactics, confusion between grants and loans, and pressure to sign finance agreements outside the Alberta Student Aid program.

There also have been stories of how recruiters have made false and misleading claims. Another organization, ActionDignity, compiled a community report that includes first-person accounts of recruiters enrolling students in programs they were not qualified for and opening student loans in their names, with students discovering later they were ineligible for the occupation or credential they thought they were training for. These are all documented narratives from students, staff, and support workers in Alberta.

We have also heard section-wide concerns about misleading advertising and poor job outcomes. There have been numerous

examples of news coverage featuring students and advocates alleging that misleading recruitment and low-quality instruction at some private career colleges essentially making a quick buck off learners. This reinforces the need for tighter standards and enforcement.

We have also heard for years – and this government certainly has, I'm sure, through their public engagement, particularly with newcomer-serving organizations and community advocates, been warned about the aggressive sales tactics and confusing financial arrangements. Momentum's stories and the work that they're doing, including ActionDignity's compilations, really gives faces and names to many of these harms.

I'll give you another example. ActionDignity's compilation documents that some students have been misled about eligibility and having loans opened in their names, as I've already mentioned. This legislation is important because there are many legitimate colleges that do want to provide a service to their students, and they want a level playing field where quality is rewarded and bad actors don't tarnish their work. I do think that the public registry and enforcement capacity are steps in the right direction, and Bill 3 gives the legal tools to go further.

Now, before I talk about some of the things that I'm happy to see in Bill 3, I do want to share a personal story that perhaps is indicative of some of the challenges right now that we're seeing within private career colleges. I had a constituent come forward a while ago who had enrolled in a local private college and was told that she had access to, quote, free money. This is how she purports that it had been described to her. Not only was there free money, quote, she was offered a free laptop and she was told that there was money for living expenses, only to find out later that it came out of her loan and that she had to pay everything back, including the so-called free laptop. Madam Speaker, this is why protections for students are needed. Bill 3 has at least some of the right provisions.

4:30

First, I want to talk about some of the provisions that I think are helpful, but of course I'd like to see some additional adjustments and changes to this bill before we see the final version.

What currently works in the bill right now is that it establishes a student tuition protection fund, so if a program is cancelled or a school closes, students would not be left holding the bag. The fund will make tuition refunds fairer and more predictable. It's essentially a backstop for Albertans who play by the rules and do the work and won't see a program disappear beneath them without any sort of supports. I'm pleased to see that the minister has indicated that the fund would be financed as a share of provider revenue, so aligning responsibility with scale.

Secondly, this bill does raise the bar for anyone who can offer training. Anyone who provides or even purports to provide vocational training now must be registered and licensed for each program, and the minister can refuse or condition registration when the facts warrant it. Inspectors would have clear powers to investigate, require documents, and enforce compliance with transparent rules for suspending, cancelling, or reinstating licences and access to judicial review.

The bill also expands regulation-making powers around student contracts, third-party recruiters, and the tuition protection fund, and it empowers the director to set program standards. It creates a framework to curb financial incentives and other tactics that have misled students. In plain language this is what the bill does right. There is more transparency, more oversight, and fewer surprises for students.

Madam Speaker, private career college enrolment and the number of providers has surged in Alberta over the last decade, and the province has already had to issue multiple compliance orders as oversight increased. A government-run public registry now lets students see the status and enforcement of a college before they enrol, and I must say that this is an overdue tool to help people spot any red flags. Since 2022 Alberta has moved incrementally to address the worst behaviour in the sector, consolidating legislation, doubling inspectors, ending most out-of-the-province, private career college funding, and launching a public registry of compliance actions. These are all things that government has done right.

We know just by looking at the media and government summaries list that compliance orders were issued against at least 15 Alberta private career colleges since mid 2024, and I think what that demonstrates is both the scale of the sector and that there is a need for rules that keep pace with growth.

What I also appreciate about Bill 3 is that it has clear guiding principles that vocational training must align with Alberta's labour market needs and provide the skills employers require. It is the right approach. It's obviously important, Madam Speaker, that a program leads to a job or wage that justifies the tuition and the time. Otherwise it's failing students and our economy, frankly, and embedding these guiding principles in statute, I think, makes a difference. It gives regulators a firmer basis to evaluate programs and enforce standards, and it nudges providers to collaborate on quality assurance and recognize credentials.

Again, Madam Speaker, there's a lot that has been done right within Bill 3, but I would be remiss if I didn't mention that this government did fail to prioritize Alberta's public postsecondary system. While Bill 3 addresses gaps in private vocational oversight, there's a parallel story that I think needs to be told on the public side.

First of all, this government had sustained underinvestment in Alberta's universities and colleges since 2019. The University of Alberta's own U of A for Tomorrow documentation records, you know, a one-third reduction over three years, and in its provincial grant, after the 2019 fiscal plan, there were other significant reductions. Faculty and staff associations have reported the human impact because of that underinvestment and its obvious consequences for student services and course availability. In fact, when we look at the reduction since 2019, it's been in the hundreds of millions of dollars. What we've seen since 2019 is a deliberate sort of rebalancing of public funds away from public operating support towards other things that, frankly, I think are not supporting our training credentialing sector.

Independent analysis by the Parkland Institute described a policy of reducing the public funding share of postsecondary costs from the mid-50 per cent to about 45 per cent. Essentially what we've seen is this government's very consistent underfunding of public universities. Frankly, if this government is serious about student protection and labour market alignment on the private side, it must equally also be serious about stable, predictable public funding on the other, and we haven't seen that from this government.

Turning back my attention to Bill 3, I have a number of questions I'd like to raise with the minister as a matter of record and consideration. Because Bill 3 relies heavily on regulations when it comes to the timeline – the minister indicated that regulations will come by spring 2026 – my question is: will the tuition protection fund be operational by then, and, if not, what interim protections will apply? When it comes to public reporting, will this government commit to program level outcomes and publish enforcement actions and a searchable registry with plain language summaries? For example, when it comes to the restrictions on third-party recruiters, will recruiters be required to be licensed and be subject to public discipline for misconduct? When it comes to tuition, for example,

will the tuition fund contributions and inspection frequency be tied to provider risk?

Madam Speaker, there are a number of different questions in terms of the enforcement of this bill that aren't clear and are not clear within the bill, that I'm hoping through the stages of debate the minister or the government will provide clarity on.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 3, the Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025. I must say that I'm very pleased that the government has brought forward this legislation. It is sincerely needed in the sector. We know that, unfortunately, there have been a lot of difficulties in the private career college sector over several years. We now have about 200 private career colleges licensed to operate in Alberta, with over 66,000 students currently registered. This is a large number of folks who have in the past, unfortunately, sometimes been exploited, as my colleagues have shared with their specific stories, by these career colleges. Of course, that's why this legislation is needed. We need to make sure that students, when they are attending colleges, are getting the proper training and the proper services, being charged a fair tuition, and not some of the false claims and some of the examples my colleagues have already identified quite clearly.

4:40

Just to make sure that everybody understands, there are certainly common concerns regarding some career colleges. One of the major ones is poor instructional quality. I'm going to go into that in a little more detail, but I was going to list a few of these common concerns.

Lack of job opportunities. Oftentimes, you know, it's a career college, so a lot of times they say: attend our career college, and then this job will be available to you at the end of it. But despite this promise, many times there were no jobs available at the end of it.

High-pressure sales tactics by aggressive recruitment sometimes got students into situations where they were being given false promises, again, and being told, "this is a grant" or "this is a free laptop" or these things, and then in fact they had to pay for all of those things in the end. This legislation will help that not be the case, and it will make sure that private vocational training colleges are able to be more transparent and fair with their practices.

Another common concern is the lack of accreditation and recognition of private college credentials. They may say, "Oh, well, you'll be this when you're done," and actually that has no relevance, or it doesn't necessarily support them to get a job. I myself am a registered social worker. I continue to hold my registration with the College of Social Workers, so that registration opens the door to me for various positions in my field. Sometimes there are promises for this kind of thing with vocational colleges that actually did not fulfill that.

Also, another common concern is sufficient student protection, particularly for newcomers and low-income learners. A student tuition protection fund has been created, so that is an important aspect, too.

If I go back to the first common concern that exists in this sector, the one about poor instructional quality, I'd like to just sort of elaborate on that a bit, Madam Speaker. That's why this bill is important. Because if people are receiving poor instructional quality, that can have huge ramifications for their work, for the citizens of Alberta. For example, if you have a social services worker, you have perhaps health care aids. I know we know that we don't have enough health care aids in our province, and career colleges oftentimes do offer programs in that. Or another example: massage therapists. These three groups. I just wanted to highlight some of the vulnerabilities, that not having proper instructional quality training is so key.

If you're not trained properly and you're working with a vulnerable population, like seniors in continuing care, like people who are maybe in a domestic violence situation, in an abusive relationship, people who are compromised because, you know, you're their massage therapist and you have sort of a power over relationship with them. They're extremely vulnerable. When you have a massage, you are laying there on their table. If those people are not fulfilling on what they should be doing, they aren't trained appropriately, the consequences could be dire. I mean, I guess an example for a massage therapist may be that they create some physical injury because they're not properly knowing how to care for people.

A social service worker could get into a relationship with a vulnerable person, a sexual relationship, a financial relationship, that is completely inappropriate.

If they're not trained appropriately about relationship boundaries and how to properly serve vulnerable people, then there could be significant consequences for Albertans, and they are not being protected or served well. And, of course, it's career ending oftentimes. Certainly as a registered social worker, if I'm working with a client and I get myself into a sexual relationship with them, that's career ending. Of course, there are clear boundaries when you're working with your clients, and you mustn't do that. But if there is not proper instructional quality, if people aren't taught appropriately, then how can they know all of these things? You know, people sometimes aren't thinking things through. They feel a certain thing and they think it's okay to do it. So having some regulations and clear accreditation practices for these colleges is so key because, otherwise, very serious, disturbing, and also hurtful things can happen to the people they're serving.

I just want to move on a bit to talk about the enforcement rules, which are in part 5, page 12 of the act. It says that inspectors may investigate if the act regulations, student contracts, registration or licence conditions, and other orders are in compliance or noncompliance. It says that investigators may interview any person, enter campuses, and review documents. This is very important, that there is legislation that specifically speaks to the enforcement of what the act, the regulations, other orders say. But, I guess, I just want to caution the government because they already do have legislation that, unfortunately, even though we do have these enforcement rules, for some reason they're not being fulfilled on.

I can give you a good example, and it's in the Protection for Persons in Care Act. We know that public servants do investigate reported abuse to Albertans receiving care in the continuing care system. A lot of these are health care aides. Oftentimes they're the direct service provider to vulnerable seniors in continuing care. We know from the investigations that have gone on, in the last report that came out, that they had tripled in founded complaints. So obviously there are some systemic issues, and we can probably trace a lot of them back to the schools, perhaps. But also what disturbs me is that even though there are the enforcement provisions, things are being found out to be obviously in noncompliance, but the government is just saying, "Yeah, this is a founded complaint," but nothing changes.

Let's make sure that, when the enforcement rules are identified in the legislation and then indeed they are investigated and they're founded, the government acts and that they are making sure that people are cared for appropriately and that people are getting the service they desire because they are, certainly in the continuing care system, many vulnerable seniors that should live with dignity and be cared for. This act is very important, that it be passed, but I do

caution the government to make sure that the enforcement aspect in part 5 is fulfilled on and that when they do have founded complaints, actual change and accountability occurs.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will take my seat.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to address Bill 3 in second reading, Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025. I sat listening to my colleagues and their wise words in terms of the debate they put on the record. I've been able to read through Bill 3, the *Hansard* introduction by the minister as well as the comments by our shadow critic of Advanced Education, and I think there's a common concern that has been identified by every one of those speakers in terms of what private career colleges bring to Alberta.

4:50

Recognizing that there are a couple hundred of these in our province, they have gone through an explosion in terms of the numbers very recently, and that thousands and thousands of Albertans, many who are newcomers, go to these private career colleges with the view of improving their current education or learning about a specific job that is in demand that can be addressed by the training they get at a private career college. Regrettably, many of those newcomers or students who go to those colleges are finding poor-quality instruction that doesn't help them a lot.

I guess I have personal knowledge of that with a cousin who years ago went through a private career college hoping to learn more about being an electrician or an assistant to an electrician and came away feeling quite disappointed that it did not have the track to get him employed that he was hoping to see. It was thousands of dollars, of course, Madam Speaker, that he invested in his education, which he found to be of low quality and ineffective. Certainly, we want people to do the best job they can when they go to get an education, and when they go to a private career college and get vocational training in something they're interested in, we don't want them to be experiencing frustration and a loss of monies and a kind of a negative experience.

I too went to the literature and saw that a great deal of work had been done in this area by a former employer of mine, Momentum Community Economic Development, who previously had done a great deal of work in the whole area of payday lending. That was something that was left hanging out there by the PC government. They had set up an act around payday lending. It was a very high level of interest charged on people who had taken payday loans, and Momentum took the opportunity for a review of that act to come forward with proposed changes. Fortunately, that coincided with the election of the Notley government, and we were able to bring changes to the payday lending program, which I posit wouldn't have happened under the PCs. I think it would have been something that was continuing to be of great concern to people who went to those lenders and got subprime lending contracts and lost a lot of money.

Back to this bill, I think there are similar kinds of things that have been found out from the people who are experiencing less than satisfaction of going through a private career college, namely they feel – and this comes directly from my former employer – "false and misleading information given by recruiters and use of high-pressure sales tactics." We see in the bill that there is a greater desire to be more transparent with the kinds of sales tactics. Actually, third-party individuals who are trying to sign up people in private career colleges are not divorced from the college. Their actions reflect on the college's actions. So that's a loophole that's been addressed here.

Poor-quality instruction and learning experiences: there's greater transparency and more regulatory efforts to try and make sure that, upon complaints, the kind of instruction and learning experiences are of high quality, and to look at how to regulate and enforce that. There's been a doubling in the number of career college inspectors from three to six in the summer of 2024. That still may not be enough, Madam Speaker, but at least that's positive action.

Another area of concern, and one that I mentioned off the top in relation to a cousin, is poor or nonexistent employment supports like practicums and job search and resumé development. These are the kinds of themes that students and people who have been through a career college, graduates, express about the career college that they've been through. A lack of job opportunities upon graduation is another and a lack of credential recognition. That's deadly for people who go through career college. If their credentials aren't recognized once they've graduated, they wonder why they paid so much and got so little. And high debt loads and inability to service or pay them, which, Madam Speaker, if you think about it, is the worst kind of bilking of a person you can possibly do.

You know, some of the information that I'm gleaning from a website here in terms of satisfaction of people around career colleges is very troubling, Madam Speaker. For instance, knowing what you're signing up for before you go. There's some information about students saying that 54 per cent of them were disappointed with their experience. That's not the kind of level of report we hear from universities and colleges and polytechnics, but in this case students are saying that 54 per cent of them are disappointed, and 42 per cent of the graduates can't find work after, which is not anything to crow about – it's very, very bad – and 31 per cent of the students who have taken this information survey say that their debt is over $10,000 upon graduation.

I do want to leave off with maybe a personal story as well. A person named Thomas, who was in for health care aide student training, said that when he arrived to Canada: "I didn't know anything about loans, and I was really curious to learn something and get a great job. That didn't happen. I just got a big loan, which is a big source of stress."

Madam Speaker, you can see where Bill 3 starts to address the issues. I would say that probably it took longer than necessary to address these issues, but it's in the right direction. We need to make sure that the number of career colleges out there are actually delivering what they say they're supposed to deliver. We need to ensure that students are gaining the education that they sign up for, and we need to ensure that the people who are delivering this service are following through with their obligations under being a registrant. I'm really glad to see that each registrant or career college has to provide funds to start a student – I can't remember what they call it; I'll look at it in a second. It's a fund for students who find that they have a valid complaint about the education they did not get from the career college.

Madam Speaker, the only other thing I'd like to mention is that we do need career colleges, obviously. Private vocational training is important because not everybody wants to go the route of a university or college or a polytechnic. They want to get their microcredit, microcredentialing in a certain area, and that's part of what a career college can provide.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll sit down and adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:00

Bill 4
Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services to move second reading of Bill 4, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

I sincerely hope, Madam Speaker, that this House will consider the bill, and it is my hope that it'll pass unanimously because it does a tremendous amount of good for the people of Alberta. Simply put, the principle of this bill is to strengthen the safety, security, and the integrity of all of our communities by providing law enforcement, correctional preventative services, and others with a clear, modern toolset that they need to protect Albertans. This bill is not about one single issue but, rather, a number of targeted issues and amendments to three critical statutes. We're taking action to make communities safer by introducing legislation to strengthen policing, enhance protection for people at risk of domestic violence, and modernize the correctional system.

The first and most significant set of amendments relates to the ongoing establishment of the Alberta sheriffs police service. We're taking the next steps needed to strengthen the foundation for the Alberta sheriffs police service by ensuring that officers have the same collective bargaining rights and labour relations rules as other municipal police forces across our province.

Now, our sheriffs currently provide vital policelike functions across this province, from courthouse security to traffic enforcement and provincial investigations, but as we formalize the Alberta sheriffs police service into a sworn police service augmenting and supporting the work of all police officers in this province, we have a fundamental responsibility to make sure that these officers are governed by the same professional, fair, and consistent framework as every other police officer in Alberta.

The amendments proposed in Bill 4 achieve this by aligning the Alberta sheriff police service officers with other police officers in the Police Officers Collective Bargaining Act. This is a matter of fairness. It's a matter of clarity, Madam Speaker. By placing sheriffs under the police officers' collective bargaining agreement, we're confirming their right to collective bargaining and ensuring a stable, predictable labour relations environment that is appropriate for a policing service. Now, that is essential because policing services are an essential service and cannot ever be disrupted. Our commitment to maintaining an unbroken chain of public safety is simply nonnegotiable.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, these amendments widely include sheriffs under the definition of police officer within the Workers' Compensation Act. This ensures that should they suffer an injury or psychological harm in the line of duty, a risk inherent in their commitment to our safety, they and their families will have access to the same compensation and support afforded to all other first responders.

Finally, Bill 4 modernizes recruitment under the Police Act by expanding eligibility to include permanent residents as Alberta sheriff police service police officers. We're expanding the pool of talent, ensuring that we can recruit the most skilled and dedicated individuals from diverse backgrounds and communities in which they will serve. This aligns our recruitment with progressive practices that are already in place across other police services, ensuring that we attract the best and the brightest here to our province. These changes are about ensuring that the Alberta sheriffs police service is built on a foundation of professional rigour, fair labour practices, and operational excellence from the very first day.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn now to the next, which is the second and equally vital component of Bill 4, strengthening our tools to combat domestic violence and protect vulnerable Albertans. The tragic reality is that domestic violence remains an extreme threat in our communities and remains one of the most hidden crimes in many homes. Our government is working and is committed to ensuring that individuals who are at risk have the information they need to make informed decisions about their own safety. This is a fundamental promise of the disclosure to protect against domestic violence act, which we commonly refer to as Clare's law.

[The Speaker in the chair]

We've encountered, however, operational and bureaucratic hurdles that have at times led to unacceptable delays in delivering this life-saving information. These delays often occur during the critical threat assessment phase conducted by the Integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Centre. Bill 4 directly addresses this. We are providing the Integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Centre with the clear, explicit, legal authority that it needs to access and disclose necessary information from relevant databases, including police records.

Mr. Speaker, every Albertan deserves to live free from the fear and threat of domestic violence. This is not a blanket measure. It is a targeted fix designed to cut through red tape and remove legal uncertainty for our law enforcement partners. This is why the minister brought forward Kim Ruse, CEO of FearIsNotLove in Calgary, to endorse this bill. As a leader of a major organization supporting people fleeing family violence she endorsed this legislation which introduces measures to enhance the safety of victims and survivors, especially during the high-risk time, when they are attempting to leave an abusive relationship.

It also establishes a robust legal foundation under Clare's law. It ensures that threat assessors can quickly and reliably access all relevant information about a potential perpetrator's history of violence. It ensures completeness. It allows us to deliver a more complete and reliable threat assessment, eliminating gaps that could put someone in danger. Finally, Mr. Speaker, it addresses liability. It removes uncertainty and liability concern for police and partners who are tasked with sharing some of this sensitive information to protect the victim.

In essence, this endorsement signifies that the bill is recognized by a leading expert in the field as a meaningful step towards ending family violence and abuse and protecting and improving our social systems that protect survivors and support them in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, when a person's life is potentially at risk from an intimate partner, mere seconds sometimes matter. These amendments prioritize the timely protection of Albertans over bureaucratic delays, and they maintain strict adherence to privacy principles which have been recommended by the Privacy Commissioner. We're reinforcing Clare's law to make it the effective shield that it was always intended to be.

Now, finally, Mr. Speaker, Bill 4 introduces prudent and necessary housekeeping amendments to the Corrections Act regarding interjurisdictional inmate transfers. Currently Alberta has a legal framework and agreements in place for transferring inmates sentenced under federal legislation to and from provinces and territories. However, there is a gap. There is a distinct gap concerning adult offenders who are held on remand or sentenced under provincial or territorial statutes. The proposed amendments will establish a clear framework that gives Alberta's government the authority to enter into agreements with other provinces and territories for the transfer of every single adult inmate.

Now, why is this essential, Mr. Speaker? The answer is simple. it's about emergency preparedness. For example, in an area of increased catastrophic wildfires, having the legal authority to

quickly and safely transfer inmates across jurisdictions, across provinces or territories during an emergency is vital. It also enhances co-ordination and judicial co-operation. There are instances where an inmate may have outstanding charges, trials, or the need to access medical services in another province. This framework provides the authority to manage these complex cases efficiently, reducing delays for our correctional systems and our courts.

Now, this is a logical, responsible, and professional update to our Corrections Act, bringing our provincial framework into alignment with many other modern correctional management practices across Canada.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, Bill 4, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2), is legislation that focuses squarely on actionable public safety enhancements. It delivers the necessary framework for the brave men and women of the Alberta sheriffs police service. It delivers a critical and timely update to the tools that we need for domestic violence prevention under Clare's law. Finally, it delivers a responsible, efficient update to our correctional system. These are practical changes, they are important changes, and they're designed to make life safer for all Albertans.

I urge all members in this Assembly to support the principles of this bill. I believe that we share a common commitment in this Assembly, each member, regardless of where we sit, in supporting the safety and security of Albertans. By supporting Bill 4, we know that we will support our front-line workers, we support the victims of domestic violence, and we will most certainly support a more professional and efficient public safety system here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, once again, I will sit down, but I do want to say that I'm moving this Bill 4 in second reading on behalf of the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services and ask that it be now read a second time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice has moved second reading of Bill 4. It looks like we've got a speaker from Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise as the MLA for Edmonton-City Centre and shadow minister for Public Safety and Emergency Services to respond in second reading of Bill 4. I think the minister is quite correct. We all here share the desire to be working towards improving public safety in our province. Indeed, that is a top priority. It is one, I think, that was forefront in the municipal election we had here in Edmonton. I think in many jurisdictions across Alberta it was one of the top issues brought forward by 94 per cent of businesses in a recent survey by the Business Council of Alberta. So, absolutely, we are all here, I believe, to work towards building better public safety in the province. Now, we certainly do have some differences, I think, between the sides of the aisle on how that's best accomplished, and I guess we'll have the chance to talk about that in debate on this bill.

I want to begin by talking about the areas in which we absolutely agree. In terms of the amendments that are being brought forward to section 2 of Clare's law, we are absolutely in agreement and support. It's essential that we make these changes. My understanding and, having read through the bill, what I see is that it's basically looking to facilitate co-operation, simplify some of that information sharing between police, between I-TRAC, the correctional agencies, external agencies, clarify who has power, and make sure that no one is sort of obstructing that process. Indeed, we all, I think, here agree that it is important, it is essential that we take whatever steps we can to empower women to be able to protect themselves in their intimate relationships.

Now, of course, I think it's important to note that this is just one support amongst many in many areas where we need to see government acting and investing to support, empower, and protect women against intimate partner violence, ensuring consistent and adequate funding of organizations that support women that are fleeing domestic violence, that are providing protection in the community. There are a lot of different fronts. Certainly, we have had some concerns at some points about what we have seen with the funding for some of those organizations, so we do appreciate and support the steps the government has taken here, but just note that there is far more to acting effectively on this issue than simply information sharing.

On the section regarding transfers within the correctional systems, we also support those amendments. Those are important, basically allowing the province to enter into agreements with the federal government or other provinces or territories when it comes to transferring inmates between correctional institutions, penitentiaries. In the technical briefing I had the opportunity to talk with officials. They noted that when we have situations such as wildfires, other emergencies – and those certainly seem to be growing in number – it's essential that we have these kinds of agreements in place to ensure that we are able to move people when we need to. Sometimes that will be between jurisdictions or between perhaps even federal and provincial facilities, so it's important that we have smart, good rules in place to allow that to happen, and largely this is just bringing us in line with other jurisdictions, so no issues there.

Now, it is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that these two worthwhile amendments are being attached to the remainder of Bill 4. Again, I want to be absolutely clear. You know, we absolutely support Alberta sheriffs. We believe they should be earning a fair wage. We believe that this government should have probably been negotiating with them on that a while back. We certainly respect sheriffs that are taking on more policelike responsibilities and have an interest in moving into more policelike roles. Certainly, if one were to be going about creating a provincial police service, one should be ensuring that you have proper labour protections.

Now, I did have to choke back a bit of laughter when I heard the Minister of Justice suggesting that his government is concerned about a stable, predictable labour relations environment after they just invoked the notwithstanding clause to force teachers back to work and impose a contract. Hardly stable or predictable, Mr. Speaker, and certainly setting a chill for all labour negotiations within this province. That said, if one was moving forward with a provincial police force, certainly that's an essential part of it. So are many of the other factors in Bill 4. Frankly, the government is putting the cart before the horse. Let's be clear. The fact is that the Alberta sheriffs police service is an Alberta provincial police force, something which many, the people of Alberta, have been very clear that they do not want, they do not support.

Even if the government had the support of a majority of people in the province to create an Alberta provincial police force, you don't go about this level of work in terms of the set-up, the framework, and putting all the pieces in place until you've actually sat down and run the numbers. The government has not done that. The minister still cannot tell us how much this Alberta sheriffs police service is going to cost. There's a lot of missing detail here. It makes it very difficult to support the measures that are being put forward here in Bill 4 when the minister has not done the simplest bits of due diligence and accountability.

Now, when it comes to a provincial police force, Mr. Speaker, what we see the government doing here is a common strategy with the UCP. When they see something they do not like, they work to eliminate it. How do they do that? Well, they create competition. They use the power of government and the public purse to create competition – they like to call it choice – to undermine the thing that they don't like. We've seen them do that with public health care. They are now providing far more surgeries, making it far easier to get a surgery in a private surgical facility than in a public operating room. We have public operating rooms that are sitting vacant, unused for multiple hours during the week because this government is shovelling more money to the private facilities than they're willing to spend in the public system. In fact, we have seen a vast expansion on that and continuing to expand on that despite the long shadow of one of the worst scandals potentially we've ever seen with an Alberta government.

They're doing it with the education system, which is another part, again, of what we have seen with the incredible disrespect towards teachers and educators in this province, where they are shovelling out more and more money to private schools. In fact, it's my understanding that the private school line item in the budget is getting close to if not already larger than the public funding under this government.

Again, what we see the government doing here is they have decided they don't like the RCMP. It is part of their fictitious belief that the RCMP are directed from Ottawa. Of course, Mr. Trevor Daroux, the commissioner here in Alberta, has already debunked that, pointing out the fact that legally they are obligated to work with the province to set the direction and the priorities for their work in the province. Of course, that didn't stop the government from spending millions of taxpayer dollars touring the province this summer, pumping out propaganda and, frankly, information that was far from correct about the truth of how the RCMP operates in our province. Bill 4 is simply building on that. This is a concern that's been brought up over and over and over again.

This is not about thoughtful, strategic public policy to build public safety. If it was, the minister would be able to tell us how much the service is going to cost, and he refuses to do so. If this was thoughtful, strategic public policy, the minister would have actually consulted, but he has not. We've heard that repeatedly. He has not actually sat down and consulted with the Alberta sheriffs that he claims this bill is meant to empower.

5:20

He has not actually talked to them about his plans for this provincial police service that is being created with the Alberta sheriffs. He has not actually sat down and talked with the actual customers for the service that he is creating. Mr. Speaker, what kind of businessperson comes up with a business plan, invests in the product, starts putting it together, starts manufacturing before they've even talked to the customers they intend to sell it to to see if this is what they're looking for? I'll tell you what kind of businessperson: the kind of businessperson that isn't spending their own money; they're spending public money. That is precisely what the UCP is doing.

Rural municipalities have had a number of questions. They've had those questions for coming on nigh two years, Mr. Speaker, about these expenditures, these plans, and the minister has refused to consult with them, to meet with them, or to answer them.

I'm not making that up. Here's RMA president Kara Westerlund from an interview in July just after the government announced their intention to stand up the Alberta sheriffs police service. Here's what she said: "We are unaware of the changes that were going to be announced that are happening. We still think if we're going to be making changes, municipalities need to have a seat at the table, making sure that we are part of every step and a part of the process as this moves along. There has been little to no communication between the minister's office and our association and our members, for that matter."

She goes on to say: "We have a lot more questions and concerns, very valid concerns. The province seems to be pushing ahead and moving forward with their plans, but there are no details. Where are the feasibility studies? Where's the data to prove what they're proposing is going to be better than what we've got? Absolutely, we all want to increase service levels in our municipalities, but who's going to pay for it? What's it going to look like? What does it mean?"

Mr. Speaker, they have been asking these questions for years. This all goes back to the Fair Deal Panel under Jason Kenney when he did the whole same rigamarole, spent the taxpayer dollars going around our province consulting on an Alberta provincial police force that no one was looking for. The Premier trotted out the same dog-and-pony show this summer, just a little more toxic, and did her run around the province and added in a few dashes of separatism, and we get ourselves back to the same place again where they still will claim that they consulted.

The minister at his press conference on Bill 4, you know, was sort of asked: well, don't people oppose an Alberta provincial police force? You know what he said, Mr. Speaker? "Well, you know, at those Alberta town hall events that we stacked with our members, gave them first choice on tickets, made sure we got plenty of separatists in the room, when I asked the question, I saw a lot of hands go up."

That's the quality of consultation under this government on what is a multimillion-dollar massive change to the law enforcement landscape in our province, a handful of UCP members and supporters at a few town halls around the province when they still refuse to consult with the actual sheriffs who are going to staff this or with the actual municipalities that they expect are going to buy into it and pay for it.

As Ms Westerlund said, it's great to make these announcements, but there's no meat behind what's being talked about, and we have a real concern. You hear the minister talk about shortages of officers, but that's not unique to the RCMP.

Let's talk about that, Mr. Speaker. The minister, again, was asked about this at his press conference on Bill 4, and he talked about all those RCMP vacancies and he just doesn't know what he's going to do and it's a problem and nobody else seems to have the problem the RCMP does. Rural Municipalities of Alberta know better. They talk to many police services across the province. They know recruitment is a challenge across the board. Speaking of vacancies, I asked the minister at estimates this year if he could tell me the vacancy rates for Alberta sheriffs. He didn't have those numbers handy, said those would come down the road.

I never did get those numbers, but guess who did. The Breakdown AB. They ran a little FOIP, and they got that information back in July. As of July 1 the vacancy rate in Alberta sheriffs was 14 per cent. The highway patrol, Mr. Speaker, had a soft vacancy rate – that's folks on leave and that sort of thing – of 6.7 per cent. Hard vacancy, empty positions: 22.5 per cent.

I have to agree with Ms Westerlund and the folks at the RMA when they say: "Hey, you know what? This is a North American problem." This is country-wide, continent-wide, and the minister is blowing smoke when he says that he's going to magically produce the thousands of officers that are going to be needed to staff an entire provincial police service across the province.

Now, again, Alberta sheriffs: absolutely, we should be working with them to make sure they can work at their full capacity, to make

sure they are paid reasonably in doing so, and we should be providing a proper structure for them to do that work within that has been built in consultation with the sheriffs themselves, with rural municipalities, with everybody who's involved, is going to be expected to pay for this, and who is going to be living with this decision for decades. That is not what we have with this government. What we have instead is the minister dripping this out piece by piece, piece of legislation by piece of legislation, hoping if he builds it quietly enough and slowly enough that folks are just going to go: oh, well; what are we going to do about it?

But the fact is, Mr. Speaker, we owe the people of Alberta better than that, and, hey, to coin a phrase, better is possible. The fact is that this government has had abundant opportunity to actually do this job right, and they refuse. Again, what we see consistently with this government is that when they say they are doing something for Albertans, they are not. They are doing it for themselves. They're doing it for the betterment of their political interests. They're doing it to satisfy the extremists in their base. They're doing it for their party AGM. They are not doing this for the benefit of Albertans. If they were, they would actually talk to them about it.

This is a government, Mr. Speaker, that I have said at times is drunk on power. They like to think that they have the right to just simply swagger across the province and impose whatever it is they want to do. Now we're starting to see cracks in that. We're certainly starting to see that Albertans are waking up and paying attention and getting increasingly frustrated with the draconian level of authoritarianism that we see in so many of this government's actions.

The fact is that whether it's this government trying to fire the Auditor General, whether denying money for the recall petitions against their own MLAs, whether it's using Bill 2 to use the notwithstanding clause to strip people's Charter rights, or whether it's simply taking one more small step, doing the camel in the tent method, sticking the nose in a little bit further, moving the camel's nose in until they get the whole thing in, that they're doing with the Alberta provincial police force, Albertans are waking up and they're paying attention.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I'm looking forward. Next week we'll be down at Alberta Municipalities. The week after that we're going to have a chance to go and talk with folks from the Rural Municipalities of Alberta. I'm looking forward to having some more conversations with those representatives from across the province about how they feel about the government's Bill 4 and their continuing imposition of an Alberta provincial police force.

I have a feeling that a lot of Albertans are getting tired, including in those rural areas where we're starting to see some of those recall petitions, where we're starting to see people wake up and go: "Wait a minute. I don't have to just sit back and have a government dictate to me what they're going to do. I can have better. I deserve a government that's actually going to listen to me, that's actually going to take governing seriously, actually going to do their work properly, actually going to have respect for Alberta taxpayers' dollars and invest them in the things that we want to see."

On that, Mr. Speaker, I will just wrap up my remarks by noting that if this government truly wants to make an impact on public safety in this province, policing is a core part of that. No question. They are essential partners in how we build safety in our communities. But – you know what? – when I talk with Edmonton's police chief, when I talk with others across this province, they tell me that there's an awful lot of the problem that we're dealing with right now that springs from social disorder, and these are not things we can police our way out of, which is why I was very happy to see this week that Edmonton's mayor, Andrew Knack, our new mayor: one of his first steps in office is to actually invest in day-shelter spaces here in Edmonton for this coming winter.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? When I talk with Edmonton's police chief, what he tells me is that they're dealing with an awful lot of calls for things for which police are not the appropriate response. Even when police go out to help, they have nowhere to take the people that need help. Yes, do we have a navigation centre? We sure do. Beautiful doorway, beautiful first stop on the train line, but the government hasn't built a single thing after it. When people go to that navigation centre, they need services and supports and programs to be connected to, actual physical spaces to be sent where they can live, where they can have dignity, and those do not exist because this government is not making those investments with anywhere close to the urgency with which they're rushing forward with a police force that nobody asked for and that they refuse to consult on.

5:30

Our public safety blueprint, Mr. Speaker, lays out a real plan to build public safety in our province, to work with our municipal partners, to work with the federal government, to actually invest in the full spectrum of support services. Yes, supporting police, but in making those social investments, actually following through on mental health and addictions in a way that recognizes the urgency of the crisis instead of the slow walk we see from this government. Those are the things that will actually build safety in our communities, not the incremental half-steps we see from this government so far and not this imposition of a service nobody asked for that we see continuing in Bill 4.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers? Looks like Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 4. I wanted to actually begin – I will get into the more opinionated portion of this at some point – with the provisions around Clare's law, because I do actually have a question.

Once upon a time – it's interesting. One of the members was having an opinion with respect to a private member's bill, of which I have introduced one on minimum wage, talking about how he had worked with the minister – in this instance, the minister had been me at that time – around the bill. And I remember thinking: "Okay. Like, that's the reason? If I had brought the bill to the minister, he would have agreed? I think that that's unlikely."

What was interesting about it is that it, like, brought me back to how things used to be a little bit in this place. One of the things that we used to be able to do in bill debate was ask questions, and the questions would be taken by department staff and answers would be sought, and they would be provided to the minister. Having been a minister that read these answers out for the members, I am very familiar with this. I am hopeful that maybe this process still exists although I admit I haven't seen it in four or five years at least now, so I suspect that it does not.

Ms Hoffman: Maybe today.

Ms Ganley: Maybe today. Hope springs eternal.

What I wanted to ask about was that these new provisions talk about doing a threat assessment, and this would be an individual who has been convicted of or been subject to domestic violence charges in the past. Overall, I think this is a very good law. What is just somewhat unclear to me in these provisions is whether or not the using and sharing and gathering of the information and the

threat assessment so gathered can only be used for the purposes of the law. It's not clear to me in here if it's being shared interagency and interdepartment so that if a woman were to come forward and seek information about her partner, she could find that information or whether it's being shared for other purposes.

I say this only because sometimes mistakes do happen in these databases. People have the same last name; they have the same birth date. Many folks will be familiar: when you get a volunteer check, it's often the case that if you wind up with the same birth date as someone – and as you age, this increases in chance – they have to take your fingerprints to verify that it's you. These mistakes do happen. I'm just curious if the minister can clarify whether these provisions and the sharing of this information about individuals who may only have been accused of something and it may be the wrong individual, which is the concern in this case – whether or not those would only be used for the purpose of the law. I think in that case the risks are outweighed by the benefit. So I would love to hear that clarification, Mr. Speaker.

The only other thing I will say on the point of Clare's law is that it is a good provision. I think it's important. I don't think it's sufficient on its own, and at the time when this bill was introduced, we did criticize it fairly heavily for failing to come with additional supports. In fact, supports had been scaled back significantly since 2019 at that time, and that continues to be the case, Mr. Speaker. I do think that while this law is one thing that can be done to prevent domestic violence, there are many other things in which this government could be investing that would help as much or more. Okay; that is that portion of the bill.

The other portion of the bill deals with setting up a provincial police service. The reason that this is necessary is because peace officers under the Criminal Code have different arrest powers than police officers. Peace officers can only arrest someone that they suspect has committed a crime under certain circumstances. Mostly, they have to see them committing the crime in order to arrest them. That is very different than a police officer, who can do an investigation and then form a reasonable suspicion and arrest on that basis. Moving them into a police force would be necessary to replace the RCMP ultimately, which is, I think, what this bill is. It's like a step in that process, a process which has now been ongoing, Mr. Speaker, for about seven years.

It feels like this is the minister honestly trying to sort of sneak up on Albertans. Like, if the government rolls this sufficiently slowly, maybe Albertans won't notice that it's happened. I think that that's pretty problematic on a number of fronts for a government. I also think that it's a really badly executed sneak attack if it is that; like, the minister might as well be wearing a Hamburglar costume in this instance. Yeah. I don't think Albertans are going to forget that this is an ongoing issue, and I don't think that they're going to forget that they are against it by and large.

I think it's worth sort of going into the history of this matter. This was initially proposed by the UCP government. Albertans objected strongly, as did municipalities of various variety because they may end up bearing the cost, right? That's why they object, because municipalities – like, money doesn't rain from the sky onto them. If they're going to have to bear these costs, they have to increase people's taxes. Mr. Speaker, I think you know people don't like taxes, so those municipal politicians don't really want to do that. They are against this because it would involve raising taxes.

I will cite an example. Surrey in British Columbia tried to do this recently. They tried to transition away from the RCMP to their own police force. Ultimately, they were too far along when someone came in and tried to reverse it. This was a very political decision, much like it is here, to transition, and it went extremely badly for Surrey. They weren't able to recruit officers because the fact that the RCMP has vacancies is a part of a larger recruitment problem for police officers that has been in the makings for at least a decade, so replacing the RCMP, Mr. Speaker, will not solve the problem that the UCP alleges it will solve where they have insufficient police officers.

Surrey ultimately had to be in a position where they were paying $20,000 signing bonuses to try and move officers over to their municipal – that's all money that, again, comes from you, me, and everyone, from the taxpayer, and it's money that doesn't need to be spent. That is really, really problematic. Surrey is going through, but ultimately the province has settled with Surrey to pay them $250 million about this issue so that they don't have to charge their citizens a, quote, unquote, police tax.

I think the problem is that this money has to come from somewhere, whether you call it a police tax, whether it's paid for by the municipality, whether it's paid for by the province. I mean, to steal a line from conservatives: there is only one taxpayer, Mr. Speaker. Someone is going to have to pay for this, and in the case of Alberta the cost according to PricewaterhouseCoopers, which was – again, this isn't, like, some sort of partisan thing; it was a report that was commissioned by the UCP government – at least $366 million for transition and $170 million a year that the province is losing. And that's at today's population; it will only go up if population grows and we need more police.

5:40

That's a lot of money that we could be spending on other things. That's a lot of money that has to come from a taxpayer somewhere, whether it's in their property taxes municipally or whether it's in their provincial taxes. Yeah. I just don't think it's a good idea. I think at a time when we're telling people we don't have money for EAs, we don't have money for doctors, we don't have money for hospitals, telling them that we have $366 million in the beginning and then $170 million a year or more just – for what? – to own the federal government? Like, it doesn't actually make a lot of sense to me.

Now, I am not saying that there are not internal RCMP processes that are a bit imperfect from the position of a provincial government, but it has been my experience that those things can be worked out, that they can be sort of dealt with. Ultimately, any police service, the RCMP included, will enforce laws that the Solicitor General in the province passes. Like, ultimately, that is a provincial jurisdiction.

I think that this is sort of the UCP kind of spinning up this issue, right? They're spinning up an issue. They're pretending that somehow the RCMP has to do – or it's some faction of folks who have, well, we'll just call them conspiracy theories. It's some variety of a conspiracy theory that has sort of somehow percolated up to the UCP.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things – I mean, this has been going on for years. They were going to do it, and then in advance of the election it's, like: no, we're not going to do it. If there's one thing I really object to, it's when a government is asked directly when they're seeking election whether they will do a thing – this is true of coal mining. This is true of the RCMP. They were asked directly, like: you had these ideas; are you still going to do them? They said no when auditioning for people's votes, and then as soon as they got in, they turned around and changed their mind. I think that that is very disrespectful of democracy and disrespectful of the citizens that we represent, and I don't like it.

Another thing, I would say, that I think is very disrespectful is the survey that was put out to Albertans on this. Like, it really is, what I would say, an exercise in how to do experimental methodology and surveys and things badly. I took a class once in school called

how to lie with statistics. This isn't precisely statistics, but it's a very similar thing. In the survey, first of all, you're forced to watch a 10-minute propaganda video, which has a lot of just factually incorrect information. I didn't even have to google it. Now, admittedly I was the minister at some point, so perhaps I know a little more about this, but it was pretty transparently incorrect, I would say, information that was in this video. It definitely did a very good job of sort of misrepresenting a number of issues or strategically presenting some information and not other information.

Then you get into the survey, which is where I truly object. The first question requires you to say: what do you think is the most important thing in favour of this? And you're not allowed to say: I'm not in favour. Right? Like, that's not one of the options. If you would like to proceed on in the survey, if you would like to answer any of the other questions, you have to answer this question where it's a forced choice of the things that are good about it. It lists a bunch of things, and none of those things are true. It's very frustrating because any member of the public who wanted to get through would be forced to answer this way.

I assume it was because of the coal survey that was sort of similarly done with similarly bad, in my view, somewhat misleading methodology where people wrote in. Ultimately, the government was very reluctant to release that information. I think they fought it before the Information and Privacy Commissioner for 21 months – sorry, it was pensions – to refuse to release to Albertans the information that they had paid for with their taxpayer dollars. That's how FOIP works, right? If our dollars are used for something, we are entitled to the results.

The government did a survey on pensions and, boy, were Albertans resoundingly, like, not into it. But the government resisted sending out that information, I think in part because some very strong language was used. Mr. Speaker, I have to say that when we did town halls on that issue, I was very surprised by the colourful language coming from some very elderly ladies with respect to the government's moves on CPP. It seems like, given the sort of word search in that particular thing, the government received that feedback as well.

I think that probably the reason the survey is designed this way, where it's like a forced choice before you can even enter into the survey to basically agree with a statement that is factually incorrect, which I had a really hard time doing – like, I know that it's not identifiable to me, and I know that it's on the Internet. But I had a really hard time having to pick one of those choices because I know that they're not true.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very silly thing, and the government shouldn't do it.

The Speaker: On second reading, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleagues for the introduction to today's discussion as we continue to consider Bill 4 here in second reading, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). I was going to say to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View off the record, but I may as well say on the record, that that is an interesting way to refer to former member Shannon Phillips' mom. She was among many of the raging grannies who were quite distraught at the attack on pensions and also, of course, closely tied to that, under the current government's direction in an attempt to create more distance between those of us who live in Alberta and the federal government, attacks on the justice system and specifically the RCMP, as they have served our province for many, many generations.

I'll maybe just start by touching base. We're just shortly thereafter with the Halloween season. Halloween in my hometown of Kinuso was when new RCMP members came to town. The detachment was in Faust. I don't know if it was intentional, but there was always a little bit of hazing that happened to the officers, not by myself, of course. At Halloween there were eggs, and there were always welcome-to-town egging incidents.

I was thinking about the way that those RCMP members responded to those youth, again, not myself, Mr. Speaker, or any of my friends. The way they responded to those youth often determined what the relationship was going to be like between law enforcement and the influential children of the community. The RCMP members were never from the local region; we always had folks who were usually new graduates from the Regina training centre, and many of them came from Ontario and out of province to serve our community. We often looked upon the members as people that we in many ways would choose to emulate, our behaviour in the community. Not everyone, of course. But it was a fun thing when the new young officers would come to town.

I also was thinking about Halloween in the context of the children who came to my house this year. I had about 300 children come and trick-or-treat at my house, and the number one costume by far – we're not allowed to engage in this space, but I will let you know – was Rumi from *KPop Demon Hunters*. Number one by a long shot. Number two, I think, was Zoey, also from *KPop Demon Hunters*. But number three, I think, this year was a police officer. I remember there were three young children. One was a five-year-old girl who was so proud to come to the door and ask for candy or comic books or whatever it is that she received in that encounter. I will say that that idea of children looking up to, having positive relationships with law enforcement and seeing them as folks that they choose to aspire to become: I think that is often what Halloween is all about. I will say that for many of those young Rumis, they aspire to be a KPop Demon Hunter.

5:50

Upon that reflection, I can't help but draw a connection to the social determinants of justice, Mr. Speaker, and how they relate specifically to the public safety and emergency services act. Folks in this place are saying, you know: these changes need to be made; we need to continue the trajectory we're on to separate from the RCMP and to create an Alberta provincial police force. The first piece of legislation that embarked upon that was a year ago, Bill 11. Then, of course, there was a bill in the spring. It was Bill 49. Now here we are, back in the fall sitting, considering Bill 4. This has been three times that we've sat in a row that the government has brought in legislation to further the separation between the province and our federal government, specifically the RCMP and the services that they provide in this province.

Often people say: well, the RCMP is not serving us well enough; that's why we need to consider this. As was mentioned during the press conference on Bill 4, the minister spoke specifically to some feedback from some Albertans in the Alberta Next Panel town halls that he participated in. I will say that the feedback that I heard over the summer: very few people wanted to talk about the RCMP. We had Better Together meetings all across the province, and I attended a number of those, and the number one thing most often voted for, that people wanted to talk about, was health care.

They wanted to talk about health care today in the province of Alberta and also if there was a move by the provincial government of Alberta under the current Premier to further separate and create more distance between the federal government and Alberta, how

that would impact the way that we engage with the Canada Health Act and the services that we receive in this province. Many, many people wanted to talk about health care. Many wanted to talk about pensions. A few after the meetings would sometimes discuss this specific issue.

One of the reasons why I think they wanted to talk about health care was their own personal experiences but also because we know, Mr. Speaker, when you look at – I often think about the social determinants of health, but the social determinants of justice are so aligned with that. One of the biggest things about whether or not you're likely to engage in the justice system in a negative way is around your income.

If the government wanted to seriously tackle income inequality in this province, they could show some leadership. It's been six years, almost seven, since anyone has gotten a raise in this province who receives minimum wage. They could actually increase the minimum wage. I know that they say, "Well, it's only about 5 per cent of Albertans who earn the minimum wage," but 40 per cent of those are parents, Mr. Speaker. Forty per cent of those are struggling to put food on the table for their children. This isn't just about them and their income; it's also about their children and their children's economic security.

I can't help but think about Logan, who is one of the constituents in my riding. He's 19. He's been volunteering a lot, helping me and our party. When I asked him what inspired him to get involved, he talked about how under the then Finance minister, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, it was the first time when his family had the opportunity to not stress out about bills in his whole life. His mom was able to feel secure in her housing, to put food on the table for their family. That child benefit went a long way to helping pull that family out of poverty. Because of that, he's going to the University of Alberta right now, in his second year, and is, I'm confident, going to have a very, very bright future.

If you actually want to look at things like the social determinants of justice, if you actually care about crime prevention – and something else members of this Assembly might not know is that I worked for a number of years for the Alberta Community Crime Prevention Association when I was in university. I was a religious studies student at the time and applied on a number of different STEP grant funded programs here in the capital city, and I was honoured to have the opportunity to work there. Then that carried over from a summer program into a part-time program while I was in university for a number of years after.

Again, when you look at crime prevention, one of the best things that you can do is make sure that you address income, employment, home security, education, and health care. So often I think about the folks who are relying on things like the day-shelter programs, that I'm glad to hear there's going to be some municipal investment but absolutely we need more provincial investment. Instead, we've seen so much of that eroded under the time that the current government has been in power. The UCP have closed a number of day-shelter programs through lack of funding to the municipalities, specifically Edmonton and Calgary. That's driven a lot of social disorder out of the core, where a lot of those programs were available, into surrounding neighbourhoods. It's had a negative impact, of course, on the folks who relied on those programs but also on other folks who live in our cities who just want to be able to come home feeling safe and confident in their community. The amount of disorder has gone up significantly.

When I think about some of the great services that have expanded around permanent supportive housing, they are very small and few and far between. Some of the folks who used to go to day programs are of course coming to visit friends at permanent supportive housing settings, and sometimes it goes really well and sometimes it doesn't go well. What we need is to have more opportunities for permanent supportive housing and for day programs so that people can have a positive way to contribute and engage and to spend time with their friends in ways that are healthy and safe for themselves and for the broader community.

If the government truly cared about safety, order, following the rule of law, they would find ways to address the social determinants of justice in a meaningful way. We've proposed a number of those, and we will continue to do that throughout the remainder of this session.

One that I touched on very briefly was education, and so did my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I want to say that when I was on the Edmonton public school board – I like data, so I spent a lot of time going through the data as it related to high school completion rates. We would often track students who, through their HLATs, standardized assessments that happened in their earlier years, were deemed being at risk of potentially not completing high school. For the ones that did complete high school, that was the group that I found most interesting. They were determined at a younger age to not be on a track to success, but they absolutely succeeded, if the goal is completing high school and being on a path to have higher income earning potential. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora has the floor.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much.

In terms of the social determinants of justice, to all members of this place – I've referred to it a number of times; perhaps they weren't hearing. This is about the social determinants of justice, specifically education as it relates to a successful society, a law-abiding society, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for giving me that opportunity to highlight this.

In terms of educational opportunities – and maybe people aren't interested in hearing about data and research. But these children who were seen as being unlikely to succeed in high school but actually completed their high school and were on a path to being higher income earners, being taxpaying citizens, being able to pay and contribute to society through independent means: one of the number one reasons why those kids said that they were able to finish high school and felt inspired to finish high school is because when they showed up at school, they knew somebody cared that they were there. [interjection] I know the Member for Morinville-St. Albert is not interested in hearing about this. I promise him that he certainly doesn't need to pay great attention, but if he wants to engage in this space, I welcome him to hear what I have to say and respond at the appropriate time.

So in terms of education . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, if you have discussions other than what's on the floor, there are places to have those, or you could at least keep it down.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Knowing that there was one adult at school who cared that they were there – sometimes it was their homeroom instructor, a custodian, an educational assistant, the person at the front desk, the administrative assistant – having enough adults to know the names of the kids in that school, to build meaningful relationships, and to say, "I'm really glad you're here. I missed you yesterday. I'm glad you're here today," because if you show up, your probability of success is so much higher.

How this relates to this legislation is that the government wants to wave around a bill and say, you know: if we create more opportunities to have division between us and the RCMP, things are going to be safer. Mr. Speaker, the research shows that if you invest in kids, their education, if you invest in health care, if you invest in housing, if you make sure people can earn a reasonable minimum wage, we are going to have a much better society, one where everyone is safer.

If we actually had a government – inshallah – that was investing in building schools, hiring staff, making sure that those young people had an opportunity to feel respected and included and that we were giving them our best, they would give us their best.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but it's now 6 o'clock, and the House is adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Published under the Authority of the Speaker
of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta