



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, December 1, 2025

Day 18

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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New Democrat: 38

Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 1, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, it being the first day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Nicole Gray. I invite all to participate in the official language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Today on December 1, Monday, the Legislative Assembly joins Albertans and communities world-wide in marking World Aids Day, 2025, a day to raise awareness of HIV and show solidarity with those living with and affected by it. Thanks to advances in health science HIV is now a manageable chronic condition when diagnosed and treated early. Reducing stigma around testing and living with HIV is key to preventing transmission and helping all Albertans thrive. We are honoured to welcome guests from HIV Edmonton, a local organization dedicated to showing individuals affected by HIV support, promoting education, and working toward a world free of stigma and AIDS-related deaths. Dr. Jennifer Njenga, Catherine Broomfield, Courage Gwirambira, Diovanni Pitts: I ask that you all rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members, it is my pleasure to introduce members of the public service joining us in the members' gallery today. They are participating in a full-day public service orientation program which explores the legislative, budgetary, and committee processes, enabling each participant to apply their knowledge to their role in

the public service. I had the pleasure of meeting with them this morning, and I would now ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Our anthem singer today is Nicole Gray, chief of staff in the office of the minister of primary and preventative health. Please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

School groups. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you 95 grade 6 students from A. Blair McPherson school and their teachers and staff. I ask them all to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce an exceptional young athlete and his dad in the gallery today, Amarion Henry, an 11-year-old basketball star from Chestermere, world renowned for his talent and leadership. He helped lead his team to Alberta's top U11 ranking and is also the published author of *Amarion's Routine for Success: Weekdays for a Student-Athlete*. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you two members of the constituency association in my riding of Edmonton-Strathcona. Irene McDermott has been an active volunteer in the Edmonton community for a really long time and has recently been elected president of the constituency association, and Hermina Joldersma is someone I've known for a million years in Calgary as a huge community leader. She's an Edmonton transplant now and newly elected to the board. I'm very grateful to both of them, and I hope that they stand and receive the usual warm regards of this Assembly.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Bernie Palsitt. Bernie and his wife, Allison, lost their 17-year-old daughter Anya in a tragic car accident in my constituency. Bernie met today with the minister of transportation and discussed steps going forward for safety. Bernie, could you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you Daljit Kaur, an outstanding volunteer. Joining her today are Mr. Rajeev Mittal and Mr. Naveen Verma, respected project management and IT professionals. The team tirelessly dedicates their time in support of Edmonton's vibrant music scene. I will request the team to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: I received a note that there's a school group here. The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to the Assembly 29 students from the lively Lymburn elementary school in exuberant Edmonton-McClung along with the talented teacher Jason Duike and two precious parent chaperones. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The first member's statement today belongs to the Member for Camrose.

Alberta in Canada

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is winning the battle. Just three years ago our province was in the midst of a tumultuous political storm that threatened Alberta's very economic and social fabric. At the time the federal NDP-Liberal coalition government in Ottawa, led by then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his friend NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, were doing all they could possibly do to choke off and ultimately destroy our province's energy and agriculture sectors.

Think about that. Literally the first and second-largest parts of our economy were under attack by our very own federal government. They were attempting to take control of multiple areas of provincial jurisdiction: health, education, energy, child care, you name it. Then they even went so far as to impose their net-zero power regulations on us that threatened the very integrity of our electricity grid that Albertans rely on for light and to keep our families safe on cold winter nights. We had a production cap on our very valuable strategic asset the Alberta oil sands and a damaging moratorium on the pipelines and oil tankers needed to take care of that oil, getting it around the world. It seemed as though the entire world was against us. Those were dark, dark times, times Albertans will never forget in our collective memory. But in those difficult circumstances Albertans came together, as we always do.

1:40

Together we raised our voices and worked relentlessly to fight and find a way to overcome this threat, and we started to win those fights. We fought and won in courts of law, we fought and won in courts of public opinion, and we fought against and continue to fight every person or initiative that seeks to destroy our economy and our future prosperity. Now is not the time to give up. Now is the time to double down and fight for both our province and our country because we Albertans indeed are the proudest of Canadians. We don't fight just for the sake of fighting. We don't look for conflict. There's an opportunity for freedom, peace, and prosperity with our fellow countrymen. That's all we've ever wanted: freedom, peace and prosperity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

World AIDS Day

Mr. Haji: Today is World AIDS Day, a day when we join with people across the world in remembering those we have lost to HIV and AIDS, a day when we recommit to supporting those living with HIV and a day when we renew our shared commitment to ending this pandemic. The theme for this year, Let Communities Lead, reflects the truth that we see every day. Meaningful progress happens when the people most affected by HIV are empowered to guide the response. While scientific advancements have transformed HIV from a fatal diagnosis to a manageable chronic condition, the work is far from over. Too many still face barriers to prevention, testing, treatment, and support. Too many face stigma, that discourages them from seeking care or living openly without fear of discrimination.

Here at home the rise of sexually transmitted infections and the recent outbreak of tuberculosis, an illness known to take advantage of weakened immune systems, including those affected by HIV and AIDS, are clear signals that our public health efforts must be accelerated, including fully funded HIV programs like PrEP. These

developments remind us how essential robust prevention programs, accessible testing, timely treatments, and sustained public health capacity truly are. We must ensure that every person, regardless of background, income, and geography, has access to the tools that keep individuals and communities healthy. This includes antiretroviral therapy, harm-reduction services, mental health support, culturally safe care, and education rooted in evidence, compassion, and respect.

Today we honour survivors, advocates, caregivers, and families who carry the memory of their loved ones lost too soon. On this world HIV and AIDS day we have the responsibility to recommit to our work ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Airdrie-East.

Alberta Heroes Fund

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize our government's continued commitment to honouring the men and women who step forward every single day to keep Albertans safe. These individuals, our first responders, are the backbone of public safety in this province. They are the ones who answer the call in moments of crisis, who step into uncertainties so that others may find security, and who demonstrate courage and professionalism under the most challenging of circumstances.

Since its creation the Alberta heroes fund has stood as a solemn promise that when a first responder loses their life in the line of duty, Alberta will be there for their families with meaningful support. This program is more than a policy; it's a reflection of our shared values. It represents compassion, respect, and a commitment to ensuring that the families of those who make the ultimate sacrifice are not left to face that loss alone. The one-time, tax-free \$100,000 benefit provided through this fund reflects our profound appreciation for the bravery and service of police officers, firefighters, paramedics, sheriffs, and correctional officers across our province. It's a way to honour their sacrifice and ensure their loved ones receive the support when they need it the most.

By introducing changes to the heroes fund through Bill 12, we're taking an important step to strengthen that promise. If passed, our government will double the annual funding limit from \$1.5 million to \$3 million, ensuring this fund remains strong, responsive, and prepared for the future. [A cellphone rang] This is a proactive enhancement, one that reflects careful stewardship to maintain a reliable program that Albertans can count on.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans trust these heroes with their lives, and they deserve to know that their government stands firmly behind them. This increase is another way to demonstrate that commitment. I am proud to support these enhancements to the Alberta heroes fund, and I encourage all members of this Assembly to join me in support for Alberta's fallen heroes and the families that they leave behind.

The Speaker: There's a local food bank that will look forward to a donation from the phone that rang.

Health Care System

Ms Pancholi: Is your life better today than it was six years ago? All Albertans should be asking themselves this question, because on every measure – affordability, public safety, education – the answer is no. It's definitely not better when it comes to health care.

In October 2022 the Premier famously told Albertans that she would fix health care in 90 days. It's over 1,100 days later, but every year since the UCP came to power, Alberta's ratio of doctors to patients has gone down. We've lost 14 doctors per 100,000 people each year. Every other province has recruited a higher percentage

of physicians to their province than Alberta has. It's why a million Albertans still don't have a family doctor. Wait times for surgeries continue to be wild, leaving Albertans suffering in pain for years. If you take your child to the ER, you'll be waiting longer than ever, and that's if there even is an ER open because that's the exception and not the rule these days in many rural communities.

Alberta's public health care system is crumbling because that was the UCP's goal all along. The Premier is on record saying that she believes Albertans should take more personal responsibility for their health care and get used to paying out of pocket for it. That's why the UCP have brought in American-style health care with Bill 11, to allow for a parallel private system for those who can afford it.

The countries the UCP cites as their model for it – Denmark, Spain, Germany, Portugal – all have universal pharmacare, more physicians per capita, sales taxes of over 25 per cent, oh, and longer wait times in the public system; 30 to 50 per cent higher. Why? Because dividing one line into two doesn't change the number of patients, the number of doctors, or the number of hours in a doctor's day. All it does do is change the order in which patients are treated, and ability to pay will now be the deciding factor.

The current state of public health care under the UCP is unacceptable, but they broke it on purpose to justify bringing in American-style private health care. That's a guarantee to Albertans that if your life isn't better now than it was six years ago, the UCP is going to make it a lot worse.

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

Christmas Reflections

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. December is the start of a very important month for Christians around the world, which is especially true here in Alberta. Yes, December 1 marks the unofficial start of the Christmas season, which is famously full of decorations, presents, and far too many sweets. However, for followers of Christ the meaning of Christmas goes far beyond Santa Claus or the gift of giving. This season holds a special place within their hearts as it serves as a beautiful approach to one of the most beautiful and important days of the year, which is, of course, December 25, the birth of Jesus Christ.

When Mary and Joseph finally reached Bethlehem, they were exhausted from their long journey, yet everywhere they turned they heard the same words: there is no room. Every door was closed to them, every space was taken, and Mary's time drew near. Worry pressed heavily on both of their hearts.

At last, someone offered them a small stable; a simple shelter meant for animals, not people. It was cold, quiet, but it was all they had, so in that humble place, surrounded by straw and the soft rustling of animals, Mary went into labour. There, in the most unexpected of settings, she brought Jesus into the world. On a night when they had nowhere to stay, hope was born. It was born quietly, humbly, and in a way that changed the world forever. It is that exact hope that continues to circulate the world today and reminds us that even in the most ordinary moments, God is still at work in your lives.

As the Christmas season begins, may the hope rise within us again, guiding our steps, strengthening our spirit, and illuminating our world in the same light that first shone on Bethlehem. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

1:50

Cancer Surgery Wait Times

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the last four weeks the four horsemen of the health care apocalypse have been boasting about health care. But the facts are that the UCP has spent the last six years tearing apart public health care to sell it off to friends and insiders, causing Albertans to suffer.

Mr. Speaker, last month was Movember, a time dedicated to men's health. Given some of the facial hair we saw in this Chamber, I think many participated in this annual event. The minister of hospitals and I both received e-mails from two men in one southern-Alberta family facing long wait times for prostate cancer surgery. One man's surgery was cancelled just days before it was scheduled, and the other faces a wait time of more than eight months. Under the UCP Alberta is the worst place in Canada for prostate cancer. Median wait times for these surgeries are just 50 days across the country, according to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, but Alberta's average wait time is 67 days, and in the south zone it's even worse. My constituents are waiting 200 days longer than the Canadian median.

The family I just spoke of were first told six months, then eight months, and then eight to 12 months' wait time. They are at their wits' end and are now forced to seek private care, which they can't afford. When will the government admit that they have let our health system deteriorate to the point where patients feel they have no choice but to pay? Or will the UCP admit that the plan all along was to bring in American-style health care? This government needs to do something about wait times for prostate cancer surgery because forcing Albertans to pay out of pocket is not a solution. Mr. Speaker, I would like to believe this government cares about my constituents, but I won't hold my breath mostly because, with this government in charge of health care, I don't want respiratory problems.

Oral Question Period

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

Parliamentary Secretaries' Allowances and Expenses

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no surprise to anyone that Albertans are in an affordability crisis. Everything just costs more. Albertans are now declaring personal bankruptcy at historically high levels. The last thing a single Albertan has called for when they're struggling to pay the bills is a pay raise for the UCP politicians. They hid that little nugget in a bill introduced last week. Why does the Premier want to give her nine parliamentary secretaries a raise, paid for by Albertans, in an affordability crisis?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, in Bill 12 we are addressing parliamentary secretary wages. First off, once the decision is made that it's a defensible decision, we have to do it in a way that's as transparent as possible. That's why it's in this legislation. When this decision came to us, we first did a crossjurisdictional analysis of other provinces that use parliamentary secretaries. I believe that this aligns us with the second lowest in the country and reflects their added responsibilities travelling around the province, representing all Albertans, not just their constituents.

Mr. Nenshi: So we do crossjurisdictional analysis when it's politicians, but we don't do it when it's minimum wage earners.

Soon the folks across the aisle will go home for Christmas, and maybe they'll meet some of these minimum wage earners when they go into stores. I hope they can justify this increase for themselves. Groceries are skyrocketing, but the only people the government looks after are themselves. Why has this government made paying themselves a higher priority than increasing the wages of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member opposite for the question. Minimum wage is something that we take very seriously and not something that we are prepared to just rush into. It's something the members opposite did to score political points while taking the private sector and private industry by shock. We are not going to raise the prices for the job creators in this province without talking to them first and making sure, if we were in that position, that we get it right. We will take no lessons from the members opposite on how to deal with minimum wage in Alberta.

Mr. Nenshi: And we, of course, will take no lectures from a government that pays itself before paying ordinary Albertans.

Now, last year, Mr. Speaker, the UCP caucus gave themselves a huge Christmas bonus. This year nine of them get more of a Christmas bonus. That means there are only five members opposite who are not getting an additional allowance from the taxpayer. That has got to sting. So a simple question: how did the Premier decide which five she's leaving out in the cold while she's giving nine pay raises?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, for four years while the NDP were in government, all of Alberta was left out in the cold because wages were depressed. In fact, they told people to leave the country. While I understand that the Leader of the Opposition has so much to say on this issue, he has very little experience on this issue. On this side of the House, when it comes to minimum wage and consulting with the private sector, we're going to make sure we get this right and listen because that's what we do on this side of the House. The opposition side, again: we will not be lectured by the NDP when it comes to supporting the private sector in this province.

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

Justice Minister's Remarks

Mr. Nenshi: It is sort of odd that the NDP opposition have far more private-sector experience than everyone on the other side. Speaking of people with little experience, let's talk about the Justice minister. He made some eye-popping references this weekend. First, on the government's campaign donations legislation he said, quote, the biggest one that you guys might remember is reopening the door for corporate donations, which I think changed the landscape to really good for us because, certainly, that is a phenomenal thing for Conservatives. Why did the Justice minister say out loud that he passed legislation to help only him?

The Speaker: The hon. Justice minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the Leader of the Opposition was not listening. We passed a bill last spring which allowed for corporate and union donations because what the NDP did prior to that was shut that down in favour of third-party advertisers, dark money coming in with no accountability to

the public, no transparency. Nobody knows where that money came from. We made changes to the Election Act to make sure that corporate and union donations were reported and available to the public.

Mr. Nenshi: I certainly appreciate the minister's transparency in saying that they did it for themselves.

The Justice minister was in a lot of news this weekend when the *Globe and Mail* detailed his even-closer-than-we-knew-before ties to his best friend, bro, and travel buddy Sam Mraiche. We also learned that the Premier, despite pretending she barely knows the guy in this House, has had multiple private meetings with Mr. Mraiche and that he is in fact part of her trusted inner circle. Simple question: did the Justice minister make the first introduction?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The irony is rich coming from the NDP leader when he sits with a number of members who have the same issue.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans expect transparency and accountability in every decision that we make here in this province, but don't take my word for it; let's trust the word of Judge Wyant, who reviewed more than two and a quarter million records and interviewed dozens of witnesses and concluded that no member of the government caucus or cabinet was involved in any wrongdoing whatsoever.

Mr. Nenshi: I'm not sure what the minister was getting at there, but I can clearly say that no members here travelled to hockey games to hang out with their bro Sam Mraiche.

The Justice minister also was part of another announcement on the weekend. His government said that they would take actions to further impede the work of independent prosecutors and police officers. In a free society you don't want government deciding who police officers should go after and who prosecutors should prosecute, as the Premier herself learned in the hardest way possible. Does the Justice minister believe in the independence of prosecutors and of police?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, the inexperience is showing clearly. The fact of the matter is that we do not interfere with individual prosecutions. The reality is this. Albertans have been saying loud and clear that they are sick and tired of the rampant crime and unchecked bail reform laws that Ottawa has passed. On this side of the Assembly we've said time and again that Alberta does not have any tolerance whatsoever for criminals in this province . . .

Ms Hoffman: Unless they're in cabinet.

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

Mr. Amery: . . . unlike members of the NDP, who have called repeatedly for defunding the police. We do not stand for it.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:59 p.m.

The third set of questions goes to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

2:00

Indigenous Consultations on West Coast Pipeline Proposal

Ms Pancholi: Getting a pipeline built is something that Alberta New Democrats know a lot about because we're the only ones who

actually got it done. Without TMX the UCP's bottom line would be ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's hear it from the one person who has the turn to do this.

You know what? A fresh 35. You actually didn't get a chance to start.

Ms Pancholi: Getting a pipeline built is something Alberta New Democrats know a lot about because we're the only ones who actually got it done. Without TMX the UCP's bottom line would be even worse than it is now, but building a pipeline to the northwest coast will require a significant level of Indigenous consultation. The Minister of Indigenous Relations acknowledged today on CBC that, quote, there is vocal opposition by coastal First Nations, but she's had a lot of success at moving people's opinions. It is absolutely essential that Indigenous consultation is done right for this project to succeed, so what success has the Minister of Indigenous Relations had that leads her to believe that she will be able to get coastal First Nations on board?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I've had several conversations with members of First Nations in British Columbia, and I can tell you that there is quiet support, but out of respect for these conversations I'm not going to name the First Nations that I've been speaking to. Of course, there is opposition, and it's understandable because these nations rely on the land and water for sustenance, but that's why it's really important to have more respectful conversations with transparency and authenticity. I will be heading out to B.C. again later this week to have further conversations.

Ms Pancholi: That support must be so quiet that only the minister can hear it. The head of B.C.'s coastal First Nations, Marilyn Slett, is not convinced. She said that she felt Alberta's government used backdoor methods that were disrespectful of consultation protocol and sets a dangerous precedent for future relationships. Poor consultation creates project uncertainty, which will drive away any private proponent. Can the Minister of Indigenous Relations ...

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Pancholi: ... given she's not off to a good start – can the government confirm which minister can be trusted with the responsibility for leading these important conversations?

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

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I have had a conversation with Chief Marilyn Slett, and the door is open for further conversations. But as I had mentioned, I am going to be travelling to B.C. to have additional conversations with a Tsimshian table later this week. There is quiet support, and there is encouragement to make sure that we keep the door open for these conversations. We know that Indigenous co-ownership is very important for this proposed pipeline, and, as I said, we have the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation also involved to help with this effort. These conversations are ongoing, and I'm very happy to state once again that there is support for this pipeline.

Ms Pancholi: The Minister of Indigenous Relations should be aware that having one conversation with the coastal First Nations does not count as Indigenous consultation. Government incompetence will not get Albertans the outcome we need. The path forward requires a genuine commitment to Indigenous consultation, not backroom methods which sideline Indigenous voices. The UCP is not off to a

good start and may not be able to win over the coastal First Nations. Is it the UCP's position that a pipeline can be built over the objections of coastal First Nations and without Indigenous consent?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I will state once again that I have had more than several conversations with B.C. First Nations. Again, I'll be travelling there next week to further these conversations as well. There is a legal duty to consult, and that consultation will happen once an application is submitted to the major projects office. Right now we are engaging with First Nations. We are getting to understand their concerns particularly around environmental concerns, and we have an expert panel of project specialists who will also help in terms of addressing those concerns that are brought forward.

Thank you.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, this government always points fingers and blames others for the corrupt care scandal, but the heart of the scandal lies at the political decision-making level. This weekend, thanks to the *Globe and Mail's* investigative reporting, Albertans learned that the Premier had meetings with Sam Mraiche and Jitendra Prasad in the summer of 2022, meetings that nobody knew about and were never disclosed. Why, while running for her party's leadership, did the Premier meet with the two individuals who would later be named in the corrupt care scandal? [interjections]

The Speaker: Opposition Leader, you had quite a few times to talk. Now we're going to hear from the hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, once again, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll point the member of the opposition once again to the Judge Wyant report, which clearly members of the opposition have not fully read. Judge Wyant completed an independent investigation and a review of AHS procurement practices, interviewed dozens of witnesses, and went through 2.25 million records. His thorough analysis of those records and his efforts in interviewing a number of witnesses concluded that all individuals on the government cabinet or caucus or political staffers did nothing wrong.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the report specifically says that people refused to be interviewed, people refused to answer questions, and he wasn't able to make final determinations. Now the *Globe and Mail* reports that the Premier had a lengthy Zoom call with Mr. Prasad, yet the Premier was not interviewed by Judge Wyant. There is nothing about these previously unknown meetings in the report, and it seems like his investigation may have never even known that this happened. Will the Premier tell Albertans exactly what was discussed in secret meetings with these folks who were found to be at the heart of the corrupt care scandal? Albertans deserve to know.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, Judge Wyant is one of the most distinguished judges in Manitoba, leading the provincial court for a number of years. His investigation and thorough review of all records indicated there was no evidence of improper conduct on the part of anyone in government. Here's what he did find. He found that procurement processes and contracts that were dealt with by AHS makers and some of their employees were done improperly, and that's exactly why this government and this Premier took immediate steps to ensure that that will never happen again.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Judge Wyant had a restrictive term of reference. This government tied his hands, and he did not have all the information needed. Now we know that the scandal stretches to recovery centre procurement. Now we know that the Auditor General's office is having an incredibly difficult time with their investigations and couldn't get information on the DynaLife scandal in a timely way. The only thing we can do to clear the air is to call a full public inquiry and find out why the Premier of our province was meeting with public servants who are now part of a scandal. We need a public inquiry.

Mr. Amery: Well, Mr. Speaker, you're only hearing half of the report from the hon. members opposite. The fact of the matter is that the Premier took immediate action to deal with directing the Deputy Minister of Executive Council to work with every single impacted ministry and deal with the 18 different Wyant report recommendations, implementing all of his recommendations as quickly as possible. That is the sign of leadership. The Premier took action following the Wyant report, a report that was comprehensive and found no wrongdoing on behalf of any government official.

The Speaker: The fourth set of questions, with no preamble after the supplementaries, goes to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Private Health Services Delivery

Ms Hoffman: The current government is so busy giving their own MLAs pay increases and creating ministers to manage ministers that they're missing the bigger picture. Albertans are struggling with an affordability crisis made worse by the ideology-at-all-costs attitude of the UCP. Insurance, electricity, rent, and medications for seniors on a fixed income all cost way more now under the UCP. And guess what they want you to pay for next? Your public health care. It's wrong. No one voted for an American-style privatization, so will the Premier keep the UCP's promise and pull Bill 11?

The Speaker: The hon. minister for preventative health care.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, we won't pull Bill 11. In fact, we're very proud of Bill 11 because it is actually going to give Albertans a choice for European-style health care that actually enables everyone to get surgeries and other services in a more timely fashion. Why wouldn't we want to do better? Unlike the members opposite, that spent their time while they were in government making things worse, we are actually focused on making things better. Our wait times are lower, we're having greater access, and we want even more.

Ms Hoffman: Given that doctor Braden Manns, an expert in health workforce planning, says that the UCP model will shift resources from public health care into private, meaning those who don't pay will be left to wait even longer, and given that under the UCP plan anaesthetists in Calgary already have to commit a certain number of hours to the private surgical centres in Calgary, this means that public, life-saving surgery wait times have been going up because there weren't enough staff in public hospitals when they were needed, so why is the minister of hospitals putting privatization above the care for all Albertans in a universally accessible system? Nobody wants American-style health care, minister.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we are making record investments to our public hospital system, and I'd remind the

members opposite that 106 of our hospitals continue to be public hospitals. We're going to build three additional bed towers, a net increase of over 1,000 acute care spaces, at three of our largest hospitals, two here in the Edmonton area and one in South Health Campus. We're also allocating additional money so that we can do 50,000 more surgeries over the next three years to reduce the wait times that the members opposite are highlighting, and rightly so. More hospital beds are coming, larger hospitals, more surgeries, all publicly funded, and we've recruited thousands of physicians and nurses.

Ms Hoffman: Given that what we actually need are more workers in public hospitals, Mr. Speaker, and given that doctors have been able to go fully private before, and that didn't bring new doctors to Alberta, and given that most Albertans are already struggling with an affordability crisis, and downloading their health care onto their credit cards is only going to make it worse, and given that the UCP has put their ideology ahead of good health care when they privatize lab services, and that cost Alberta taxpayers at least \$125 million, do any of the health ministers over there understand that an American-style scheme makes things far more expensive and way worse?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 1,000 net new RNs, LPNs, and health care aides work in our public system. The 640 increased physicians that we've recruited over the last year are billing publicly. The three hospital bed towers that we announced with the acute care action plan are public hospital bed towers. We're investing \$28 billion in growing into our public health care system. That will continue. No Albertan will have to pay for medically necessary care, but Albertans don't need to travel to other jurisdictions to meet Alberta surgeons. They're going to be able to do that right here.

Canada-Alberta MOU on Energy Collaboration and Commitments to Indigenous Peoples

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, building strong partnerships with Indigenous communities requires early, consistent, and culturally informed engagement. The recent Alberta-Canada MOU on major projects emphasizes collaboration and ownership as central to success. Can the Minister of Indigenous Relations update the House on how the government is ensuring Indigenous communities are engaged from the start for planning for projects, and can she explain how engagement is co-ordinated with Indigenous leaders in Alberta and British Columbia to ensure meaningful input?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the hon. member for this question. Mr. Speaker, signing this memorandum of understanding is a milestone in Alberta's Indigenous engagement, recognizing co-ownership and collaboration as key to the pipeline's success. From the start we have had early talks with communities in Alberta and B.C. I recently visited B.C. and will return later this week to continue discussions, as I've mentioned before in this House. We are working on building relationships based on trust and transparency, guided by Indigenous relations experts on the technical advisory committee. We are ensuring our engagement is meaningfully aligned . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, supporting long-term economic prosperity for Indigenous communities is essential for

Alberta's growth and reconciliation efforts. Given that the new MOU highlights pathways for Indigenous equity participation and co-ownership in major projects, creating opportunities for communities to benefit economically, can the Minister of Indigenous Relations explain how this agreement will strengthen pathways for economic participation, create jobs and training opportunities, and support Indigenous communities in realizing long-term prosperity across the province?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, this MOU affirms Indigenous communities as true partners and provides clear pathways to co-ownership and long-term economic prosperity. The Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation is a key tool that helps communities across the province and the country access opportunities for equity, participation, and economic benefits for major projects like the proposed pipeline. Since its inception in 2019 the AIOC has already provided nearly \$750 million in loan guarantees and will continue to do so.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, strong partnerships with Indigenous communities rely on co-ordination, technical guidance, and culturally informed approaches. Given that these measures ensure engagement is meaningful, reflects community priorities, and supports equitable participation in major projects and further given that this government has emphasized collaboration and ongoing dialogue to incorporate Indigenous perspectives from the onset, can the Minister of Indigenous Relations explain how these practices are being implemented across projects such as the proposed pipeline?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. This MOU ensures Indigenous communities are positioned as full partners in Alberta's energy future, and we are working to get this pipeline built by engaging early and building strong, collaborative relationships. This infrastructure will help us export more oil to Asian markets and to diversify our customer base. By understanding the concerns of Indigenous communities and incorporating their perspectives into our decisions, we can leverage Alberta's natural resources responsibly and position Canada as a global energy superpower.

Pension Fund Investment Management by AIMCo

Member Ellingson: It seems the government shielding themselves from litigation is commonplace with the UCP. Bill 12 protects AIMCo, a Crown corp, from litigation or settlements against it for the estimated \$1.3 billion in losses through their flawed investment decisions. AIMCo manages the pensions for hundreds of thousands of Albertans. To the minister: why are those hard-working Albertans being prevented from recovering those losses and protecting their pensions?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What Bill 12 will do are changes to the AIMCo Act, or the Alberta income management corporation act. We are going to prevent the taxpayer from being on the hook for any potential liabilities that happened from the VOLTS trading strategy, which ran from 2018 to 2020. First things first, no pensioner will be impacted. This will not change any benefits received from a defined benefit pension. No contributions will go up. The situation has been remedied, and we have sincere faith in AIMCo's management.

Member Ellingson: Given that the minister stated this action is necessary to protect the taxpayers from AIMCo's bad decisions but given that when funds for a defined benefit pension fall into a deficit position, the employer must make additional contributions to make up the deficit, will the minister state today that, despite Bill 12, the government will be making those additional contributions so that their employees' pension plans will have their gap filled from AIMCo's bad decisions? Yes or no?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we're always there as proud partners as the employer, the government of Alberta, on all defined benefit pension plans. I can assure this House that the plans that are in question are all fully funded, in some cases technically overfunded. They're in a great position, which brings us back to the point of how we cannot put this on the backs of Alberta taxpayers.

Member Ellingson: Given that in 2019 the UCP forced the teachers into placing their retirement fund under AIMCo management and given that just last year the minister overstepped all of the rules protecting AIMCo from government interference when he dismissed the board, the CEO, and senior management of AIMCo and given that this government took away the teachers' rights to negotiate their pensions, broke the law to take away teachers' rights to negotiate a union contract, is the minister shocked that teachers don't trust the UCP to protect their pensions?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, teachers, any Alberta public servants that have pensions that are managed by AIMCo should see from these actions that we completely have their backs. We are the proud partner as the employer. We make our contributions; they make theirs. We need to have faith in AIMCo as our choice investment manager on behalf of the province to bring all of those other great things like a striving financial sector in the province, all of those ancillary benefits that we talk about in this House all the time: diversifying the economy, bringing in new skilled jobs. There are so many benefits to having this.

Automobile Insurance Reform

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, at a meeting of the Premier's closest friends and supporters this weekend she faced the music. Her separatist friends disliked her "separate Alberta in a united Canada" talking point even more than I do, if that's possible. Then there's insurance. Her closest associates don't like this government's privately delivered no-fault insurance scheme. Why not? Does the Premier think that her supporters hate privately delivered no-fault because of the higher costs or because of the lower benefits?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the conversation continues. Whether it's at a party AGM or at large, we continue to hear from Albertans of all stripes, whether they're just Albertans at large generally concerned about the price of their automobile insurance or whether it's someone that's been impacted by a collision in the past and had frustrations with the current system or positive stories. All I can tell you is that we'll continue to seek affordable, sustainable insurance that thinks about Albertans first with the highest level of care in the country and the largest tort window.

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier's friends and close associates overwhelmingly rejected this government's

approach to auto insurance and given that no-fault insurance removes accountability and oversight from insurance companies and even the UCP's own supporters and base don't like private no-fault auto insurance, why won't this government revisit its auto insurance plan, that increases rates 15 per cent or more and that everyone in this province thinks is a really bad idea?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the truth is that people are frustrated with this current system. Every day I hear talk about affordability in this House. We are in a current tort-based system that is being subsidized by the good-driver rate cap. That is completely unsustainable. When we're talking about the potential for a public insurer or having private insurance companies, that is simply the delivery mechanism. When it comes to what we're doing, we're looking at taking the largest controllable cost out of the system, and it will lead to more affordable insurance down the line, January 21.

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister's legal costs, that he's often quoted at 20 per cent, don't show up in any public document on insurance costs – you know what does? Twenty per cent marketing costs. Given that those marketing costs include affiliate commissions from direct writers like Desjardins and TD Insurance, which are transferred profits protected by this UCP government, why didn't the government demand that insurers save money in their own operations rather than squeeze innocent victims while increasing insurance costs for all Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we engaged in a very extensive consultation with every player in this, whether it be the industries, med and rehab, injury lawyers, brokers. We've talked to everybody. We've taken all of their feedback, and they know where we're coming from. We're trying to get to a system that is more affordable and predictable for the long term. You know, it doesn't matter what is shown on this detailed list of receipts. If you're paying 40 to 50 per cent disbursements, it's coming out of your settlement, and insurance is paying for it.

Highway 40X Bypass

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, the Grande Prairie area is rich in resources. These resources are a major driver of Alberta's economy. It's very important that we get them to market safely. However, because there isn't a highway bypassing Grande Prairie to the south, large-scale industrial vehicles are forced to go directly through the city. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: please inform this House of how a highway 40X bypass will benefit Grande Prairie and its surrounding areas.

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

Mr. Dreesen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for this very important question. Obviously, the 40X bypass by Grande Prairie will be a four-lane, 15-kilometre divided highway connecting highways 40 and 43. Obviously, heavy truck traffic goes right through the middle of Grande Prairie currently, but this bypass will change that flow of heavy traffic, making it a lot safer for residents in Grande Prairie as well as the flow of goods in and around this very important part of the province. I'm happy to say that the detailed design is scheduled to be done by next year.

The Speaker: The member.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that large industrial vehicles like heavy-bed trucks, logging trucks, oil field equipment are often the major cause of traffic disruptions in Grande Prairie and further given that this heavy equipment puts extra wear and tear on city streets that are not designed for all this industrial traffic, to the same minister: how will the construction of the bypass positively impact the residents of Grande Prairie?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Dreesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Grande Prairie has double the provincial average of heavy commercial truck traffic. Today those trucks must actually go through the city of Grande Prairie, but the highway 40X bypass will take the traffic out of those neighbourhoods, reducing delays, minimizing wear on municipal roads, and keeping emergency routes clear. I'm happy to say that I'll be travelling up to Grande Prairie this weekend to discuss this plan and this design with not just the MLA but also residents in Grande Prairie.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the answer. Given that this bypass has been a long-standing promise to the residents of Grande Prairie and surrounding communities and further given that our government has recognized that this infrastructure project is critical to supporting economic growth and workforce mobility in the north, to the same minister: what specific milestones and important benchmarks are set to ensure that this project is completed?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Dreesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if everything goes according to plan, construction will begin by 2026. Phase 1 will include two new lanes, a CN Rail flyover, a roundabout at highway 40, and a new interchange at highway 43. This is a major priority project for this government. Obviously, the wealth of Alberta comes from rural Alberta, and we want to make sure that we have these important investments made in our road network to make sure that our goods can travel across the province as well as keep families safe in rural Alberta.

Private Health Services Delivery (continued)

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, after six years of UCP incompetence Albertans know they can't trust this government to get anything right when it comes to health care. Contrary to what the UCP says, there are fewer doctors per capita than before. Too many Albertans still can't find a family doctor, and now this government wants to make Albertans pay to see a doctor, get surgery, and more. Will this government admit that their years of cuts and chaos to health care were all part of a plan for an American-style health care system in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of preventative health services.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we are seeing more doctors coming to our province. We've gone from roughly about 10,600 when the members opposite were in government to now 12,769 doctors, not to mention the 76, almost 77 per cent increase in nurse practitioners, not to mention the fact that we

have 106 medical residents who are now working in rural, remote locations. [interjections]

The Speaker: Only the hon. member has the floor.

Member Hoyle: Given that the Premier has long pledged to overhaul Alberta's health care system, initially promising she would, quote, fix health care in 90 days, and given that bringing in privatization would only throw our crumbling health care system into further chaos and given that my constituents need family doctors, reduced wait times, and ERs that are open, not jam packed, will the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services explain why the government has done nothing to fix the health care problems they caused?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite should know that we have now 602 doctors in the province taking new patients. That is the most that we've ever seen across the province. I can quote from a letter from 13 doctors who have come together to say:

Many Alberta surgeons receive fewer than four operating-room days a month and want to do more for their patients but cannot. Some now travel to other provinces to provide private care, while others refer patients elsewhere or suggest seeking surgery abroad.

Why don't we have it right here in Alberta? We're going to.

Member Hoyle: Given that patients in the public system tend to have more complex needs, which require more time and resources to address, and given that having fewer doctors serving this population will cause wait times to increase, forcing people to pay for private care when they cannot get the health services they need, will the Premier and her cabinet commit today to actually support the public system so that under no circumstances will any Albertan be forced to pay to see their doctor or get the medical treatment they need and deserve?

2:30

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We stand by the public health guarantee that no Albertan will ever have to pay to see their family doctor, nor will they need to pay for essential services. That being said, let's look at the members opposite and their record. Cataract and hip replacement surgery wait times rose by 30 per cent while they were driving people away from this province. Coronary artery bypass: the wait time jumped, 14.9 weeks in 2014 to 2015 to 22 weeks in 2017-18. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Health Services in Rural Alberta

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent reopening of the hospital in Boyle as well as future planned projects serve as significant developments for communities in my constituency. Through these initiatives our government has given my constituency additional places for residents to access care and for health care professionals to find employment. To the Minister of Hospital and Surgical Health Services: what future investments are planned for hospitals within the Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock constituency, and what benefits will they have for residents and also all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is making significant investments in capital projects across the province to ensure Albertans receive care within clinically recommended timelines. In Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock we've allocated about \$16 million through the capital maintenance and renewal program to modernize and maintain Athabasca, Barrhead, and Westlock's health centres. Additionally, \$27 million has been invested in the medical device reprocessing program at Barrhead and Westlock to upgrade and expand these departments, supporting safe, reliable surgeries for residents in northern Alberta. As I've highlighted, we're adding incremental surgeries across Alberta, and that will include in rural health centres.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given these investments signify there is and will continue to be a need to increase health care resources within my riding and given that skilled health care professionals are essential for ensuring that high-quality care is delivered in rural communities and further given that recruiting these essential workers takes time, can the same minister provide specific details on what strategies are being used to maintain emergency care access in rural communities facing temporary physician shortages?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. To ensure rural communities maintain emergency care during temporary physician shortages, we launched the virtual emergency physician pilot in January 2025. It now operates in nine rural sites, including Barrhead and Westlock, keeping emergency departments open and patients receiving timely care. We're also expanding medical schools to train over 100 new doctors annually, including rural-focused programs at Northwestern Polytechnic and the U of L. Additionally, a \$16 million rural and remote family medicine resident bursary pilot will help underserved communities access health care professionals. [interjection]

The Speaker: Only the hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the opening of hospitals will bring an increase in skilled health care professionals to my riding and given that additional human resources must be supported by modern medical technology and adequate surgical equipment to ensure these professionals can deliver more procedures, can the same minister outline what investments are being made for equipment upgrades to ensure that the expanded workforce can effectively increase surgical capacity in rural communities such as those in the Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is investing over \$240 million over three years into the medical device reprocessing upgrade program to modernize hospital sterilization departments, including about \$60 million in Budget 2025 alone. Ten hospitals, including Barrhead health centre, will receive upgrades to improve surgical instrument safety, reduce delays, and support growing procedure demand. By strengthening sterilization infrastructure and providing modern equipment, these investments increase operating room efficiency, expand rural capacity, and ensure Albertans receive timely surgeries.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Electric Power Prices

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, electricity is not affordable for Alberta households, contrary to anything the UCP says. Alberta faces the highest electricity costs in any Canadian province, and Alberta's floating rates have spiked, which means big bills, much higher than Manitoba or Ontario, and Albertans paying far more than other Canadians for the same essential service. Given that Bill 8 risks deepening Alberta's affordability crisis by embedding more hidden costs that families in other provinces are largely shielded from, to the minister: how can the government justify exposing Albertans to further volatility and higher electricity costs under Bill 8?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's ironic coming from the NDP, who hid all the costs of electricity on the taxpayer. When they got rid of coal-fired power plants, they took great pleasure in announcing it from the rooftops, not telling Albertans that they had to pay \$2 billion to make that transition happen, which Albertans are still paying for through their taxes at nearly \$100 million a year. We are not doing that. We are protecting Albertans by making sure that those who join our system pay their fair share. That's protecting Albertans.

Ms Sweet: Given that the government has paid a billion dollars in lawsuits over the last two years and given that the UCP government shifted power away from the Alberta Utilities Commission into the minister's office and given this raises concerns about accountability for consumers and businesses and given that independent regulators should ensure decisions are made transparently and free from political interference but given that Bill 8 means Alberta risks having a system where political priorities override consumer protection, to the minister: how will the government assure Alberta that rate setting and oversight won't become politicized with hidden costs and risk quietly passed on to families without transparency that an arm's-length regulator . . .

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad the member opposite brought up the lawsuits that their government ensued. That's what we're having to settle because they brought it about by breaking their own laws. We're very proud that our independent regulators have full authority to negotiate with the Utilities Consumer Advocate on behalf of Albertans to set those rates for two years, removing that volatility. The rate of last resort is to notify Albertans that they know which rate they're on, and they have over 100 different private-delivered choices to get a lower rate. We're proud of our private system.

Ms Sweet: Given that 37 cents per kilowatt hour versus 8 cents in other provinces is nothing to be comparable to or be proud of and given that Bill 8 will make life more expensive for Albertans and given it embeds transmission loss directly into the bill and allows for possibly a new charge without transparency and given these risks deepen the affordability crisis by layering hidden costs into bills that families cannot afford, to the minister: how can the government justify more hidden costs to bills for families when they're already struggling with the highest utility costs in the country?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to be part of a government that is making our bills more transparent because we

are not doing what the NDP did where they hid those costs to the taxpayer. That's where we're paying the \$2 billion that they wasted on coal. That's where every year, because they negotiated such bad contracts with renewable energy, if the price is as low as it is today, taxpayers have to pay those same companies to make them whole. That's where those costs are. They also paid it in their transmission costs. We are doing the work protecting Albertans, bringing them a better . . .

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

Private Health Services Delivery (continued)

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, the Premier claimed during her leadership that she will fix health care in 90 days. They will say whatever it takes to win power, because wait times aren't getting any better. One of my constituents had to wait for a week at the Peter Lougheed hospital until space became available for him at the Foothills hospital for his surgery. He is surely not alone. What is the minister's answer to Albertans who are waiting in pain for medically necessary surgeries beside American-style, two-tiered health care?

The Speaker: The minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite highlights important issues, and that's why we are increasing our public surgical program. We did a record 318,000 surgeries last year. We're already on track to surpass that record this year. On top of that, we're adding 50,000 more surgeries over the next three years to reduce wait times like the ones that the member opposite highlighted. Another thing that's going to improve hospital flow: the bed tower that we're building in the Calgary area. It'll be approximately 400 acute-care beds, which will enable all hospitals to increase flow in the Calgary area.

2:40

Mr. Sabir: Given that health care privatization has failed before and given that their privatized lab experiment was an utter disaster and given that this failed experiment cost Albertans at least \$125 million, what does the minister have to say to all those Albertans whose health outcomes were impacted negatively by the UCP's failed lab privatization?

Mr. Jones: The transition of community lab services was not executed to the standards that Albertans expect, and I apologize for the service disruptions and the impacts on patients. I am pleased to share that this minister of health and this Premier reversed that transition, and over the seven months after the community lab service wait times went back down to more appropriate levels and the service experience has improved dramatically. Mr. Speaker, we will continue to invest in our lab services so Albertans get the care they need when and where they need it.

Mr. Sabir: Given that after failing to learn from their failed lab privatization experiment, the UCP is pushing ahead with their Bill 11 American-style health care privatization and given that health privatization has a documented history of failure and poor health outcomes for regular people, I have a simple question for any of the health ministers. When will this government understand that health care is a right and a service and not a business opportunity for their friends and insiders?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of preventative health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Regardless of how many times they say it, it's not going to be what they say it's going to be; it's actually going to be European-style health care. It's going to be quality health care. In fact, the Montreal Economic Institute said: "It is well-documented that in countries where doctors have the option of practising in both the public and the private sectors, patients have better access . . . The Alberta government's draft proposal is welcome news for patients who have struggled to get treatment within the government monopoly system." No longer will they struggle. We are going to take them on track to get better health care.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue with the daily Routine.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three petitions to present today, all on the wildlife land management theme. The first one is a petition provided by the Alberta Wilderness Association and Exposed Wildlife Conservancy asking the Minister of Forestry and Parks to rescind the cougar quotas, the killing problem grizzly bears program, the quotas on fur-bearing animals, and expanding the species under ministry special licences. That is signed by 650 Albertans.

The second petition is one from the West Country Sustainability Coalition asking the Legislative Assembly to introduce legislation to prohibit any new coal exploration or development on the eastern slopes of Alberta. That is signed by 1,016 Albertans.

Then the last one, Mr. Speaker, is a petition to protect Alberta's wild/feral horses. The two requests in this petition: one is to establish a moratorium on wild/feral horse captures and removals until an independent wild horse management council can be created, and to recognize wild/feral horses as wildlife. That petition is signed by 15,000 Albertans.

The Speaker: Okay. Those were approved by legislative counsel, were they?

Dr. Elmeligi: Yes, Mr. Speaker. They've all been approved.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. minister of preventative health care.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of an *Edmonton Journal* article written by a group of 13 physicians and surgeons, including Dr. Chad Ball, editor in chief of the *Canadian Journal of Surgery*, which outlines their support for the reforms that we're taking in Bill 11, particularly dual practice.

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

Ms Renaud: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is an article from the *Medicine Hat News* entitled Lawyer Blasts Rollout of AISH Changes in Omnibus Bill by Zoe Mason. The second is a legal brief called Nothing About Us Without Us: A Legal Challenge Against ADAP & CDB Claw Back and the Erosion of Disability Rights in Alberta.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the five requisite copies of a *National Post* article titled Alberta's Jordan Peterson Law is Sorely Needed Across Canada.

The Speaker: Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the five requisite documents, sent to me by Chris Stahmer, a constituent, of an opinion piece written by Robert Mayall in the *Calgary Herald* who talks about health care privatization failures waiting to happen.

The Speaker: Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you. Five copies of the November 29 *Calgary Herald* newspaper article about GlobalFest International Fireworks Festival and the financial challenges the festival is having due to poor ticket sales, competition with other festivals, and rainy weather in 2025.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you. I rise to table three e-mails from Grant in Calgary-South East, Elisabeth in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and Ayslinn in Drumheller-Stettler. All three of these constituents across the province are urging their MLAs to not support Bill 9.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Horner, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Sustainable Fiscal Planning and Reporting Act government of Alberta 2025-26 Second Quarter Fiscal Update and Economic Statement.

The Speaker: We have come to the part of the day that we call points of order. The point of order at 2:02 was withdrawn, which leaves us the point of order at 1:59 p.m. by the Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time the Minister of Justice was speaking and was in the process of saying that the government, quote, has no tolerance for criminals. Unquote. At that same moment, unfortunately, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora shouted from a sedentary position, "Unless they're in cabinet."

I need not remind the Speaker that the member was out of order just last Thursday, making accusations of corruption from a sedentary position, finishing sentences. The same occurred in March 2025 on page 2,615 of *Hansard*, to which the Speaker said:

I appreciate her comments with respect to members of the government and, particularly, former Speakers or otherwise attempting to interrupt or intervene in the debate. I speak with a certain level of experience that on occasion those attempts have risen to the level of a point of order.

Of course, on May 1, 2025, in *Hansard* on page 3,135 the Speaker said, "We don't get to accuse members of breaking the law." Mr. Speaker, there is evidence in *Hansard* going back to 1978 where accusing fellow members of criminality is out of order. We understand that this happens in debate at times; the appropriate thing at this moment is for the member to apologize and withdraw,

and we can move forward happily knowing that debate sometimes gets hot.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the Speaker knows well, in this place heckles and their timing have had significant impact in Speakers' rulings, particularly given the difference between "corruption" and "cover-up" and those items being matters of debate in this Chamber when we are talking about the government, when we are talking about collective, but yes, often crossing into point of order territory if speaking about an individual member. Exactly what was being said at the time is significantly important in determining whether something was unparliamentary or not.

2:50

Unfortunately, without the benefit of the Blues – I did not hear that heckle, so I don't know what exactly was being said at the time. I hope that with the Blues and your ruling you might be able to help us uncover that, but I will reiterate for this Chamber that I think it's incredibly important that context does matter.

The Speaker: Well, I do have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. minister was saying, "On this side of the Assembly we've said time and again that Alberta does not have any tolerance whatsoever for criminals in this province," and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is then quoted as saying, "Unless they're in cabinet."

I think you know what to do.

Ms Hoffman: I'm happy to apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: This matter is concluded.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 203

Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act

[Debate adjourned November 24]

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

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I was growing up in my town of Faridkot, there was a little library in our community. It had maybe 10 chairs, a few fans that worked on their own schedule, and a single bulb at the entrance that flickered like it was debating whether to retire early. People from the neighbourhood, students specifically, gathered there, hoping to study. Some days the electricity came; some days it didn't. On those nights without power we'd gather outside, unable to study and forced to play as kids in darkness. We didn't realize that what limited our capacity to study was the grid.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

When I came here and went back to visit my hometown, the government had finally upgraded the line feeding our neighbourhood. Suddenly the fans worked, the lights were on, the library stayed open late, and I watched something incredible happening there. Kids started scoring high marks, small shops brought refrigerators and started selling milk and cold drinks, and a tailor, a friend of mine, invested in his first electric sewing machine.

It was proof – plain, lived, undeniable proof – that electricity doesn't just brighten rooms; it brightens futures.

That childhood experience still lives with me, and whenever somebody is talking about electricity, about the grid, and about powering the future, I always remember how we lived back then. It taught me that when a government invests in reliable power, it is not just delivering watts. It is delivering opportunity. It is delivering dignity and a pathway to a better-powered future.

Today Alberta is facing a similar situation. Of course, our situation is not as bad as my town had in those days, but when we compare it to a bigger picture, when we look at it at a bird's-eye, things and situations are very similar. When we strengthen our grid, investments arrive, industries grow, and jobs multiply like those lit-up shop signs in my hometown if we go and see that market right now. Electricity transformed my little town's economy. Imagine what it can do for a province as ambitious as Alberta.

Madam Speaker, before I move any further, let's go back in time. In the 1980s and in the 1990s Alberta had regulated power generation. Residential and industrial prices in the province increased somewhat above the average to the rest of Canada. Fast-forward to 2001. The Alberta government deregulated electricity generation with the promise that prices would be lower and less volatile.

Madam Speaker, the opposite happened. Alberta is consistently home to the highest electricity prices in Canada. Between 2001 and 2014 Alberta's electricity consumer price index increased by an average of 1.8 per cent per year, double the difference prior to deregulation. This means that since 2001 Alberta electricity consumers, including residential, industrial, commercial, and farm electricity users, have paid about \$24 billion – billion with a "b" – more for their electricity than if they had paid under the same prices as other Canadians on average. Alberta residential consumers accounted for about \$7 billion of that total. That is an average of about \$690 per year per household for 24 years. Albertans continue to pay one of the highest electricity prices in Canada, and there are additional surcharges on top of those electricity bills.

Affordability is crushing Albertans. Utility bills are out of the roof, and life is becoming hard every day. When electricity goes up, inflation goes up, and when inflation goes up, it doesn't just stay to electricity. It impacts the prices of everyday things that Albertans buy and rely on.

I have met various constituents who will come to me to tell how difficult their life has become in the past six years. They tell me that their electricity bills have doubled. They tell me that other charges on top of the regular bill don't even let pennies stay in their pockets. Madam Speaker, they question me: how can we lower the bills? They question me: what steps could be taken to make their lives more affordable? We must address their affordability, we must put money back in their pockets, and we must restore transparency.

We don't need to take small steps. We need to take a leap, a leap to power the future. Other jurisdictions are already doing it. For an ambitious province like ours, we need ambitious plans. We need plans that will not only transform our economy; we need plans that will turbo boost our economy. If other jurisdictions like the United States, Australia, and Europe can do it, why can't we do it? What is stopping us from being the powerhouse of the future economy?

Madam Speaker, the only thing holding us back is political will. We need a political will that acts like a magnet, that attracts science, not conspiracy theories, that attracts unity, not separatist rhetoric, that attracts better vision, not political theatre. I'm glad that we have a political will on this side of the House that has experience, expertise, and integrity. I specifically want to thank the Member for

Calgary-Glenmore, who has put forward this well-thought, well-researched, and well-consulted bill that will attract more investment to our province, lower the bills, and make our province a more affordable place for all Albertans.

This bill does these three things in three ways, Madam Speaker. It requires co-ordinated planning for energy storage in our province and enables a new purchasing model called energy storage as a service. It allows businesses and communities to use energy storage with a service agreement instead of buying their own equipment. It will require the AESO to investigate the implementation of energy storage as a service to enable regulated and nonregulated entities in the electricity sector to exchange services. Not only will it help to relieve transmission congestion; it will lower the cost for customers who pay for transmissions. The AESO will be required to choose the most cost-effective solutions, whether it be nonwire solutions or a wire infrastructure.

The second thing that this bill does is create fair market conditions for investment in energy storage. Government Bill 22 defines energy storage as a unique resource. Bill 203 builds on this legal definition and states that energy storage consists of a unique class of technologies and does not utilize the transmission system the same way as load or generation and therefore requires unique consideration in the current AESO design process. Bill 203 will require the government to create fair market conditions for storage and direct the AESO to “determine transmission system connection cost allocation and transmission reinforcement payments,” TRPs, “that are specific to energy storage resources.” While the AESO is starting to address some of these inappropriate costs for energy storage, there are other details that must still be addressed in the upcoming review process.

3:00

Bill 203 also requires that AESO is developing new storage-specific charges and fees in the review, recognizing the full value and benefits that storage will provide to the grid. Madam Speaker, there are benefits to the storage as well. There are three main benefits. The first one is storing low-cost energy during low-demand times and releasing during high-demand times, improved grid reliability, and storage has both financial and environmental benefits, as outlined in section 3(2)(a) of the bill.

Bill 203 requires accountability and co-ordination among other ministries, whether that be Technology and Innovation or Energy and Minerals. This bill requires the co-ordinated approach between the ministries. That’s the main purpose of this bill. It requires co-ordination, and that will improve better outcomes, better services, and a more affordable Alberta for all Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, it’s hard to forget that feeling on the evening of January 13, 2024 – I think many of us remember that – when phones across Alberta lit up with that piercing emergency alert tone, telling families, telling Albertans to immediately turn down the lights, to turn down the heat, to brace for possible rotating outages because our grid was on the edge. It was minus 30, minus 40 degrees in some communities. Imagine parents putting their kids to bed in extra blankets just in case the power went out, seniors in apartments asking themselves if the heat is going to go off. It was a scary time for some. It was, without question, a precarious situation, but it was also a stark warning for Albertans. That specific event on January 13, 2024, tells us that this government has managed our electricity system poorly and is leaving families exposed and investors uncertain.

It’s exactly why Bill 203, the Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act, is not just welcome; it’s overdue. I want to thank and recognize my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore for introducing it. As my colleague has already mentioned, Madam Speaker, Albertans are paying some of the highest and most volatile electricity prices in the country. Over just one year, from January 2023 to January 2024, Alberta’s electricity prices jumped by nearly 120 per cent – think about that – far outpacing the national average. We’ve seen regulated rates over 18, 20, even 25 cents per kilowatt hour at times. Really, it’s the difference between an affordable bill and a panic-inducing one for so many families when Albertans are already in the middle of an affordability crisis. I hear from families and folks in my constituency that tell me that they try to save money whenever they can, that some of them, particularly seniors and those on fixed incomes, dread opening their monthly energy bill.

Madam Speaker, at the same time, investors see that same instability, not just in prices but in policy. How can we forget that this government slammed the brakes on renewable energy in 2023 with a seven-month moratorium? To put it in context, during that time we were a leader in renewable energy. There was so much potential. But because of this government’s renewable energy moratorium they chilled global investment entirely. Independent analysis shows that 118 projects were affected, representing at least \$33 billion in investment and over 24,000 jobs, not to mention hundreds of millions of dollars in municipal tax and lease revenues across Alberta that were lost. And you ask: what for? All of that was sacrificed to satisfy their ideology, and Alberta is still trying to recover its reputation.

Madam Speaker, Bill 203 is finally treating energy storage as the strategic asset it is. Right now Alberta has roughly 271 megawatts of operational energy storage capacity, almost all of it batteries, with more on the way. These projects helped keep the lights and heat on during the January 2024 grid alerts, stepping in to balance a system under severe strain. Energy storage does something simple, but it’s really quite powerful and needed. It soaks up low-cost electricity when demand is low or when wind and solar are plentiful and then releases that power when the system is tight and prices are high. That means there are fewer emergencies, more predictable and smoother prices, less waste, and it also means that all types of generation – gas, renewables, and even imports – can be used more efficiently, more intelligently.

Madam Speaker, the rest of the world has already figured this out. Ontario, for example, is on track to reach nearly 3,000 megawatts of installed storage by 2028, building on major projects like the 250-megawatt Oneida battery that is already in commercial operation. California has grown from about 770 megawatts of battery storage in 2019 to more than 10,000 megawatts by 2024, increasing capacity more than 10-fold in just five years. Texas, with a market somewhat similar to ours, has installed around 6,200 megawatts of battery storage in the last five years and is projected to approach or exceed 10 to 14 gigawatts on its system in the near term. Internationally, at COP 29 more than 65 countries and dozens of utilities committed to a global goal of deploying 1,500 gigawatts of energy storage by 2030, roughly six times the installed capacity of 2022.

What I’m trying to illustrate through those examples, Madam Speaker, is that the world is racing ahead and Alberta, a province that used to lead in renewables and storage growth, is now playing catch-up because this government chose chaos and moratoriums over planning and certainty. But members on the other side of the House have an opportunity now to make things right, or at least take a step to making things right, and Bill 203 is going to support

us in doing that by ensuring that Alberta is re-entering the race with a plan.

I also want to mention that this concept of energy storage, you know, is not new. Government Bill 22 passed in 2022 gave us the first legal definition of energy storage and acknowledged that it doesn't behave exactly like traditional generation or load, but Bill 22 unfortunately stopped at definition. It did not fix the cost structure. It did not require proper planning. It did not resolve the double-charging problem that punishes storage projects. It really didn't do much, but it was a start. Bill 203 takes it a step further and addresses implementation, and it picks up where Bill 22 left off.

3:10

Now, I want to spend the next few moments talking about what Bill 203 will do. First, it will require co-ordinated planning for energy storage and directs AESO, or the Alberta Electric System Operator, to consider energy storage as a service as part of a larger tool box. In practical terms energy storage as a service, or ESAAS, allows communities, businesses, or even regulated utilities to effectively subscribe to storage instead of owning the hardware outright. The provider owns and operates the batteries, and users pay for the service and the benefits, like reduced transmission, congestion, or better local reliability. Right now legacy rules in Alberta make these kinds of arrangements extremely difficult even when they are cheaper and smarter than building another long transmission line. Bill 203 tells AESO and the Alberta Utilities Commission: when you plan the system, you must look at the nonwire solutions, like storage, demand management, microgrids, and distributed resources, and choose them when they are the lowest cost way to maintain reliability.

Madam Speaker, there's so much more that we can say about this bill, but I think it is the right path forward, and I would encourage all to vote in favour of Bill 203. Thank you.

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

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Five months ago the people of Edmonton-Ellerslie gave me the biggest honour of my life. They trusted a brand new MLA to fight for them. I haven't forgotten a single doorstep conversation. One promise came over and over: fix the power bills, and make sure the lights stay on. The promise is why I'm standing here today, five months in already, demanding action on Bill 203.

Last month I was grabbing groceries at a store in Ellerslie when a mom named Nicole spotted me. She marched straight over, shopping cart and all, and said: "Gurtej, you knocked on my door in October. You told me that you will work hard to lower my utility bills. When are you going to keep those promises?" I did not have good answer that day. I do now. The answer is Bill 203.

Every Albertan remembers January 13, 2024. Phones screamed. The grid was minutes from a rolling blackout. It was minus 43. Seniors were terrified. Parents unplugged fridges. Hospitals went to the backup generators. My neighbour's kid uses a breathing machine at night. The family did not sleep. Energy storage was one of the only reasons the lights stayed on, but counting on a few batteries and prayer is not a plan. It is negligence.

And the bills. Albertans pay the highest electricity price in Canada. Seniors in Ellerslie call my office in tears because they have to choose between groceries and the light bills. Small businesses tell me that they are scared to turn the lights on after 5 p.m. because the rates are robbery. That's not bad luck; that's bad government.

Let's talk about the UCP's track record. In 2023 they panicked and slapped a seven-month freeze on wind and solar; \$33 billion in investment vanished, 24,000 jobs a year gone, 118 projects dead. Municipalities budgeted over \$70 million in tax revenue this year for renewable projects. Guess what? The money never showed up. Rural communities, rural councils are cutting recreational centres and road repairs because the UCP decided ideology matters more than paycheques.

Investors took one look at the Alberta scales and ran to Texas. Texas added 6,500 megawatts of battery storage last year alone. They now sit at 14,000 megawatts total. California went from 770 megawatts in 2019 to almost 17,000 today. Ontario just broke ground on 3,000 megawatts of new storage last month. Alberta? We are limping along at 271 megawatts. That's not a plan; that's a punchline.

The UCP's own consultant wrote a brutal report saying that their restructured energy market is scaring capital away. They are still fiddling with rules while the grid suffers. Energy storage still gets charged twice; once when it's pulling power into the charge, again when it pushes power out to save the grid. Pay twice to play once. Who in their right mind invests under these rules? Nobody.

Bill 203 ends this nonsense, plain and simple. First, it forces real planning. Three ministries – Affordability and Utilities, Technology and Innovation, Energy and Minerals – have to sit down together and write an actual road map for energy storage. No more silos, no more finger pointing; a real plan with a real timeline and real accountability.

Second, it kills the double charging. The UCP themselves called energy storage a unique source in their own Bill 22 back in 2022. Great words; zero action. Bill 203 turns those words into law. AESO, the Alberta Electric System Operator, has to create fair charges that fit storage, not punish it. When batteries charge, they are not the same as a factory. When they discharge, they are not the same as a gas plant. Treat them like the unique tool they are.

Third, it tells AESO to pick the cheapest solution. If a battery or microgrid can solve congestion cheaper than stringing new wires across the prairies, they have to choose the battery. That's not ideology. That's math. The math says that nonwired solutions save ratepayers hundreds of millions.

Fourth, it opens the door to energy storage as service. Communities, businesses, and co-ops can use big batteries without having to own them. The providers own the equipment; you just pay for the service. It's like renting a furnace instead of building a power plant in your backyard. That's already working everywhere else. Alberta is late to the party because of the legacy red tape. Bill 203 cuts that tape.

Fifth, it demands Indigenous consultation from day one. Any new storage project has to sit down early and often with the First Nation and Métis communities, because new projects should mean jobs and revenue sharing, not court battles.

Sixth, it forces the government to get serious about long-duration storage and a made-in-Alberta battery supply chain. We have lithium sitting in old oil field brines. Companies like E3 Lithium in Calgary are ready to pull it out. We have the engineers, the welders, the electricians. All we need is a government that stops slashing Alberta's innovation budget by \$53 million and starts investing in the next economy instead of paying for the last one.

3:20

Madam Speaker, the world is moving at rapid speed. At COP 29 two weeks ago countries pledged to install 1,500 gigawatts of energy storage by 2030. That's six times what exists today. China wants to match the entire current global total by 2027. The

Americans threw half a billion dollars at long-duration research. Texas and California are building so fast, they can't pour concrete quick enough. Alberta? We are still arguing about whether batteries are baseload enough. We are living in the middle of the fourth Industrial Revolution. AI data centres are coming. Global demand for clean, reliable, affordable power is exploding. Alberta has the land, the grid, the workers, and the resources to dominate, or we can keep listening to the same tired voices who think 2005 is coming back.

Bill 203 isn't radical. It is realistic. It builds on the UCP's own Bill 22 instead of ripping it up. It gives investors the certainty that they are ever begging for. It gives families the reliable power they are already paying for. Albertans have waited long enough. I stand with my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore, with every NDP member.

Thank you.

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

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today in strong support of Bill 203. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Glenmore for the Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act. Bill 203 is exactly what Alberta needs. It is practical legislation grounded in what engineers, market analysts, and system operators have shown us time and time again: energy storage is a proven instrument for keeping the lights on, lowering costs for families, and unlocking the kinds of investments to create long-term, high-quality jobs for Albertans. This is why my colleagues across from us need to listen to the plan brought forward by the New Democrats. Bill 203 is a road map for affordability, for reliability, and, most importantly, to attract investments into our province.

Madam Speaker, in January 2024 we heard that this province came dangerously close to a complete blackout. As it turns out, it was battery-based storage, modest in scale but crucial, that helped stop the failure from becoming catastrophic. It is absolutely irresponsible and reckless for this government not to plan. It is foolish to continue this nonsense of relying on luck. It's not working.

We need a policy that recognizes storage for what it is, a unique system that is a resource that can act like a reserve, a capacity asset, and a price-stabilizing broker all in one. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory, one of the world's leading independent technical bodies, has documented exactly this rule: storage supplies, operating reserve, increase capacity value. It smooths variability when we pair it with renewables like wind and solar. This improves system reliability. It's plain. It's simple. We need reliability, and it is common sense to diversify Alberta's beautiful economy and create simple legislation that outlines it and stabilizes our investments.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, it's about costs. Albertans are asking why their electricity bills keep bouncing up and down, and the answer lies in how we produce and how we move and price our electricity. Storage lets us buy or capture low-cost energy at off-peak hours and then release it at peak demand hours. Economists and market modellers have shown that well-designed storage deployment reduces peak prices, mitigates the price spikes, and lowers wholesale costs over time.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, work by leading energy economists has demonstrated how storage arbitrage, meaning the strategy of buying electricity when prices are low and storing for use when prices are high – all of this increases the effective value of renewable generation and reduces net system costs when markets and compensation mechanisms are set up properly. Bill

203 is designed to do exactly that: enable the market to capture those value streams.

It is obvious to our team and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, who brought this bill forward, that the government must review this. In our collective over a century of work in this field we have observed and heard from experts that there are real, fixable regulatory barriers that for today's reality make storage less economic than it actually should be. For years energy storage assets were charged transmission fees both when they were charged and again when they discharged, once as a load and then once as a generator, so a double penalty that makes investment very unattractive. It's not good policy, and it's a legacy distortion.

In the United States of America the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and many technical regulatory reviews across the world have recommended clarifying the rules so storage can participate as a dual asset without being penalized twice. The Biden administration allocated half a billion dollars in research to advance long-duration energy storage, a strategic investment into energy and minerals and industries. Alberta has to catch up.

Bill 203 directs Alberta's system operator and regulators to correct exactly these market and fee anomalies so storage can compete fairly. That is a targeted, evidence-based fix. The beauty of this bill is that it's not a giveaway, not a subsidy; it is simply creating a level playing field. That's what we're creating.

Madam Speaker, this bill is an investment magnet. Private investors, project developers, and battery manufacturers, to firms that produce critical minerals and components: they are the future, and it is dependent upon the clarity of our procurement, dependent on the clarity of our market rules, of our grid modernization. Obviously, the investment will follow once we are clear about these. When governments give clear, predictable signals about procurement, market rules, and grid modernization, investment follows. That is how you build high-volume manufacturing and long-term operation jobs in communities across our beautiful province. Peer-reviewed research on storage, business models, and on green industrial strategies shows over and over again that properly structured policies spur domestic-creation jobs and supply chain development. This is precisely the outcomes that our province desperately needs.

Bill 203 is written to ensure that local First Nations and Métis communities can participate. Modern energy projects must be done with communities, not to them. Nothing about us without us. Bill 203 requires early, transparent consultations so that Indigenous businesses and nations can participate in ownership, supply contracts, and shared benefits. Upholding FPIC, free, prior, and informed consent, in good faith is nothing without standards laid out by the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples. It is good public policy and, simply, just good politics to operate in good faith. It helps projects go up faster with fewer disputes and more broad-based benefits.

Some will claim that we don't need a plan – that is irresponsible – that the market alone can force delivery on storage. But markets do not correct for legacy rules or signal certainty to long-term manufacturers. The record from jurisdictions that have invested in storage planning like Australia, like China: it is clear that targeted policy plus regulatory fixes unlock deployment at scale. The facts are that at COP 29 delegates made a pledge to commit to a collective goal of deploying 1,500 gigawatts of energy storage in the power sector globally by 2030. That's more than six times the level of 2022. And to pursue efforts towards such a goal as this means establishing policies that enable regulatory frameworks that facilitate the adoption of energy storage and supports so we can

meet the storage target and address the barriers faced by storage projects, including this double taxation that exists.

3:30

Madam Speaker, peer-reviewed research and studies demonstrate that storage is most valuable when it is treated as a system resource and when markets value the full suite of services it provides: energy capacity, ancillary services, and transmission distribution deferral. Bill 203 does what is necessary to create stability. It is asking this UCP government to actually create a plan, to remove irrational fees, and to create procurement pathways so private capital can commit with confidence.

Bill 203 improves system reliability so families don't fear cold snaps turning into blackouts, because it's dangerous. It helps stabilize bills so small businesses and households can budget, it fixes the regulatory barriers that have kept investments on the sidelines, and it creates conditions for new jobs for First Nations and Métis; full participation. It does all this by giving the system operator and government the tools to plan and modernize, not micromanage markets, by removing the obstacles that have kept storage from competing fairly.

I urge this UCP government to support Bill 203 to show Albertans, to show investors, to show industries, to show First Nations and Métis communities that Alberta has a plan. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: You've got two minutes available until we will move to the closer of the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Fortunately, I'm notably a very fast speaker, so I'm sure I'll get through a lot of content.

Bill 203. I'd like to thank my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore for bringing this bill. Obviously, something very important for us to talk about; we're talking about lowering electricity costs for Albertans. We talk a lot about the affordability crisis, particularly how much worse it's gotten under the tenure of this UCP government. This, of course, is one way that we are looking to make some helpful suggestions to the government on ways that they can actually improve affordability for Albertans. It's fairly straightforward, what we're looking for, because what we're asking for is that this would be part of a co-ordinated plan from the government to modernize Alberta's electricity grid and to enhance reliability and to do that by using energy storage.

Why now? Why has this bill come forward now? I always get to learn new things in this job, which is great. I think this one had slipped past me, but the government is currently undergoing a major redesign of the energy-only market. Now, of course, Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada that has this deregulated electricity market, and it is undergoing this review. So it's a very timely contribution to the discussion that the government is having with the Alberta Utilities Commission and AESO because they are working on making some changes to the energy market. What Bill 203 is doing is calling for energy storage to be included in the upcoming review and to ensure that research and long-term planning are also considered. This is also going to ensure that current policies will not have barriers . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Member, I hesitate to interrupt, but it is now time for the sponsor of the bill to close debate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do appreciate all the debate and all the speakers on Bill 203.

As I close debate, I would like to address comments from the Minister of Affordability and Utilities. For starters, I would like to

emphasize that this bill is about creating fairer and more competitive market conditions for energy storage. The minister cited FFR, and sure, that's an ancillary service procurement that the government is doing. That's good, but I want to remind the government that this is not a market-based mechanism; this is a contract. As the Member for Calgary-Elbow explained, we do not need a separate, massive, top-down government procurement process here; we just need the market to function properly, and the market doesn't function right now, Madam Speaker. Bill 203 is about creating the right economic conditions for storage and not government contracts that are happening because of poor planning over the last few years.

The minister says that they're already working on things in this bill, but this bill is very much focused on the distribution side of electricity, which the government hasn't even started, Madam Speaker. The minister has been working on the restructured energy market – that is true – but in the last six years there hasn't been any substantial work for pragmatic solutions in the distribution side of the electricity business.

Bill 203 enables competitive procurement or aggregator contracts as standard approaches for sourcing storage services with the AUC to improve investor certainty. It requires that procurement should be integrated into distribution system planning cycles and ensuring deployments are aligned with forecasted grid needs. Bill 203 creates a distribution-level framework that allows storage to provide local services such as peak shaving, congestion relief, and deferring upgrades directly to utilities. This framework would include simplified participation rules for small and aggregated storage projects, avoiding the bulk market requirements that currently limit their ability to participate.

Bill 203 requires clear cost-recovery mechanisms that allow contracted storage service costs to be recovered through rates in the same way as wire investments. Bill 203 wants to change that, reduce red tape, and enable a modern purchasing model that allows idle batteries in regulated and deregulated entities to be shared when demand spikes. None of that has been started, Madam Speaker, and the minister needs new, focused work on distribution to reduce legacy barriers and to allow more affordable energy to enter the grid system.

The minister also seems to be bothered by the requirement of a highly technical and specialized task force of experts on long-duration energy storage. Madam Speaker, long-duration energy storage is currently not commercial. This is a highly technical subject that requires a highly technical group of experts. The point here is to showcase the ambition and a clear intent on getting things done through collaboration between ministries.

The minister could have proposed an amendment to the bill, and I would have welcomed his feedback and thoughts to make this bill doable for his ministry. Unfortunately, his comments missed the mark and the bill's intent and ambition right here.

Madam Speaker, I held many industry round-tables and consultation meetings on Bill 203. Over 45 organizations attended, five of which are industry associations with massive power loads. They all expressed their frustration with the lack of policy certainty in the Alberta electricity market. They shared how government bills are passed without timelines and specifics; hence why Bill 203 included delivery timelines, so companies can have certainty and plan for the future with actual, clear timelines. I hope the minister understands the intention here and learns more about the lack of certainty in the market and the frustration of his own ministry stakeholders.

I want to end by saying that Albertans have paid some of the highest electricity bills in North America, Madam Speaker. This bill is about adding more affordable energy while improving grid

reliability and bringing back investor certainty in Alberta to build new projects and create new jobs.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I urge this Chamber to vote in support of Bill 203.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:39 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Chapman	Ip
Batten	Dach	Renaud
Brar, Gurinder	Ellingson	Sabir
Brar, Gurtej	Goehring	Sigurdson, Lori
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hoffman	Sweet
Ceci	Hoyle	Wright, P.

Against the motion:

Amery	Jones	Sawhney
Armstrong-Homeniuk	LaGrange	Sawyer
Boitchenko	Loewen	Schow
Bouchard	Long	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Lovely	Singh
de Jonge	Lunty	Stephan
Dreeschen	McDougall	Turton
Dyck	Nally	van Dijken
Ellis	Neudorf	Wiebe
Fir	Nicolaides	Williams
Getson	Nixon	Wilson
Glubish	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Horner	Pitt	Yao
Hunter	Rowswell	Yaseen
Jean		

Totals:	For – 18	Against – 43
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 203 lost]

Bill 204

Public Interest Disclosure

(Publicly Funded Health Entity Whistleblower Protection) Act

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 204, the Public Interest Disclosure (Publicly Funded Health Entity Whistleblower Protection) Act.

If passed, this landmark legislation will guarantee that health care workers and publicly funded health entities receive uniform whistle-blower protections, protections that are vital to safeguarding patient care and ensuring accountability across our health care system. Before I speak to Bill 204, let me share a story that illustrates why this legislation is so urgently needed.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Earlier this year a nurse in a publicly funded continuing care facility discovered that critical safety protocols were being ignored, putting vulnerable seniors at risk. She wanted to report it, but she hesitated. Why? Because she didn't know if she was protected. She didn't know if she worked for the government, a contracted agency, or who would handle her disclosure. She feared losing her job, her licence, and her livelihood.

Mr. Speaker, that nurse is not alone. According to recent surveys nearly 40 per cent of health care workers in Alberta say that they would not report wrongdoing because they fear retaliation. That's unacceptable. When those who protect us are silenced, patient safety suffers, public trust erodes, and accountability disappears.

This legislation does fall under the Minister of Justice, not the ministry of health. When I asked about it last week, the Minister of Justice chose not to respond. Instead, I heard back from the minister of health. I'm fully prepared to discuss this bill with the minister of health to clarify protocols and protections, but the question remains: who should I speak to? Is it the Minister of Justice? Is it the variety of ministers of health? Who do workers go to speak to if I don't even know who to speak to?

The confusion is not trivial. It reflects the chaos that front-line workers are experiencing every single day. This is far more than a procedural matter. Bill 204 sends a decisive message to health care professionals and to our public. Alberta will protect those who speak up in good faith. It directly addresses the lack of clarity born from recent restructuring, changes that have been fragmented over our public health care system and pushed it towards our American-style model. This lacks accountability. Many front-line workers no longer know which minister they report to, whether they work for a government agency or a contracted facility, nor who ensures their protections when they raise these concerns.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, four minutes ago the Privacy Commissioner came out with recommendations saying that the commissioner recommends the government ensures that whistle-blower provisions are broad enough to facilitate disclosure to the commission about any noncompliance with HIA and to ensure that provisions protect the whistle-blower from retaliation. Currently there is no protection for retaliation built into the amendments in Bill 11. This gap must be addressed to broaden who can blow the whistle concerning any suspected or actual noncompliance with HIA and to include provisions to protect the whistle-blower from retaliation. These provisions are necessary, especially in light of a new expanded sharing of health information and the new permitted use of the information within HIA. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, it's not just the NDP that have concerns with Bill 11 and the move towards expanding our health care system into a chaotic division of health care. Workers do not feel protected.

4:00

So what does the bill do? Well, first, it's defining publicly funded health entities. These are any organizations delivering insured services funded by the public dollar, including hospitals, clinics, continuing care facilities, and now the new contracted agencies. It expands coverage not only with current employees but former employees, medical and professional staff with privileges, and individual designated employees by regulations, allowing the law to adapt as the system continues to evolve, because as we know, next week we'll get another bill saying that we're doing something else about something with health because this government continues to try to create chaos in every single part of our system.

It explicitly bans reprisal action such as suspension, demotion, or harassment against those who raise concerns with good faith, and it mandates an entity to appoint a designated officer responsible for securely receiving, investigating, and resolving disclosures. These measures provide a clear, enforceable framework, giving health care workers the assurance they need to safely report wrongdoing.

The other piece that I need to highlight, Mr. Speaker, is that this bill came from Saskatchewan. Guess who's in government in Saskatchewan? Premier Moe. I think the government side knows him quite well. What's super interesting is that this bill was passed under his government. It was proposed by the NDP, and then Moe

adopted it. So if the government is going to be like, “We have a problem with this,” go talk to your buddy in Saskatchewan and ask him why he thought it was such a good idea.

The problem here is that this is going to turn into the government just saying no for the sake of saying no, when in reality the chaos that is being driven by this government around these systems – the workers have a right to be protected, and they can’t wait for this government to decide to do it. Why do we know that? Well, let’s look at the DynaLife debacle. A promising privatization of the community lab services cost over \$100 million, delivered no savings, led to longer wait times and critical testing, and the Auditor General reviewed it and basically said that the staff were too scared to come forward even though they knew that it was happening because they were fearful of retaliation. Fix the problem. Like, it’s so easy to do.

The corrupt care scandal 2025: the AHS CEO came forward, was dismissed after raising concerns about inflated private surgical contracts. Brought it to light, reported them to the Auditor General, reported them to the Premier, got fired: that’s reprisal. That’s a problem. I wonder why the government doesn’t want to strengthen whistle-blower protection. Because they don’t want anybody to blow the whistle. Because they’re not doing the things they should be doing and they’re wasting taxpayer dollars.

Three private clinics across Edmonton, Red Deer, and Lethbridge billed up to \$8,300 for hip surgery, \$4,000 more than what it would have cost for us to do in a public facility. Internal warnings were ignored, whistle-blowers were actively silenced, weakening the relationship between AHS and the department of health, and then what did the government do? Introduce Bill 11 to make sure we dismantled both of those things because they don’t want anybody to know.

These scandals reveal a reoccurring pattern: profit, secrecy, and the silencing of those who speak out, a toxic combination of eroding our public confidence. Bill 202, the Conflicts of Interest (Ethical Governance) Amendment Act, that my colleague introduced a couple of weeks ago was supposed to help with some of these conflicts of interest concerns that we’re seeing with all of these different ministries, and again, the government chose to vote that down because, again, why would we want to do openness, why would we want to do transparency, and why would we want to make sure that Albertans know where their taxpayer dollars are going?

Our health care is under immense stress. ER closures, prolonged wait times, and nearly 1 million Albertans without a family doctor. It was supposed to be fixed in 90 days. It wasn’t. It’s been two years. It’s been six years for this government in general, and what we’re seeing is that instead of fixing it, we’re destroying it. Bill 204 is not just a bill; it is a declaration on behalf of the NDP that whistle-blowers are not enemies to be silenced but they’re citizens to be protected, that public money will not be handed to private interests without oversight, and that the people who speak truth to power deserve honour and not reprisal. The NDP will stand up for that every single day.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 isn’t a political prop; it’s practical and it’s necessary. It empowers those on the front line, restores transparency, and puts accountability at the heart of the publicly funded health care system. We must act to ensure that those who are protecting the public can speak up without fear, that public health care remains accountable to the people, and that Albertans can once again trust in the system that serves them.

In closing, I urge all members to support second reading of Bill 204 and to stand with Alberta’s health care workers and the patients that they serve.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to rise today to speak about Bill 204, the Public Interest Disclosure (Publicly Funded Health Entity Whistleblower Protection) Act. Let me begin by saying this. We do not dispute what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning said. We do not dispute the concept or the importance of strong whistle-blower protections. These are absolutely essential to patient safety, to ethical care, and, most importantly above all, to accountability across our publicly funded health system.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Manning went into great detail about why she thinks that Bill 204 is important, but here’s the problem. Bill 204 does not strengthen those protections. It risks undermining the very framework that currently safeguards health care workers and the patients that they serve.

Mr. Speaker, the previous MLA spoke a great deal about where Bill 204 came from. We heard and we learned that it was lifted from the province of Saskatchewan. Well, here in Alberta we already have a comprehensive, legally grounded whistle-blower protection law.

An Hon. Member: It’s called PIDA.

Mr. Amery: My friend beside me says, “It’s called PIDA.” For all of those watching, it is the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, and it already exists in this great province to protect the public interest in the most meaningful sense. The safety of Albertans, the ethical conduct of our institutions, and the responsible use of public resources are all encompassed in existing legislation, legislation that has existed here in Alberta for more than a decade.

Mr. Speaker, under the existing public interest disclosure act employees can report everything from unlawful conduct to serious and specific dangers to a person’s life or health. Most importantly of all, protection begins the moment a worker seeks any advice or even asks a question, before formal disclosure is ever made. The act protects good-faith advice seeking. It protects participation in investigations and even refusing to be complicit in wrongdoing. Now, that’s the kind of protection that the health care sector in this province requires, and that’s the kind of health care protection that the health care sector in Alberta deserves.

Now, we know that whistle-blowers often fear retaliation, and that’s why confidentiality and anonymity is embedded in both legislation and institutional policies such as the Alberta Health Services safe disclosure policy. A worker can go to a designated officer, a chief officer, or directly to the Public Interest Commissioner anonymously and trust that their identity will be protected to the greater extent possible. [interjections] Now, I hear my friends across the aisle chirping as we talk about this, but I’d like to impart upon them and on you, Mr. Speaker, the facts.

This is paired with independent oversight. The Public Interest Commissioner has broad investigative authority, access to records, the power to investigate reprisals, and the ability to ensure that concerns are not ignored or buried. When those reprisals are found, real remedies exist, including reinstatement, repayment of lost wages, damages, and reimbursement of legal costs.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, that’s what a meaningful deterrent looks like. It’s not the political posturing of Bill 204. It’s not a bill that was lifted from another province with incomplete consultation. Poorly thought out, not made here for Alberta: it’s merely an afterthought, a bill pulled from somewhere else. [interjections]

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Manning, who continues to chirp in the background, did not know that we actually have a bill here in Alberta that covers everything that Bill 204 tries

to seek to do and much, much more. The existing legislation here in this province is not a theory; it's a complete and comprehensive framework that has worked for years. It's encouraged early detection of risks. It's helped prevent harm and strengthened a culture of accountability across the entire public sector, including in health care.

That brings me to the central problem, one of many problems with Bill 204. It is premature. It risks weakening, not strengthening, the protections that already exist. As members of this House know, the public interest disclosure act is presently going through a bipartisan review through a legislative committee. Members from all parties have already been invited to write submissions on this. Stakeholders from across the health system have contributed thoughtful, detailed recommendations, unlike Bill 204, which has no thoughtful, meaningful, and likely any consultation at all. The committee is poised to examine the entire act thoroughly and with the expert input that it deserves. So why would we make amendments just as a comprehensive review is ongoing? Let the committee do its work. The process was established to consider these exact questions. Introducing a stand-alone framework is now completely premature.

Let's be clear about the risks of fragmentation, Mr. Speaker. If reforms narrow who is considered to be an employee, some staff – for example, part-time workers, trainees, volunteers, contractors – may lose protection. If anonymity is reduced or procedural barriers are added, workers may hesitate to report sensitive issues like privacy breaches or unsafe clinical practices. If the role of designated officers or the Public Interest Commissioner is weakened, like Bill 204 will undoubtedly do, investigations could be delayed.

I think that the Member for Edmonton-Manning has good intentions, but I think that the bill is misguided, it is incomplete, and it's completely poorly thought out. Each of the unintended consequences would undermine the very goals that Bill 204 seeks to support. In a system as complex as health care even small weaknesses in whistle-blower protections can have consequences, patient safety risks that go unreported, ethical breaches that go unchecked, or mismanagement that is never uncovered.

Mr. Speaker, the combination of statutory protection under the public interest disclosure act, institutional policy across health care entities, and independent oversight by the office of the Public Interest Commissioner gives Alberta a robust, balanced, practical, and fully complete framework. This is not the time to try and posture politically. This is not the time to try to carve pieces out of the existing legislation. This is not the time to introduce frivolous pieces of legislation that try to weaken the existing public interest disclosure act that we have here in this province.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called. The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sabir: Citing 23(h), (i), and (j), while the Justice minister was making some remarks, he really went off the rails when he said that it's "not the time to introduce frivolous pieces of legislation." That's the legislation brought by the hon. member of this House. If he disagrees with it, come up with something better, but that kind of language, imputing frivolous motives, is not helpful. It's against the standing order. That kind of language will also create disorder in this House, so I think the minister should reflect on the language

he's using in this House about the bills that are introduced by members on this side.

The Acting Speaker: Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This is not a point of order by any stretch of the imagination. The deputy House leader references 23(h), (i), and (j), none of which talk about anything to do with frivolous pieces of legislation. We're debating a bill. The Deputy Opposition House Leader suggests that we provide something better. We're talking about something that exists that is far better than Bill 204. In my opinion, as a matter of debate, and in the opinion of many members in this Assembly, Bill 204 doesn't achieve what we already have. That is a matter of public debate. If something is introduced that doesn't achieve what we already have, it is frivolous.

The Acting Speaker: I will rule that this is not a point of order. This is a matter of debate, and the minister may continue with his comments.

Debate Continued

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your fine ruling and your good judgment. This is not, as I was saying, a time for the members opposite to use the opportunity of this Assembly to try and carve out pieces in an existing piece of legislation. If anything, it remains a time to strengthen awareness of it, to make reporting easier, to reduce the stigma, and to make sure that every single worker knows that they can speak up without fear. Public trust in our health system depends on transparency. It depends on the confidence that when a health care worker sees something deeply wrong, they're able to report it. They can say something safely, confidentially, and without retaliation.

Bill 204, despite its good intentions, does not advance that goal. It does not achieve any of these things, and because of that, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support Bill 204. We have far better legislation already in place.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise today and add a few words to the discourse about Bill 204. In my view, Bill 204, in fact, does protect workers, specifically health care workers. These are workers who right now are not in fact adequately protected under present legislation, and what this bill is seeking to do is simply to remedy that, to fill in those gaps in a really specific way.

The UCP government has time and time again shown a level of disrespect toward health care workers that has been astonishing, and that is despite the fact that these hard-working Albertans are the folks that have, in the face of chaos and uncertainty and logo changes, kept health care functioning for Albertans. However, those health care workers, the health care workers we depend upon, Mr. Speaker, are working under considerable strain at the moment, and their ability, given the current state of health care with all of its chaos, which is absolutely and totally down to this government and the government previous to them, has meant that health care workers – their service, their ability to serve, their willingness to serve – are at a critical juncture.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I'll provide a little bit of context for my remarks because there are a number of reports that have recently been released that speak about just how Alberta's health care workers are feeling. There was a high-level brief of a recent

research study, which was entitled *Undervalued and Overstretched*, which focused on the experienced voices of Alberta's allied health care workforce. Part of what that workforce talked about in this report was that Alberta allied health care workers report extremely high levels of job-related stress. In fact, over 70 per cent of them state that their job is highly stressful, 75 per cent state that their job is emotionally draining, and 45 per cent state that they are overwhelmed by the demands of their job. In addition, those who identify as having a disability report higher levels of job stress in all measures.

4:20

The professions that score the highest when asked if their job is stressful and if their job is mostly draining are those in acute care, paramedics, family counsellors, primary care paramedics, mental health therapists, addictions counsellors, social workers, and pharmacy technicians. Over 35 per cent of allied health care workers report that they often think about quitting their job, a similar number to teachers in their first five years. Those with higher levels of education might be less likely to think about quitting. Again, those who identify as having a disability are more likely to think about quitting and more likely to begin to look for a job outside the organization within the next year. We should not be looking at these sorts of numbers, Mr. Speaker.

As we know, health workforce is a pressing issue in Alberta right now. We know we simply do not have enough folks to work in health care as it presently is, much less what's happening with this massive reorganization. The opinions of allied health care workers about the proposed changes to the provincial health care system are overwhelmingly negative, Mr. Speaker. They're worried about the lack of involvement of front-line workers in planning and implementing changes, which they believe will lead to nothing but increased complexity and fragmentation of services.

The National Union of Public and General Employees found something similar with a report that they released also this year. They talked about the fact that stress levels are notably high amongst health care professionals in Alberta, who report constant and elevated stress, that health care professionals in facility-based health care settings and those in allied health care with direct front-line roles also face significantly higher stress levels. Albertans who took part in this survey by NUPGE report a heavy workload and burnout, with inadequate staffing levels being a driver. No amount of advertising or changing of logos or adding of yet another pillar will overcome these issues.

These factors, Mr. Speaker, the stress of the folks who are right now thinking of quitting, the lack of a real involvement of health care workers, all contribute to the situation we see today. Certainly, during a time when workers are feeling generally disrespected by this government, part of that disrespect lands straight in the middle of the constant nature of working short every single day. I can't imagine what it must be like to have to go to your workplace always short of workers and to know that it isn't just a matter of you being there for a few extra hours. What it means, when any of these health care workplaces are working short, is that patient care is at risk. That is why my colleague from Edmonton-Manning's bill is of extreme importance at the moment. Working conditions are patient care conditions. These health care workers deserve to have all the protection that they possibly can get from this government if indeed they have a question about any patient care conditions.

Depending upon what else might be happening in any particular organization – and we know that the previous health care amendment act statutes created a whole bunch of new health care entities, new organizations, new individuals who can act as corporations and indeed can become employers. There are so many

gaps, Mr. Speaker, in that legislation that health care workers themselves, as my colleague noted, aren't sure at all if they are protected. I'd want protection for all those health care workers who might be in a position to look out for the patients they care for and who perhaps we just might need to hear from in the future in order to learn the truth of any particular situation. These workers deserve to know that they are protected from retribution. These are the folks after all, because they see and experience everything on a daily basis, that are the best physicians to see and experience the truth of what's happening now and in the future of our health care system, to our friends, to our loved ones, to our family members. If they need to raise their voices, as a government, as legislators we should be the ones to ensure that none of them need to fear.

What this bill does is create an act to give workers in all publicly funded health care organizations consistent and constant whistleblower protection. It would apply to every employee working in publicly funded health organizations under all of that new governance structure that we're looking at no matter the funding set up. These changes that are happening right now, as I alluded to earlier, Mr. Speaker, have left workers unsure about their future, and I am not at all surprised why they are unsure. Still now many of them are not sure about which pillar they're going to end up working under.

We've heard reports, Mr. Speaker, of workers being assigned to one particular pillar, and then that assignment is taken back, only to be given back a week later. They don't actually know who their employer will be. They don't know how far removed from Alberta health their employer will be. They don't know if it will be fully public or nonprofit or fully private and who is actually running the organization. They don't know what might happen if they're moved to a brand new organization that doesn't yet exist. What will happen to things like their pension, their seniority? Will they be red-lined and then for how long? Will they now be considered outside Alberta health; therefore, unable to apply to other positions they might be interested in?

All of these issues have bearing on whistle-blower protection because there's such a culture of uncertainty now, Mr. Speaker. People don't know if their jobs are protected. They don't know if their patients' lives are going to be at risk, with all of the many plethoras of changes that are occurring. Not only that but all of this speaks to the general and continual erosion of trust. That, in fact, is one of the primary focuses of Bill 204. It's to rebuild trust amongst health care workers and restore that accountability across all publicly funded health care organizations.

I myself have talked many times about how this government has eroded trust between itself and Albertans and the workers it purports to serve. So many promises made yet not kept: 90-day fix for health care; health care guarantee; fairness at the bargaining table, Mr. Speaker, particularly when it's clear that the government is setting the terms and the employers have no flexibility whatsoever at the bargaining table; declining to meet with workers who are experts in mental health and addictions care and who have recommendations that are, in fact, patient- not profit-centred; respect for the jobs that health care workers do yet not having a workable and recent workforce plan, where actual health care workers and organizations who represent them have a voice at that planning table. Given the flurry of decisions made that have spread chaos throughout our health care system, it's no surprise that workers are not feeling all that great about their day-to-day working lives.

In the midst of all that chaos Bill 204 would give legal protection because it spells it out to health care workers who provide services, whether they work for one of the new public entities, nonprofit or private provider. By passing the bill, Mr. Speaker, we make sure

that health care workers can report wrongdoing or misuse of funds. Any organization . . .

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in strong opposition to Bill 204. To be clear, this government has always ensured that what we do is protect Albertans. You see that in the deals we have made and the bills we continue to introduce. Protecting whistle-blowers is no different. I take such a strong stance on this because it is not just important; it is essential. Without proper whistle-blower protections, Albertans are put at risk every day: risk of being excluded, bullied, and discriminated against.

I understand and appreciate the intent behind the bill; however, Bill 204 is not the right approach for Albertans or the systems that they rely on each day. Bill 204 introduces unnecessary complexity, duplicates protections that already exist, and risks creating consequences that could harm the very people it claims to protect. Albertans deserve better than political games; they deserve a government focused on solutions, not headlines.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I am tired of seeing the NDP take existing legislation, slap a new label on it, and call it their own. We saw it with Bill 202, and here we are again attempting to change something that is clearly already working. That's not leadership; that's posturing. It is the same reason that the members across the aisle refuse to work with us and instead choose to mislead Albertans by yelling loud and far that everything this government does is meant to hurt them.

Mr. Speaker, when I grew up, I was taught that the loudest voices aren't always the will of the people. It's an attempt to divide this province instead of working together to strengthen it, and we won't have it anymore. Our existing protections are strong and effective, so before we rush into reinventing the wheel, let's talk about what we already have.

4:30

Under the public interest disclosure act Alberta has one of the most comprehensive whistle-blower protection frameworks in the country. This legislation exists to protect the public interest, health, safety, fiscal responsibility, and ethical conduct of Albertans and the employers they work for. It encompasses all of our public sector. It allows employees to disclose wrongdoing, including unlawful acts or anything that creates a substantial and specific danger to life, health, or safety.

Protection begins the moment a worker seeks advice or reports a concern, not just actual disclosures. Advice seeking, co-operation in investigations, even refusal to participate in wrongdoing are covered and included. Reports can be directed to the AHS designated officer, AHS chief officer, or directly to the PIC. This gives individuals flexibility and multiple channels to report concerning behaviour. Additionally, confidentiality and anonymity are embedded safeguards. Employees can report anonymously or confidentially, reducing fear of reprisal.

And let's not forget independent oversight. The Public Interest Commissioner has full powers to investigate disclosures and complaints of reprisal. Reprisals are explicitly prohibited and penalized. If someone commits a reprisal – dismissal, demotion, pay reduction – they commit an offence under the PIDA. Victims can seek remedies, including reinstatement, lost wages, and damages.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the current policy distinguishes whistle-blower disclosures from routine HR-type grievances, and this distinction is crucial. It ensures that the whistle-blower mechanisms are not misused and can therefore remain focused on

serious risks and ethical failures. These are not hollow promises; these are real protections that work. So why is the NDP trying to undermine them with Bill 204?

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 is premature and politically motivated. Here's the reality. The Legislature already has a bipartisan committee reviewing the act. Stakeholders from across the health system have submitted their input. That process is under way, so why push in a bill now? Why rush something through when we are about to dive into a comprehensive review? The answer is simple. It's politics. It's always politics with the members across the aisle and their new leader. The NDP want to score points, not solve problems. They want to create the illusion that this government isn't doing enough when, in fact, we're doing the hard work – consulting, listening, improving – and when things go as planned, it is always incredibly difficult for them to acknowledge that.

For example, just last week we had an incredible announcement with the signing of the MOU right here in our province, an announcement that has the potential to benefit our entire country alongside Alberta. How many questions did we get during question period? How many engagements did we see on social media? None. That's because the NDP, unfortunately, want to continue to push divisive rhetoric rather than be there for Albertans even in the best of times. [interjections] Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'm getting there. I'll get back to the bill.

Bill 204 undermines the process that we already have in place. It risks weakening anonymity, narrowing who can report, and complicating the role of designated officers. It will impose burdensome procedural barriers that discourage disclosures and allow serious wrongdoing to go unreported. That's not progress; that is recklessness.

Another issue I want to discuss with you is the risk of weakening protections. Let's talk about what happens if we get this wrong. If health care workers fear speaking up about serious risks, errors, or misconducts, the system becomes less transparent and less safe. Patient safety suffers.

Ms Sweet: Yeah.

Mrs. Sawyer: Public trust erodes. I'm glad you agree.

In times of strain, when workloads are high, funding is tight, and staffing is stretched, rigorous whistle-blower protections are more important than ever. They catch issues early, prevent harm, and preserve integrity. Bill 204 threatens all of that. It will erode internal protections at the very moment we need them the most. That's why this government will not support it.

Mr. Speaker, I have served in this House just long enough to recognize a pattern. Every time the NDP sees an opportunity to sow division, they take it. They pit Albertans against each other, urban versus rural, public versus private, front-line workers versus administrators, and now they're doing it again with Bill 204. Instead of acknowledging that this government is working in the best interests of Albertans, they try to paint us as indifferent or inactive. Nothing could be further from the truth, and Albertans know that. We are strengthening protections, not weakening them. We are listening to experts, not pursuing legislation for political gain, and we're committed to transparency and accountability in all our essential systems, especially in our health care system.

Albertans deserve collaboration, not conflict. They deserve solutions, not slogans, and they deserve a Legislature that puts their interests ahead of partisan politics. Stop dividing Albertans, get on board with what our government is doing, and let's start working together.

Mr. Speaker, the question becomes: what should we do? We commit to a better path forward. We should let the committee finish

its work. We should consider stakeholder input carefully, and we should look at ways to strengthen, not duplicate, existing procedures. That means increasing awareness among our institutions, health care workers, bureaucrats, private sectors, and ensuring easy access to reporting channels, reducing stigma, and protecting all staff: full-time, part-time, contract, or volunteer. Public trust in our health system depends on transparency and the ability to bring forward legitimate concerns. Alberta's system delivers on that promise. Let's build on it, not tear it down for the sake of a headline.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 is not about protecting whistle-blowers. It's about politics. It is about division, and it's about undermining a process that is already working. Albertans deserve better. That is why I urge all members in this House to join me in voting against this bill. They deserve a government that focuses on solutions, not stunts, and that is exactly what we have always delivered.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm thrilled to rise and speak to Bill 204, Public Interest Disclosure (Publicly Funded Health Entity Whistleblower Protection) Act, as proposed by my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Manning. I want to say how much I appreciated working with her in the lead-up to the introduction of this bill.

A little bit of background for all members. One of the things that sometimes we get asked by our voters – and I imagine probably many of the people on the other side of the House do, too – is to find ways to be collaborative and propositional and find ways to get things that will improve outcomes for all Albertans from either side of the aisle and find ways for us to work together.

Just this last weekend I was speaking to a great group of students through a model UN club for all of the Edmonton public and Catholic high schools who were able to attend. One of the questions that was asked was what advice somebody had about our engagement in the Chamber. I said that in my opinion if a bill doesn't make things worse, I want to vote for it, because I want to find opportunities for us to find win-wins. I am excited when a bill comes forward. Even if it isn't perfect, if it doesn't make things worse, I usually am excited to vote for it and say so in debate.

I also want to say that I think members of this House – I know that there are many political staff watching this debate right now. Members of this House deserve political staff that when e-mails come to all of us, all members of the Assembly, they're flagged for all members of the House. Just before this bill was introduced, the Alberta Information and Privacy Commissioner sent an e-mail to all of us raising concerns regarding amendments to the Health Information Act as set out in Bill 11 and specifically calling on us as members of the Assembly to work expeditiously to update whistle-blower protections as it relates to health care entities in relation to Bill 11. I would have expected the Justice minister to have staff that flagged that for him before he stood in this House and said that there was no need to update the legislation because it was just fine. It clearly is not fine, especially in light of what's happening with Bill 11.

It was actually the Member for Edmonton-Manning and myself reaching out to other elected officials in other provinces to say, you know, "Where were some opportunities where you found a win-win in working with the Sask. Party?" to our NDP colleagues. One of them talked about introducing this bill, essentially, as a private member's bill, which at that time the Sask. Party through their majority decided to vote down but the very next session brought in

a government bill that did exactly what the private member from the NDP had proposed.

4:40

We are giving this government an opportunity to respond to those constituents who say, "I really wish you guys would find ways to reach across the aisle and do good things for Albertans," to do that here today and any day. In terms of the sowing division piece I want to say that this was absolutely intended as a way for us to be collaborative, to build on opportunities for us to provide the same protections to all health care workers, about 135,000 of them, as opposed to just ones that were covered under previous legislation, 10-year-old legislation, as highlighted by the Minister of Justice, when we had one main service provider, Alberta Health Services.

The government has decided to create new pillars, create new entities, hire new CEOs, hire new boards, create all these different new folks that needed to get paid severance so the new folks could be hired. There have been many, many layers of wrongdoing happening during that time. Just to highlight a couple of them: the Turkish Tylenol scandal, the DynaLife debacle, surgical contract outsourcing, often referred to as the corrupt care scandal. In all of the reviews that we've seen in these, the Auditor General review around DynaLife, a culture of fear was highlighted. Around the surgical contract piece and Justice Wyant's review of that to date, you know, a culture of not everyone feeling confident in being able to speak up was highlighted.

This is really an opportunity for us to say that it doesn't matter if you work in public or private or nonprofit care, if it's provided by a religious entity or a secular one. Every health care worker: if you see something that concerns you, whether you're working in procurement or whether you're working at the bedside, if you see something wrong, you should be able to raise your voice, and you should have confidence that you are going to have an opportunity to do so without reprisal, without the minister knowing who it was that specifically raised the alarm. That is absolutely something that was able to be remedied through our neighbours in Saskatchewan working across the aisle to bring forward a piece of legislation to protect all health care workers. Whether they work in urban, rural, public, private, nonprofit, everyone has the opportunity, under a very explicit piece of legislation, to know that health care workers are not going to be the recipients of retaliation if they do speak up with concerns.

I know that all of us hear from folks on the front lines that have great ideas on how they can improve care. Also, you've probably spoken to some who said, "I know something is wrong here, and I just don't know what to do," and under the current legislation what they have to do is notify the minister.

When it's so clear that a lot of these changes – specifically, I refer to Turkish Tylenol, the privatization of lab services, the privatization of surgical services. Through the investigations it's been made very clear that this wasn't based on evidence-based decisions or best practices or interjurisdictional comparisons. This was driven by a desire to move on one specific ideological bent, and that is around the Americanization of our health care system, the privatization of our health care system. So when health care workers have concerns about the implications of that and see them roll out in their workplaces, they have every reason to be worried that there could be political retaliation because the decisions were politically motivated. This legislation makes it very clear to anyone working in health care that that will not be the case, that their voice and their willingness to come forward and wanting to make things better on behalf of patients, their families, their colleagues is honoured, respected, and valued.

It is a fact that other provinces and territories do have some form of whistle-blower protection for workers. Alberta, of course, is not different, but what we are proposing is that we look to Saskatchewan, which is the one jurisdiction that has something specific around health care, and we highlight this as an opportunity for all Albertans to know that we're willing to work together and propose good, simple solutions.

The days of secrecy, cover-ups, people having every reason to be concerned that there are political motivations behind many of these decisions and that they could have and are having negative health outcomes for patients or that there are times when we know that people may be receiving compensation for a less-than-transparent procurement of things, including what was highlighted in the *Globe and Mail* just over the weekend around candidates for leadership meeting privately with people who worked in procurement in the lead-up to the selection of a leader for the current governing party: these types of things are very concerning, Mr. Speaker, and the current legislation didn't prevent them from happening. They absolutely happened, and I can bet that there were probably people who worked in scheduling or knew that these things were ongoing, but they knew that they would not be protected because the governing party and entities in question were clearly very aligned. That shouldn't be what stops people from blowing the whistle and stops wrongdoing from happening.

Mr. Speaker, everyone should know that no matter where you work, you are a steward of the public resources that we share in this province. What we put into health care is probably one of the biggest and most important investments in making sure that we have a strong society where it doesn't matter how much money you have in your pocket; every single Albertan has a right to having quality health care available to them. Everyone who works in that system should have a right to be heard if they are indeed witnessing wrongdoing and wanting to raise the alarms on that.

Again, the creation of four new entities or agencies with different CEOs, HR departments: it is very confusing right now for a lot of health care workers. When they were asked, "Should health care be improved?" almost everyone said yes. Of course, health care has room for improvement. People in the system know many of the ways to make it better, but what they got instead was a new logo, a new CEO, and new HR department to have to deal with.

I also want to say that the piece around a committee being responsible for reviewing this: there is a committee, and the committee can absolutely go much further than this if they so choose. But I want to really thank the Member for Edmonton-Manning for carving out a piece and that piece being specifically focused on those who are working in health care to say, at a time when there is so much chaos, so much concern around things being done in an unethical way, that the government and the opposition came together to say that health care workers deserve every opportunity to be heard and without reprisal.

Again, I want to highlight for everyone – and we can table it in this place; it has already come into everyone's e-mail, but we will be happy to table it tomorrow – the e-mail that we all received at 3:50 p.m. today from Commissioner McLeod around concerns that Bill 11 warrants Privacy Commissioner updates to ensure that all health care workers will be protected under the new legislation.

Also, I want to highlight that, speaking of delayed – that was one of the notes I wrote here on my piece of paper for myself – the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, that came through in the spring left so many new entities and agencies without clear definition around who can be covered and protected under those, and we should move quickly today to make sure that we remedy some of that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to add my voice to the debate on Bill 204, public interest disclosure act, brought forward by my eminent colleague from Edmonton-Manning. I thank her very much for bringing forward this private member's bill.

I guess I'd just like to help the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills understand what a private member's bill is. It's a bill that is introduced by a private member, so someone who's not in cabinet, by either side. You don't have to be in government or not in government, but you just have to be not in cabinet, so you're considered a private member. We all have the right to do that. We all have the right. That's part of a fundamental aspect of our democracy. You know, I know that the member is new to the Chamber, but this is a right of private members, and I'm very dismayed that she seemed to think she didn't have the right to do that. Of course, she absolutely does, the MLA for Edmonton-Manning, as all of us do. It's very few of us who actually get selected. In the Speaker's office there is a selection process that goes on to, hopefully, give members a fair chance of getting one. This is what the Member for Edmonton-Manning chose to focus on, and I think it's a very important topic.

It's especially important right now that we have more powerful legislation regarding this issue because we're in the middle of scandal after scandal with the UCP government. Despite their protestations that, yes, we have strong enough legislation, why are people getting fired? Why are boards being dismissed? Why is the Auditor General not being funded? Like, come on. There's thing after thing that the UCP government is doing that is not protecting the public interest. It's actually in the way of the public interest. That's why this bill is so important.

4:50

The purpose of it is to provide that legal protection for health care workers specifically, whether they're employed by a public entity, a nonprofit, or a private-sector health care provider. With all of the chaos in our health care system currently with breaking it up into many different areas and then some people aren't, you know, direct employees of the government anymore – they're in other areas – this legislation is more important than ever. We know that people are feeling like: do I have any rights anymore? There's lots of confusion and concern and validly so.

Health care workers who report wrongdoing or misuse of public funds are thus protected from legal action when this legislation is passed. As I said, we need this legislation more than ever before because of the current situation right now in Alberta. You know, we all know about the corrupt care scandal. When the AHS CEO was investigating the bloated contracts to a private surgical facility owned by Sam Mraiche, who's a close friend of the Premier – we heard lots about that in the *Globe and Mail* article on the weekend – she was then fired.

She's looking after the public interest, the CEO. She's wondering: why is this such an extraordinarily high price for this contract? She's investigating it. In her investigation she alerted the health minister regarding that. Guess what. Not long after she had set up a meeting with the Auditor General – that's the Auditor General's responsibility, to do the due diligence to make sure things are being run ethically and that there isn't a misuse of government funding. All of that is under his purview. When she was just about to meet with him – guess what – she lost her job.

An Hon. Member: Fired.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes, she was fired.

It's even such a clear demonstration of why it is necessary for this legislation. I'm, again, very grateful to my colleague from Edmonton-Manning for bringing it forward.

You know, just to add sort of insult to injury, not only was the government bold enough to fire the CEO when, actually, she was taking care of proper funding, what was seen as normal for surgical clinics; when she talked to the board of AHS about this, the board thought: hey, we need to do something about that because we do care about good stewardship of government money. Guess what happened soon after that. The whole board was fired by the UCP.

Despite what the UCP is saying about, "Yes, we want to hear and we want to make sure that the services are used well" and all of that, they're busy being duplicitous. They're doing something completely different in reality. Their words and what they're doing are not congruent. I'd like to say what it is, but I don't think I'm allowed to say that in this Chamber.

Number two was the corrupt care scandal, which gives a very good reason for us to bring forward this legislation. There's also the privatization of lab services scandal. Workers in that sector, you know, are terrified to speak out, as in many areas of the government. Yet we found from the Auditor General that \$125 million was lost when the UCP made bad decision after bad decision in the DynaLife fiasco.

We know that in 2019, when the UCP came in, there had already been shovels in the ground. There already was a lot of work going on this world-class facility for lab services. That was actually in my riding, in Edmonton-Riverview. It was all fenced off. I knew exactly where it was. We were excited about this world-class facility that was going to help us be, really, world leaders in terms of laboratory services. As soon as the UCP came in, they stopped the contracts for that and they stopped the construction of that site. Then later they decided to privatize lab services in total, so DynaLife got the contract for Calgary.

What were the consequences of this? The significant consequences of this were that there were longer wait times for lab results. This was very serious because these bad decisions, the stopping of the construction of this world-class facility plus the privatizing of lab services, was during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Auditor General's report regarding the pandemic identified that slow lab results meant that many times vulnerable seniors' results in continuing care were received slowly. Guess what that means. That means that COVID-19 was spread very quickly in many centres, and we know that many lost their lives. These are very clear bad decisions by the UCP that put vulnerable seniors in continuing care facilities and also in seniors' lodges and other congregant care settings at risk.

We didn't hear about some of this because of this whole culture, you know, in government and also in contracted agencies of not speaking up because they're afraid they'll get fired. And guess what. They will get fired. The UCP is happy to do that even if they're trying to do this in the best interests of Albertans. People aren't safe. People aren't safe to speak up. Therefore, bad decisions are made, and then vulnerable people are hurt, and in this case it's really quite heinous what happened. We know that over 5,000 Albertans died from the COVID-19 virus, and sadly many, many of them were seniors. If workers felt protected, that they could speak up to advocate, many would still be with us today.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-McClung. About two minutes left.

Mr. Dach: Well, doggy, Mr. Speaker. I think I've been spending a bit of time this afternoon in another Legislature, maybe down south in Louisiana or someplace like that, where even to question the government brings a punishment to the speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think we heard something from the Justice minister this afternoon. He was talking about this Bill 204 being frivolous, something unnecessary. "Premature" was another word he used, and the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills said that it's unnecessary complexity. Well, what I say to that is: Mentzelopoulos. I say "Mentzelopoulos" to that.

I talk to the whole Assembly, but I'm really directing my remarks to the Justice minister because this minister, Mr. Speaker, has no credibility with health care professionals. They go through with Bill 11, eviscerate the health care act in this province, reorganize the entrails, and the upshot of it is that we end up with health care workers who have nothing but fear and insecurity because there's no definition as to whether or not an individual is covered under PIDA, and the Minister of Justice should know that. The insecurity and fear that this bill, Bill 11, created is something that caused Bill 204 to become necessary.

Whistle-blower protection: whistle-blowers deserve to be protected, not silenced. The bill does strengthen the existing PIDA framework, and it does so at a time when there's great uncertainty, Mr. Speaker, created by Bill 11 and the siloing of the health care pieces in this province so that there's no way of knowing, if you're an individual health care worker in this province, if indeed you're covered under the act. I ask them to talk to health care workers to see if they indeed are covered.

5:00

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, but the time for consideration of this item has concluded.

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so excited to speak to Motion Other than Government Motion 505. I am incredibly excited to do something about the high price of groceries for the people of Alberta. This Motion 505 requests a public inquiry under the Public Inquiries Act on grocery price inflation, shrinkflation, and skimpflation. I'll first talk about the challenges of grocery prices, possible causes, and why a public inquiry is appropriate for getting to the bottom of what's going on.

Grocery prices increased through the pandemic and continue to increase. Since 2019 Albertans pay more for a basket of groceries. While in some respects this is a world-wide phenomenon, in others it's uniquely Albertan. Farm gate prices in many commodities – beef, pork, canola, wheat – remain volatile. They go up and they go down while prices at the checkout go only in one direction, and that's up.

Alberta makes food, more than we need for our own needs. We feed the world, but the people who live here don't get any price relief from being food producers. It means something is wrong. Families are struggling as a result of high grocery prices. Food insecurity is sky-high. Food banks used to be regarded as a policy failure. People should be fed without having to resort to food banks. It's exceptionally degrading to have to tell somebody: I can't feed my family. But now food banks are this UCP government's policy answer to food insecurity. What was once a bug is now branded by this government as a feature. If you can't feed yourself, hey, go to the food bank. The government is not responsible.

What do I mean by sky-high food insecurity? The facts are stark. The national average for food insecurity in Canada sits at 25.5 per cent, while in Alberta it's well above 27 per cent. Food bank visits have increased 134 per cent since 2019 in Alberta; 1 out of 5 children under the age of six live in food-insecure households. These are children who don't have enough to eat. Thirty-six per cent of Albertans are either borrowing money or drawing from their savings accounts to buy groceries. People are choosing between food insecurity or being financially strained in the richest province in Canada. There was a 22 per cent jump in food bank usage in Alberta between 2024 and 2025, a 22 per cent increase in just one year.

Grocery prices are a problem, and they're a society-wide problem. High grocery prices impact people struggling to make a living, people who feel like they should be comfortable but aren't, people taking care of family members, people on a fixed income, and, above all, high grocery prices hurt children. A woman with a union job tells her kids they can have an apple or an orange for lunch, but not both. The professional couple seeing the cost of daycare rip higher every month because of food costs – maybe they're wondering: wow, is it even worth having a second job? The senior citizen who's worked all their life and saved for retirement has beans every night.

Now, here's the thing, and here's what's really important. On this side of the House we care very deeply about our constituents and about Albertans' ability to feed themselves economically. Everybody in Alberta deserves a good job that pays the bills, that lets you buy groceries, that lets you have a vacation every now and then. For the people of Alberta this is not the story that they're living. The promise of Alberta prosperity is broken for so many Albertans, and it starts with the price at the grocery till.

Now, it's not just the price on the price tag that's going up. The food supply chain is raising prices in a whole bunch of sneaky ways. One is shrinkflation, when price stays the same but quantity drops. This makes my Calgary-Elbow constituents absolutely insane, because it's harder to know how much you're paying for something.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I have a teenager, so Kraft mac and cheese is a household fixture. That box of KD is 200 grams now, down from the former 225. The poor teenagers, starting with my own. Two hundred grams of Ritz crackers are now 180. Dawn dish soap: a 10 per cent quantity decrease, going from 479 ml to 431 ml, and it goes on. Redpath granulated sugar saw a 25 per cent decrease from 2 kilograms to one and a half. Doritos nachos sank 10 per cent, going from 80 grams to 72 grams. Pringles went from 156 to 148. Folgers coffee went from 816 grams to 734 grams.

Then we can add skimpflation to the challenges. That's when the product becomes worse. Quaker chocolate-covered Dippys are now "chocolatey". What's the difference between "chocolatey" and "chocolate"? That's like the difference between health care and corrupt care. They are two separate things.

So, why is a public inquiry the appropriate mechanism? One would think that how the grocery business is organized is that grocers buy goods at a price, sell it at a slightly higher price, and pocket the spread. Then that spread is kept under control by competition. Oh, my sweet, summer child, that's not how this works at all.

Let's talk about slotting fees. These are fees that suppliers pay to grocers to rent their shelf space. A deep-dive into the consumer packaged goods, or CPG, space is not going to fit into a 10-minute debate, but it's worth talking about slotting a little bit. Consumer packaged goods are the stuff in the middle of the

grocery store: produce on one side, bread on the other, meat along the back wall, and in the middle, the stuff your grandmother told you to avoid, the domain of CPG.

People buy CPG like Kraft Dinner, potato chips, cake mixes, Bisquick, breakfast cereal, and granola bars because they're quick and easy. They also have decent margins and a long shelf life, so CPG vendors want to sell them. Also included in CPG: cleaning products, frozen meals, cosmetics, personal care products.

Slotting is one way the largest CPG companies can get a leg up on their competition. Yes, they pay for shelf space. Shelf space at eye level costs more than shelf space lower down. End caps cost the most of all. These shelf-space rentals are called slotting fees. There's actually a really good description of slotting fees on the Alberta open government website.

In addition to slotting fees there are pay-to-stay fees. If a product isn't performing and not selling enough units to make Western or Walmart happy, they can pay additional fees to stay on the shelf and not get run off for poor performance. There's the usual raft of trade promotions and discounts that are available to the largest retailers – think Walmart, Loblaw's, Sobeys, Costco – but not to anyone else. These fees and discounts have not been regarded as anticompetitive before, but this is exactly why we need a public inquiry to get to the bottom of what's going on, because never before have both the grocery business and the CPG business had such immense market concentration.

In 2015, Brazilian 3G Capital partnered with Warren Buffett to mash together Kraft and Heinz into Kraft Heinz. Really creative. This added a behemoth to an industry already dominated by huge players such as Nestlé, Unilever, Mondelez, Danone, Cargill. 3G doesn't have a stake in Kraft Heinz anymore, but Warren Buffett does alongside his giant stake in Coca-Cola . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but it was made known to me that you didn't actually move your motion, and you've got about a minute and 40 seconds left. If you don't do it within a minute and 40 seconds, we're all going to be in an awkward position.

Member Kayande: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

Public Inquiry into Manufacturing Practices

505. MLA Kayande moved:

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

- (a) cause a public inquiry to be made under the Public Inquiries Act into the practices and effects of "shrinkflation" and "skimpflation" in which a manufacturer may reduce the size, quantity, or quality of a product without applying a corresponding decrease in the price of the product,
- (b) appoint at least one commissioner to oversee the public inquiry who is a judge of the Court of Appeal, the Court of King's Bench, or the Court of Justice in Alberta, and
- (c) declare that section 7 of the Public Inquiries Act applies with respect to the public inquiry.

The Speaker: You can use this last minute any way you want within the rules.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So this market domination and potential supply chain control seemed for many years innocuous, but then GLP-1s happened. GLP-1s are prescribed for many reasons. These are the drugs that

people think of as weight-loss medications such as Ozempic, Wegovy, or Zepbound. One consequence is that to severely restrict someone's desire to eat, what do they give up? Salad dressings, cake mixes, potato chips, breakfast cereals, the high-margin pieces of the CPG world. Ordinarily, reduced demand for products should lower its price. That's not what happened here. Instead, prices went up.

5:10

We need to know why. Did food companies anticompetitively raise prices to make up for margins lost by GLP-1s drugs? How much is competition being reduced by slotting, pay-to-stay, and other nontransparent fees? We need to know. This is an industry that's already been subjected to legendary price-fixing conspiracies in lysine and citric acid and, most shockingly of all, Mr. Speaker, in bread. What is the role that government plays?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister for red tape reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Motion 505. This is not a plan. It is not a solution. This is another example of the NDP prioritizing theatrics over results. What they are proposing is a multiyear, multimillion dollar public inquiry that does nothing to help Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite know full well that the issues that they're raising today fall overwhelmingly under federal jurisdiction. These are matters tied to national competition law, national enforcement, and national regulatory oversight. Yet instead of pressing their mothership in Ottawa, the NDP wants Alberta taxpayers to foot the bill for an inquiry into an issue the federal government is already responsible for. It is a motion that is expensive, symbolic, and fundamentally misguided.

Here in Alberta we already have strong, immediate, practical tools that protect consumers. Under the Consumer Protection Act any Albertan who believes they've been misled with respect to how a product is represented can file a complaint with our consumer protection unit. This unit has authority to investigate, require documentation, and take enforcement action as well. When action is taken, it is posted publicly so Albertans know which business has failed to meet expectations, and when emerging concerns pose risks, consumer alerts can be issued in real time.

Mr. Speaker, if they want to do it anonymously, they can also call report a rip-off at 1.877.427.4088. This is real protection that is already in place, already working, and does not require a judge, does not require a commission or even years of procedural hearings. A public inquiry would take years. It would require counsel, hearings, expert witnesses, submissions, and extensive administrative infrastructure. It would not change federal jurisdiction. It would not lower costs. It would not improve transparency. It would not address affordability, and it would not do a single thing to help families today. It would, however, cost millions.

That brings us, Mr. Speaker, to the core issue, that this motion springs from the NDP's deepest instinct. When faced with a problem, their answer is always to grow government, create new bureaucracy, commission new processes, and spend even more money. They confuse process with progress, and this is not surprising. Some in the NDP caucus take great warmth and comfort in their degrees from elitist American universities, institutions where government expansion is often treated as the default solution to every issue, real or perceived. There is nothing wrong with education, but it matters where your worldview comes from, and when your worldview comes from the faculty lounges of expensive

American campuses rather than the lived experiences of Alberta families, your policies tend to look a lot like this motion: costly, theoretical, and disconnected from reality.

Albertans know the results of the ideology that the NDP promotes. Time and again the gift of socialism has been abject poverty wrapped in slogans but paid for by the working people.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm just going to ask you to find your way back to the motion before us here.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I'm asking everyone to vote against Motion 505 because of the history of socialism, which is shortages, higher prices, increased bureaucracy, economic stagnation, and in far too many places literal breadlines, yet the NDP continues to champion policies rooted in that same world view. It's the world view of the Laurentian elites and the champagne socialists, people who talk endlessly about fairness while creating systems that make life harder for ordinary families.

Mr. Speaker, we need to vote no to Motion 505. When they stand today calling for an Alberta-funded inquiry into issues squarely under federal jurisdiction tied to national regulatory frameworks, it is entirely consistent with their pattern: spend more, achieve less.

This side of the House chooses a different path, Mr. Speaker. We choose a different path than Motion 505. We rely on the tools that we already have, we enforce the laws that already work, and when enhancements are needed, we bring them forward responsibly. We do not believe in wasting millions on an inquiry that would not, that cannot address what is fundamentally a federal matter. We believe in using the effective mechanisms already in place and focusing on actions that deliver real, immediate benefits to Albertans. That is practical governance, that is responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars, and that is the opposite of what this motion represents.

Mr. Speaker, this motion does not protect consumers; it does not improve affordability; it does not address the federal jurisdiction, where these issues primarily lie; and it does not offer a real-world solution to the pressures that Albertans face. What it does do is highlight a deep philosophical divide, a divide between a government rooted in practical, real-world action and an opposition rooted in theories imported from elite American universities and sustained by the world view of Laurentian elites and champagne socialists.

Albertans deserve solutions, Mr. Speaker. They deserve pragmatism, not performative NDP politics. That is exactly why this government will continue to deliver. I would encourage the House to vote against this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That went downhill real quickly.

Okay. The government side today – I don't even know where to begin. The minister literally standing up and saying, "It's not our problem; it's a federal problem," when we're talking about Albertans and affordability actually blows my mind. A hundred per cent there are tools that this government has at their disposal to help bring down costs for Albertans: car insurance, for example; utilities, for example; looking at rent, for example; helping with housing, for example; all the things. There are so many things the government could have actually stood up and said: these are things that we're doing. Instead, somehow we went down a rabbit hole about postsecondary being a bad thing, and I don't really understand that part. All right. I mean, heaven forbid people go to school and learn things.

I'll focus on some things that I think are kind of important. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's food system is one of our province's greatest assets. It spans primary production, processing, distribution, and retail, and it feeds millions of people not only in Alberta but beyond our provinces. Agriculture contributes billions to Alberta's GDP and supports tens of thousands of jobs in rural communities. From grain to beef to dairy to produce Alberta farmers are the backbone of our economy and of our food security. But their system is under strain because of shrinkflation. We look at input costs, for example. Fertilizer, fuel, feed prices have surged dynamically in recent years. Farmers are paying more to grow and to raise food, and those costs ripple through our supply chain.

Processing bottlenecks. Alberta relies heavily on centralized processing facilities where global supply chains falter, and we feel it right here at home. An example of this, Mr. Speaker, would be if we look at our beef industry. Obviously, we know input costs have gone through the roof when it comes to feed. We've had droughts. We've had a significant amount of impact. When those cattle go to market, they are paid a certain price at market when they're at the auction. They move from the auction to our slaughterhouses. They immediately have an inflationary impact when they go to slaughter. Once they leave slaughter, they move to our grocery suppliers, where we see a third inflationary impact.

Alberta farmers are not feeling that inflation. They are not feeling the price return back at their farm gate. The inflation that Albertans are paying at the grocery store does not go back to our local producers. That is fundamentally the problem that my colleague is trying to address with this conversation. How do we look at the inflationary impacts that our producers are having right here at home when they're not benefiting from it? Albertans are paying more and Albertans are getting less, whether they're producers or whether they're consumers, and we need to fix that problem.

5:20

For the government to say that it's not our issue: they are faultily wrong in that assertion. We need to look at our supply chain. We need to look at the fact that we know every single member on the government side: they represent rural, or so they tell me all of the time. They hear this dialogue. They know about input cost and how much it costs to produce our food and they're not getting it back at the gate, yet we don't hear this government standing up and talking about that. We hear them saying: blame the feds. Come on. Let's figure out a way to get more money in the pocket of rural Albertans and our producers and less in big business, where it's not coming back to Albertans and it's not coming back to consumers.

We know we have a handful of major grocery chains that dominate the market. We recognize this. It's giving them leverage basically over making our producers be price takers. We need to fix the model. We could be looking at butcher capacity here in Alberta. We could be looking at small abattoirs and being able to do that right here. Local business, small business. Let's support the small communities in rural Alberta instead of supporting big corporate, like the JBSes of the world. That's a hundred per cent within the purview of this province. That money not only supports a small business; it supports a beef producer that then supports an Albertan that can buy their groceries for a little bit less.

It's not a hard problem to solve and it's not a federal problem, but the lack of creativity on that side when it comes to being able to do this blows my mind. They're supposed to be the side that talks about business, yet they haven't created a single business in six years. Right? Like, there is a lack of understanding around what can happen because that would mean policy shifts. [interjections] I know the members opposite are talking. Stand up and give us some solutions to the problem, Minister.

The Speaker: Through the chair, please. Members on the other side would do well to let the speaker who has the floor speak, and the speaker would do well to go through the chair with her speaking.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The other piece of this is that we actually know that the food bank demand in our province has skyrocketed: 210,000 visits per month, up by 134 per cent since 2019. The food bank came out last week and said: "You know what would be a solution to our food crisis? Being able to support producers, to bring their beef to the food bank and be able to have a subsidy to support us to do slaughter." It would save food banks \$10,000 in Medicine Hat alone. It's a great solution to the problem. You know whose purview that is? The province's. Not the federal government; the province. It would give good Alberta beef to every single Albertan in that community that's accessing a food bank. That seems like a good strategy and a good solution. Again, not a federal problem. But, you know, every single time this government doesn't want to deal with an issue, it becomes a federal issue. It just absolutely blows my mind that we can't do that.

The other piece is that we do need to have a better understanding of why this inflationary cost has gone up and why it is that all of this is being transferred onto the consumer. That can happen with an inquiry. They could just do an economic analysis, I guess. We could just start there. If the government doesn't want to do an inquiry because that's a problem, even though we just had I think the Alberta town hall where they were travelling the province for a while and telling progressives to sit down and, unless you agree with me, don't say anything – like, this government is really good at panels, really good at travelling the province unless they don't want to talk about the issue. But this is an issue that Albertans actually want to talk about, and they want to know the answer.

If the government doesn't want to do that, then just do an economic analysis. They have the information. They have the data. We know how much inflationary costs have gone up in the province. We know how much input costs have gone through the province. The government just needs to look at the payouts through AFSC, through AgriStability and AgriRecovery, to know what those offsets look like and then figure out how much of that is actually being transferred to the average Albertan at the grocery store.

There are other innovative things they could be doing. They could be supporting our horticulture industry and looking at building more greenhouses so that we can grow more here and sell more here so that we're not importing more here. It also creates jobs. It also uses energy. We know we've got tons of it. We can heat greenhouses. It's not that hard. We have the technology to do it. Big Marble in Medicine Hat: again, a prime example of that innovation.

Mr. Nally: Speak about the motion.

Ms Sweet: The government really doesn't like the fact that I am speaking to the motion but it's not actually going the way they thought it would because they didn't think we could stand up and have this conversation. So I am speaking to the motion.

This is all about bringing down costs for Albertans. The energy costs alone is a conversation that this government could be standing up and – how are you bringing down the cost for Albertans to heat their homes? We're entering winter, yet we don't have the openness and transparency to know what's going on. In fact, I would caution the government to say that their new bill under Bill 8 is actually going to increase costs to Albertans. Auto insurance is another prime example. The solution that the government is providing isn't

going to work, and they know it's not going to work, so they don't want to talk about it.

It's not a federal issue. It's a lack of the province being able to say: "Oh, my goodness. We need to do something to support Albertans to bring down their costs, but, uh-oh, we have no idea how to. Instead, we'll just try to deflect. We'll keep deflecting, and we'll keep blaming Ottawa until we get an MOU." Then all of a sudden everything is okay for five minutes, and then it's Ottawa's fault again. Like, it just absolutely blows my mind that the government will stand up and say, "We have to work in collaboration," and then we have a motion here that's like, "Let's look at this problem; let's figure it out; let's support Albertans," and the government is like: nope; no. Every single time the answer is no because it's the opposition. Heaven forbid we have a good idea. The government just can't handle good ideas. It's always got to be no.

I have a lot of suggestions, clearly, of things that could happen that could support not only our producers but bring down costs for Albertans, to be great job creators, and support their constituents in rural Alberta. I'd be more than happy to have those conversations.

With that, I will sit down.

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

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to Motion 505. Shrinkflation is indeed being felt the world over as people struggle with the cost of living. The cost of groceries and household products hits home. The monthly grocery bill is a significant item in the household budget, and costs have been rising faster than other items.

While it is clear the UCP doesn't believe in public inquiries – if they did, there would have been a public inquiry into corrupt care – they do however believe in expanding bureaucracy, with 90 per cent of their caucus now in quasi-cabinet but not real cabinet members, so they have to find a way to give themselves a raise. They sure know how to show Albertans that they care about themselves.

In October overall inflation rose at 2.4 per cent year over year while groceries were up over 4 per cent. With groceries and food comprising up to 20 per cent of the household budget, this is significant. People are frustrated. I know that in Calgary-Foothills the rising cost of groceries and affordability is at the top of the list for conversations with my constituents, and I know my caucus colleagues are hearing the same thing with their constituents. While this government may have been telling people their grocery prices will go down once the federal government has fixed the problem in taking away the carbon tax, that didn't happen. The price of food continues to rise and at a faster pace than other goods and services, Mr. Speaker.

Right here in Alberta more people are facing food insecurity than ever. Too many Albertans are stating that they are wondering how they're going to buy groceries, with families making choices between paying the mortgage, paying the rent, paying for auto insurance so they can get to work, and putting food on the table.

At the same time, this government is presiding over stagnating wages. Alberta is the only province where, since the UCP was elected in 2023, people have seen their purchasing power decline. Workers in Alberta are earning less today than two years ago. While this happens, we can take note that the government refuses to increase minimum wage while they increase the wages for parliamentary secretaries.

Albertans are already angry about the rising costs of groceries, Mr. Speaker. Shrinkflation makes them even angrier. Shrinkflation isn't just contributing to people paying more at the till; it is deliberately deceitful. Manufacturers and large retailers are consciously hiding price increases by shrinking the amount of what

is sold in that package for the same price, kind of like the UCP hiding little bits and odds and sods in the Financial Statutes Amendment Act.

5:30

I talk about this for large retailers, not just manufacturers, because companies like Costco, Walmart, Loblaws, Sobeys, Safeway control the supply chain. They have goods manufactured and packaged for them. In many cases the retailer controls the size of the packaging sold in their stores. This is particularly true for private-label items such as Kirkland, Walmart, President's Choice, Compliments, and many more, all made specifically to the retailer's request.

Mr. Speaker, unless you're paying close enough attention to the label on the shelf, that shows the price per volume or price per weight, and somehow remember what that number was the last time you were in the grocery store, a week ago, a month ago, you wouldn't know that that price is increasing. Unless you still have that identical item in your home when you bring the new package home and you notice the size difference from your previous purchase to the purchase you just made, you wouldn't know that the price is incrementally increasing.

This is a conscious choice by retailers and manufacturers, a conscious choice to hide their price increases because they know that people are struggling and they are angry that the prices of food and what they pay at the grocery store is going up. Mr. Speaker, people want honesty, they want transparency. At least if you're going to increase the price by 15 per cent, tell them. Why are you hiding it?

As recorded by the CBC, probably a Laurentian elite organization, someone who normally purchases sugar for the family baking – Walmart reduced the standard package from 2 kg to 1.5 kg while keeping the price the same. Only after public pressure did Walmart acknowledge that they changed the packaging size and that the price was increasing. At least people now can see that the price is going up. They know where they can direct their anger. They can also be looking for other products, other retailers that may be selling the same package size and where the prices have not changed as much.

You know, Mr. Speaker, given the introduction of American-style health care through Bill 11, you'd think that the UCP would be paying attention to American news because this news is being reported in the U.S., where grandmas are no longer buying cake mix because the volume in their packet no longer matches their recipes. To add a little bit of levity to the conversation, community potlucks all over, leading up to the holidays, aren't going to have the same cakes and cookies because the grandmas aren't buying the cake mix, and they're not making the cakes and cookies for the potluck.

Governments everywhere are ignoring this challenge, just like the UCP will choose to ignore this challenge. People are asking for legislation and inquiries, Mr. Speaker. An Ipsos poll conducted a survey of 25,000 adults in 33 countries; 48 per cent of respondents said that shrinkflation was unacceptable. In Canada 64 per cent of those respondents felt that shrinkflation was unacceptable, among the highest in the world. Only Türkiye and France noted higher responses.

There are some governments overseas that are beginning to respond and to protect their residents against shrinkflation. Maybe they did a public inquiry first; maybe they just, you know, boldly went out and did something that would help their citizens. Brazil has mandated manufacturers to declare volume or weight reductions since 2022. This year Hungary and South Korea will do the same. In Europe, Mr. Speaker, since the UCP is now comparing

themselves to European social democracies, France is bringing forward something similar for the European Union to adopt.

Alberta could be a leader, Mr. Speaker, not a leader in unemployment or wage stagnation but a leader in addressing affordability. Helping Albertans understand about changing prices and shrinkflation, looking at the supply chain: no other province has addressed this, and Alberta could be the first.

People are angry about shrinkflation. They are struggling with affordability. They are struggling with food insecurity. As the government refuses to support policy that would help people with affordability such as increasing minimum wage, they could at least work towards informing Albertans about shrinkflation, understanding the supply chain, looking at ways to fix the problem and make things better.

The UCP might not believe in transparency for themselves, but this motion is an opportunity to support transparency in the supply chains, in the food system, in grocery retailing by putting shrinkflation in the spotlight through a public inquiry; understanding more fully the supply chains; working with retailers, manufacturers, producers in understanding real solutions to address affordability; improving our economy; creating local jobs; and making groceries more affordable in grocery stores.

I know that everybody on this side of the House is going to support this motion, and it's a struggle for me to understand why the opposite side of the House would not. Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret that affordability is top of mind for all Albertans. The prices for many everyday products and services have increased noticeably over the past five years, resulting in the tightening of family budgets across the province. Whether it's food from the grocery store or gas from the pump, housing and rental costs, people are feeling the squeeze of inflation almost everywhere. I've had many people tell me of the pressure they and their families have been facing to balance the books, and it's always heartbreaking to hear their stories.

While the underlying causes can be debated until the cows come home, the reality is that prices continue to rise, and citizens are increasingly looking to governments for relief. Naturally, the opposition has seized a justifiable concern and attempted to politicize it with this motion before us, Motion 505.

Motion 505 is calling on the government to start a public inquiry into shrinkflation and skimpflation. These terms are general slang terms that relate to inflationary pressures that unfortunately have no direct application to the Alberta Consumer Protection Act, or the CPA. Yes, you heard that right: this motion is completely performative, Mr. Speaker, and is indeed a political distraction that recommends zero concrete action to support affordability and protect consumers. In fact, a public inquiry would cost taxpayers millions, take years, and result in no meaningful action to combat shrinkflation and skimpflation. It is simply needless.

There are already strong and effective consumer protections in Alberta that hold businesses to high standards. If Albertans feel that a business has engaged in deceptive or misleading advertising or labelling with respect to size, quantity, or quality of a product, they can file a complaint with our consumer investigations unit for action. This then starts a process for investigation into the complaint. If any wrongdoing is found, enforcement actions are posted online to ensure the public is aware of which businesses to avoid. It's a good system, Mr. Speaker. With the existing framework, citizens are in the driver's seat. It punishes bad actors within the system and allows

Albertans to keep their rights as consumers support businesses that play fair and boycott those that break the rules.

They are now proposing a government initiative that is unlikely to deliver meaningful results and risks portraying free enterprise in a negative light. In fact, the whole charade that Motion 505 is is so performative and useless it would make even their failing national party comrades proud. I'm proud to be part of a party and a government that helps our citizens instead of trying to fool them with nonsense politics, that does nothing except waste this Assembly's time.

5:40

While the opposition has been working to deliver this truly fruitless motion, this government has been working to make life better for Albertans. This includes a new tax cut, saving each person an average of \$750, or \$1,500 for a family, while we're implementing a faster, better, and more reliable care-first auto insurance system to decrease insurance costs. We are helping rural and remote Albertans, including Indigenous communities, from higher home heating costs through the natural gas rebate program and remote area heating allowance. We have made publicly funded addiction treatment available at no cost across the province by removing the NDP's \$1,240-a-month user fees. This government has invested more than \$31 million to support food security since 2021 for Albertans in need, including \$5 million in Budget 2025. Actions like this and many others have been part of this government's agenda since day one, and we will continue to deliver real results to Albertans, not just politically provocative motions.

These are the actions of a government that cares for Albertans, Mr. Speaker. These are the actions of a government with a plan. Their focus appears to be more on political theatre than developing substantive policy solutions. This is why they have to distract and table legislation like Motion 505, trying desperately to prove that they are able to offer solutions as well. They've been stealing every terrible idea from the Liberal think tanks and throwing them at the wall hoping one will stick, but Albertans can see right through their virtue signalling, and they have absolutely no appetite for Laurentian elite posturing from the opposition.

They can see that the government is focused on Albertans, not on winning favour with the intellectual class roaming the halls of UBC. Instead of playing political theatre, our government will continue to make life more affordable and continue to use and enhance the tools we have to ensure that no one gets ripped off. On top of that, we are offering real relief to Albertans through a multitude of programs designed to support those who are struggling to pay the bills.

This is good governance, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House we are aware of the pressures of inflation and how it's been affecting everyday Albertans. Inflation is a serious issue, and it has to be at the top of mind for this government as we bring Alberta into the future. This government has been at the forefront of delivering smart, targeted action to help those who need it most, allowing more individuals and families to keep more of their paycheques in their pocket. This is what we were elected to do. That is what we've always been doing, and that's what we will always continue to do.

We will not stoop to the level of the members opposite, who constantly virtue signal and pontificate without offering any real solutions to the problems of the day. Motion 505 is yet another example of the typical blame-and-complain politics of the members opposite. With a rigorous system of checks and balances on the corporate advertising power already in place, it is completely nonsensical to support this motion and the expensive and costly public inquiry that would follow.

Please let us all stop wasting time on this unnecessary motion and get back to the real problems of the day and how best to solve them.

To the hon. members of this Assembly: I urge you all to vote no to Motion 505.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion 505; shrinkflation. I want to thank the MLA for Calgary-Buffalo for this motion. It's evident that the MLA for Calgary-Buffalo – no, not Calgary-Buffalo; that's me. Calgary-Elbow. I was just going to say some nice things about the Member for Calgary-Buffalo . . .

An Hon. Member: You still can.

Member Ceci: I still will.

It's evident that the Member for Calgary-Elbow is listening to his constituents. I am, too. Indeed, he's voicing the concerns with this motion that my constituents have shared with me when I door-knock, Mr. Speaker, and, of course, take their calls and their messages and their e-mails. I dare say that Albertans generally are voicing these same concerns with regard to shrinkflation and skimpflation. I think that the reason – I can't speak for the Member for Calgary-Elbow, but I can tell you this. When I door-knock in single-family communities that I represent – I represent about 75,000 to 80,000 constituents, Mr. Speaker, and not all of those are in single-family communities. There are significant towers, and the density is going up and up and up all the time in Calgary-Buffalo. But when I go around to the single-family doors and I knock on them, the most frequent concern that is voiced to me by those people behind those doors is about their grocery bills.

One constituent relayed the view that, you know, they used to be able to go to the grocery store and cover the back seat of their car with bags and bags of groceries, and now they can barely put three bags in the back seat that are partially filled for the same amount of money. They say that \$100 only buys them a couple or three days of groceries, and they're concerned about those things. They want to know what I can do, and I remind them that government can do many things. We talked about some of those things.

They can look at the cost of car insurance. When we were government, we capped it and kept it at 5 per cent and worked with the industry. Unfortunately, we didn't get to the end of that road with them, but there are also things like rent. Rents can be addressed by government. The costs of postsecondary institutions, utilities, child care, increasing minimum wage: there are many things government can do, but that doesn't get directly to the cost of groceries and shrinkflation and skimpflation.

I remind them that there was federal government work done around competition and anticompetition practices that were brought before the federal committees to talk about. I remember that the heads of different grocery companies were speaking about what their views were about all of that, and I think what the Member for Calgary-Elbow is doing with this motion is that he's going one better. He's trying to say: let's address these things right here in our backyard; let's talk to the people here.

You know, further down in the motion he talks about a commissioner who can oversee a public inquiry, and I know people on the other side said that that public inquiry would be years long and millions of dollars. I don't think they've seen a public inquiry on that side that was years long and millions of dollars. I think their practice is to do quick-and-dirty public inquiries that don't really get to the heart of anything because of the limitations placed on the commissioners or the judges or whatever.

Mr. Speaker, the Public Inquiries Act of 2000, that is being referenced here by the Member for Calgary-Elbow, is really

interesting, and I took a look at it. It talks about the ability to compel witnesses and get them to testify in front of the commissioners. You know, I just think about what Albertans would want. They would want to know more about why the costs of groceries are skyrocketing the way they are, or why those same groceries are getting smaller all the time and they're paying the same amount.

Mr. Speaker, I do hear the other side talking about the things they've done, and one of the things they've done is that \$5 million has gone towards food banks in this province. I just want to remind people on the other side that food banks aren't the answer. They're addressing a problem. They're not addressing the root cause of that issue, which is that people don't have enough money, and they'll have more money if government actually did some things that help people out.

Food banks, as my colleague from Calgary-Elbow was saying, were to be a short-term solution back in the – it started right here in Edmonton. Everybody knows that story, I think, that food banks were started by a gentleman who went on to become a Liberal either MP or minister for a while, federally. Food banks are a way to address food insecurity, but the better way of addressing food insecurity is making sure that people have enough money in their pockets to feed their families, and that comes from government actually taking action on things that they can control.

5:50

In the meantime this motion talks about wanting to address the thing that I hear when I door-knock. People say a lot of things. You know, they say: what are you going to do about this, that, or the other thing? I try and say: well, this is not something a provincial government can look at. And they say: "That's not right. We want to know why the costs of groceries are going up so much. We want to know how to make sure that we can afford groceries for the long term for our families."

I absolutely think the mover of this motion has it right. You know, when so many people are going hungry in this province, so many people don't have the necessities to purchase groceries on a regular basis, we should not be saying that the answer is food banks. We should be trying to look at solutions that we can bring to the problem, and the problem is that groceries are too expensive.

Now, I'm fortunate. I'm part of a household that has a double income. We notice the . . .

Ms Chapman: An elderly income.

Member Ceci: I'm part of an elderly household that has a double income. No, that's not true.

We notice the cost of groceries going up. We're more fortunate in our household than most, I think, in this province.

We need to do something. The mover of the motion has a solution on the table. It won't cost millions of dollars and be years long, unless the government gets a hold of it, and then those sorts of things will happen. They refuse to look at what the problems are, and, you know, give money to a food bank or the food bank association in this province instead of addressing the real costs of the issues, which is that people don't have enough money.

Mr. Speaker, the mover, Calgary-Elbow, has listened to his constituents. He is speaking for my constituents and, I think, many people generally who say that there is just too little money at the end of the month, and they have too many bills. One of the ways we can address those bills is by looking at the cost of food, which is probably right around the biggest or second-biggest cost families

have each month after they look at their rents or mortgages or home costs.

Mr. Speaker, the grocery prices aren't going to come down on their own. The consumer price index in this province is going higher and higher and higher, and we need to take action. That's what this private member's motion – which is our right for one day a week, and that's Monday, to bring forward these private member's motions. People on the other side may not like it, but we have that right and opportunity, and we will take that right and opportunity every Monday to rise and to speak to the needs of Albertans and address them in that way.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Taber-Warner, you've got about a minute.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be really brief, and that is to say that I'm not surprised to see that a motion from the opposition is to hire another bureaucrat to be able to fix a problem. That is not the problem. The problem that can be fixed is through the private sector being able to drive the price down. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the private sector has been proven for a long time to be able to actually drive the price down. It's usually when governments get involved that the price actually is driven up. This is what we've seen for the past few years, especially throughout the world. [interjections] The reality is that they really should be listening to this because they'd probably learn a few things, which is that the private sector . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Think of the person that has the floor.

Mr. Hunter: . . . has been more effective at being able to drive the price down because of competition. Competition will drive the price down.

The Speaker: Now we should all be listening to the mover of the motion, from Calgary-Elbow, who has five minutes to close.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the other side I've heard a couple of things; one is that it's a waste of time and money. What I haven't heard is a single shred of empathy for the plight of Albertans who are struggling . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the private member has time to close, and it's something he's waited for. Let's give him the five minutes, please.

Member Kayande: . . . with the high cost of groceries and struggling to figure out how to feed their kids. On this side of the House we care about that, and that's why we want to find out what's going on.

Basically, according to the government, if you're unhappy with the cost of groceries, go to the food bank. File a complaint. It's never what's illegal that's a scandal. It's what's legal. How much is competition being reduced by slotting, pay-to-stay, and other nontransparent fees? How is coupon, point-of-sale, or e-mail receipt data used to reduce competition and increase prices? What's the risk of further price-fixing in this industry that's already been subjected to legendary price-fixing conspiracies in lysine, in citric acid, and, most shockingly of all, bread. That's anticompetitive, and we need a public inquiry to get to the bottom of anticompetitive practices that increase prices on Albertans.

What's the impact of restrictive covenants on competition where a grocer can close a store and prevent another grocer from opening at that location, Mr. Speaker? That is a practice that exists and that this government wants to do nothing about. The 1-2-3 combination of inflation, shrinkflation, and skimpflation is a punch to the face of Albertans. The potential for anticompetitive behaviour in a supply chain dominated by monopolies is real and could be costing Albertans millions of dollars.

I'm proposing this motion because I care about high grocery costs, the high cost of feeding ourselves, and the children of this province, who deserve tasty and balanced diets at a reasonable cost. I know that everyone in this House wants cheaper groceries for Alberta families, Mr. Speaker. We just need to vote for this motion. Let's make it happen.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Elbow has moved Motion 505.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would propose that we adjourn the Assembly until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca