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The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

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Day 19

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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

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New Democrat: 38

Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 2, 2025

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. members, prior to adjourning for dinner this evening we had a point of order called. The Deputy Government House Leader called a point of order. I would ask if the deputy House leader would like to argue that point of order at this time.

Point of Order

Imputing False Motives

Mr. Williams: Happily, Mr. Speaker. I believe it's an easy one to dispose of. At the time, just before the Speaker hesitated to interrupt the Chamber's debate at six o'clock, we were debating a point of order that I had risen on where the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was speaking and had said that the UCP or the government and the Premier personally are taking away the fundamental human rights of Albertans. It's clearly a point of order when members invoke individuals that are allegedly doing something that is categorically inappropriate; if this is the case, to take away human rights. We do not believe that is the case. Of course, we would argue that, and if the member opposite were simply to withdraw and apologize for personalizing this against the Premier, we would be able to continue on the substantive debate, which I know we have a lot of tonight. Of course, just to be precise, this is imputing false motives, under 23(i), to the Premier.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Opposition.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We do now have the benefit of the Blues. The quote is: "Yet here we are. When we are talking about trans youth, all of a sudden the Premier and the UCP are taking away their fundamental rights." I think the first point worth noting here is that we are literally debating a bill that is using the constitutional mechanism available to the government to divest people of their constitutionally protected rights. In fact, I would say that "taking away their fundamental rights" is fairly polite language to describe what is happening. It's literally in the Constitution. This is the method the government has to divest people of their fundamental rights. They are using it.

The quote is, "the Premier and the UCP," very clearly a reference to the collective. Beyond the fact that it's a reference to the collective, even if it was just the Premier, even if she hadn't said, "the Premier and the UCP," if she had just said, "the Premier," it's not the member qua member. She didn't say, "the member." She said, "the Premier," clearly as the head of state, and the fact that she clarifies by going on to say "the UCP" is a clear reference to the fact that it is her in her official role as the head of state.

Mr. Speaker, if the UCP find the language to be insulting or to suggest an unavowed motive, then I might suggest that they withdraw the bill which is divesting people of their fundamental rights using, again, the very clearly recognized constitutional method to divest people of their constitutionally protected fundamental rights.

I mean, this isn't a point of order, Mr. Speaker, on three different grounds. I look forward to your ruling.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you for those presentations. I am going to provide caution here as opposed to providing – I'm not going to consider this a point of order. I will provide caution,

though, that it is a matter of debate, but the speaker did refer to the Premier as an individual within the context just prior to that, about what the Premier had said. So I'm not going to consider that it's not an attack on an individual member. I do consider this to be an attack on the Premier, as was identified earlier in the comments. "When the COVID-19 pandemic was under way, the Premier was deeply concerned that their rights were being denied," clearly talking about the individual. Later in the conversation, then, "the Premier and the UCP are taking away their fundamental rights." I would suggest to you that that is aligning with the fact that the Premier was identified.

Saying that, I do believe that this is a matter of debate and that it needs to be considered a matter of debate. We will not consider this a point of order and consider the matter dealt with and closed.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Bill 6

Education (Prioritizing Literacy and Numeracy) Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to provide any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to Bill 6? I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am here as a product of the public education system. It goes back so far as my parents were both public education teachers. Sharing a staff room is how the two of them met, so if it weren't for at that time St. Albert Protestant schools, now St. Albert public, I wouldn't be here. Then, of course, my parents both continued to teach throughout my childhood, sent me to the same public schools that they worked in. I feel like I had the opportunity to achieve a quality education. I never felt like my education was put second to any of my other peers because we were part of a universal public education system and one that at the time a lot of people were very proud of.

I have the honour of spending a lot of time with high school students, regularly getting invited to speak with them or some of them requesting meetings. Sometimes I meet with them on the steps of the Legislature at protests. I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that this year I have talked to zero high school students who tell me that they're planning on becoming teachers. I think probably the biggest reason is because of the political climate in this province today, a climate driven by an ideology, motivated by privatization, corporatization, profitization even when it comes to the well-being of our society through the public education system.

I have almost every day of this sitting tabled letters from parents, students, teachers who are outraged at the government's use of the notwithstanding clause, an intentional infringement, an acknowledgement that the government was choosing to infringe on the rights of teachers by ordering them back to work without a collective agreement and imposing one and imposing astronomical fines for any who wanted to exercise their right to refuse work. This is next level, Mr. Chair.

When I was a child, I also was dissuaded from choosing education as a career path by my parents, but I was a little bit stubborn, as some people might be shocked to hear in this House, and pursued education anyways, and I was really glad that I did. I took a bit of a scenic route, but when I did my education degree, one of the courses that I really enjoyed and did quite well in was a required assessment course. It was a core competency that every teacher in Alberta at that time needed.

Of course, assessment is about two things. It should be, number one, about informing your own practice so that you can find ways to amend your techniques to connect more with students. If you don't know if the students are gaining knowledge on the material, how do you know if your teaching methods are effective? Two, it was also to give that formative feedback to those students as well as summative at the end of the course so that you could say with confidence what percentage of the learning outcomes as directed by the province those students had actually attained. That is very foundational for being able to advance your way through the school system, being able to get into different postsecondary opportunities, Mr. Chair. Having good confidence that our educators have the skills that they need to be effective at doing assessment I couldn't agree with more.

What I do disagree with is the government's attempt to distract from their terrible record, especially over the last few months when it comes to lack of respect, even longer than a few months. It's been almost a year since educational assistants walked out of their workplace. I think Fort McMurray was in December, so almost exactly a year, Mr. Chair, and it was months before they actually were able to reach an agreement and go back to work. In that time students with disabilities were denied a basic education. In fact, the parents of those children had to go to court to say to the government that the government was neglecting their responsibilities to provide an education to their children. They had to take the government to court to make sure that their kids could actually go back to school, because so many students were sent away.

7:40

Now the minister says: oh, we had no idea how complex classrooms were. Mr. Chair, if the minister would talk to teachers, if he would talk to the teacher representatives, he would have no surprises because that's exactly why those educational assistants and admin assistants walked off the job last year. They wanted better working conditions and better compensation, and they deserve both, and so do teachers, to be quite frank. The reason why is because their working conditions are students' learning conditions. They deserve so much better, but under the UCP there is a desire to distract, deflect, and say: you know, if we have one more forced, mandatory test, that'll make everything better.

The other thing I want to say is that the best thing a teacher can do, especially at the beginning of the year, is form relationships with students. When you're focusing so much of your effort on doing upfront assessments at the beginning of the year instead of getting to know students' names, getting to understand the dynamics of the classroom, building that trusting relationship, it really impedes the ability to be an effective teacher and to develop those power bases in your classroom when you are spending all of your time jumping through hoops at the beginning of the year.

The government after forcing teachers back to school also came up with new tracking tools that they asked every teacher to go through and fill out and report to the government on to help inform the minister of how overcrowded classrooms were and how complex the role of being a teacher and an educational assistant is today. I will say that system crashed multiple times in the first few days because teachers were willing to share this information. It was yet another burden put on them after being forced back to work, but they were willing to report on that information if it would make a difference.

This bill does nothing to make a difference, Mr. Chair. This bill simply adds more requirements for more standardized testing at a time when teachers, parents, children, educational assistants, administrators – oh, my goodness. Everyone just wants more resources in the classroom.

The government, the UCP very intentionally over the last six years, instead of having proper funding and having the funding follow the student, which once upon a time they used to claim to support, brought in something that they chose to call the weighted moving average, which meant that you wouldn't actually be fully funded for the kids that were showing up in your classroom until three years after they showed up. You would only get a portion of the funding for the kids that were there that year and some funding for the kids that were there the year before and some funding for the kids who were there the year before. So in a province that's growing – and particularly, I represent school divisions that are growing very rapidly in my riding – the funding was far short of the per-capita funding that schools saw under the NDP government.

Mr. Chair, what I will say is that I am pro assessment, particularly when it's done in an informed way with teachers at the table helping to develop it. That is, I think, a far stretch from where this bill lands. I am pro using data to make informed decisions. The UCP has done the opposite. Instead of tracking and reporting class sizes, which we always did in this province, one of the first things they did is say: we're not going to report on class sizes publicly anymore; we're just not going to do that. And then the minister comes into this place a few years later and says: oh, I had no idea it was as bad as it is.

Poppycock. Baloney. I'm trying to think of other lovely parliamentary ways of saying that, Mr. Chair. An embarrassment is what it really is, and I think that the minister knows that, too. I think that we all know that if the government wants something, they should measure it, they should track it, they should report it, and then they should fund it. Instead, what this government is doing through this bill is trying to distract everyone.

It is so frustrating that the government has tried to villainize teachers because what we need are more quality teachers. What we need is for students to see themselves reflected back to them. Windows and mirrors and doors are sort of the metaphor that's often used. They need to see themselves as leading in a school, as leading in society. They need to be reflected back in what they hear in that classroom, and they need to see an open path, a door for them to be able to walk through to be those leaders in our school system and in our society.

Instead I keep meeting with students who say: "Our teachers deserve so much better. I thought I might want to be one, but not anymore." That, to me, is probably one of the biggest atrocities of this government's focus on education: trying to villainize teachers, trying to use the notwithstanding clause against both teachers and students for the first time in Alberta's history. The UCP has done so against these vulnerable groups who are just trying to make tomorrow better than yesterday.

Mr. Chair, that's what public education does. It creates a pathway for every single one of us to achieve our fullest when it's done right. Our kids deserve so much better. I'm here to say that there are a lot of people in this Chamber fighting for better, and we know that it's possible, but Bill 6 is a long way from the tools that we need to get us there. What we really need is a government that shares those values and is willing to put public money behind the children who we're investing in.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any others wishing to speak? I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Every time I get an opportunity to talk about public education, I think I feel compelled to do so because the riding I represent has a significant number of people who are newcomers, and many of them have moved from all four corners of this globe in search of better opportunities and, in

particular, better education for their kids. As the Member for Edmonton-Glenora said, for many of us, in fact, for so many of us, public education is the only way to reach the full potential. That's true for so many in my riding. Every time I have an opportunity to interact with my constituents, be that at events, be that in my office, be that at town halls, which I usually do at the beginning of fall session, among many issues education is always something that parents will raise and that even students will raise. This year was also the same.

Many students who participated showed strong support for their teachers because at that time a teacher strike was still going on, and they were sharing concerns how their classrooms are overcrowded, how their classroom lacks support staff, and how their schools are so overcrowded that many schools do not have designated lunchrooms, many schools do not have designated libraries. Instead libraries are set up in their hallway.

Because there are so many students in their classroom, there were a number of other issues that were raised by students. These are the people who go to these schools. They were describing their own experience, their own experience with bullying, their own experience with aggression, their own experience with how they are not getting full attention from their teacher. Certainly that impacts their learning outcomes, and certainly that impacts their opportunity to reach their full potential.

I strongly believe that public education is an equalizer and public education is foundational to creating a fair society, a society where everyone has a fair chance. In order to make sure that everyone has a fair chance, we need to have a strong public education system that provides that fair chance. But now after forcing teachers back to schools, overcrowded classrooms, underfunded schools by using the notwithstanding clause, violating their rights to collective bargaining, violating their rights to strike, violating their rights to association, violating their rights to equality, the minister wants Albertans to believe that somehow the standardized testing will make a difference.

7:50

In order for these tests to work, I think we need to have, first, those conditions in our schools, create those learning environments in our schools that will make sure that our kids are learning at par with their peers in other jurisdictions, other developed countries' school systems. But here the government, whenever they are faced with challenges, for instance when people start complaining about classroom sizes, instead of doing something about it, instead of building new schools, instead of adding more teachers, adding more support staff, their solution was to stop collecting that data. Of course, now government doesn't have the data evidence – they may have that, I guess. It's not that difficult. Every school division knows how many students are there, but at least the government wants Albertans to believe that we are not collecting it, we don't know what the classroom sizes are. They will let the status quo prevail. It doesn't matter how hurtful, how harmful that is for kids' learning outcomes.

Again, making this change without adding any resources to our school system, without adding needed teachers, without adding needed support staff, without adding support for students with complex learning needs, students with disabilities, students with English as a second language: I don't think that adding the standardized testing makes any difference. We already know that our school system is in crisis. What we need to do instead of adding another standardized test, is to talk to experts. We need to talk to teachers, which they don't usually talk to or listen to. We know that our class sizes are ballooning. We know that our classes are more complex. We know that our classrooms are lacking supports. We

know that our classrooms are lacking support staff. We know in our many communities we are lacking schools.

For the last five years I have been advocating for new schools in our ridings, and ever since the Member for Calgary-North East was elected, I think every sitting, every session one thing that I do hear from him over and over is for a school in Redstone that basically, I guess, in 2019 I started advocating about, and still that school is sometimes in the design phase. Sometimes it's in the pre-design phase. Sometimes it's in the pre pre-design phase. Communities over there are still looking for a structure that they can call a school. I think from '19, if you just calculate six years, many students, many kids are now even just moving through the school system where they had been bused into different quadrants, which is also not helpful for their learning outcomes.

In northeast Calgary CBE issued a list of overflow schools, and not one school was in northeast Calgary, meaning that all schools in Calgary-North East were at capacity and kids from our communities, our ridings are bused to other quadrants for hours. That also impacts their learning outcomes.

I say that instead of these performative things, the minister should take public education seriously and the future of our children seriously and actually provide needed resources and supports in new schools where we need them so that every student in Alberta can have an excellent opportunity to learn in the public education system and have a fair shot of being successful and to reach their full potential.

With that, I would urge the minister to do better, and I will take my seat.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to address Bill 6 before us. I'd like to maybe chime in on some of the things I heard from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and my colleague from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. I am also the product of a public education system, a universal public education system, not of this province but from many years ago, where I went through elementary, junior high, and high school. We had the opportunity to go to private schools, but my parents chose the neighbourhood schools. We four in my family, you know, surpassed our parents. I guess that every parent wants their child to do better and be of an upstanding nature and do better than them in education, and that's what happened to me and my siblings. That was as a result of the really good education we all had.

I, like my colleagues, have tabled many, many letters in this House from teachers, parents, students who are incredibly upset at the actions of this government through the three and a half week teacher strike. Those letters say that they were wanting the government to do better and to get to the table and sort things out for students and teachers and families. Unfortunately, that didn't occur. What did occur was pretty egregious in my view in terms of government using the notwithstanding clause against teachers in a legal strike situation.

Bill 6, which is before us – and we have brought, of course, amendments to that bill in second reading – is a requirement for more standardized testing that many believe is a distraction from what is really required to fix the education system in this province, fixes like ensuring that we're not the lowest per-student funding in the entire country. We weren't there when the NDP government was the government from '15 to '19, but we certainly rapidly declined after 2019 with the removal of, I think it was, 20,000 education staff. Whether they be teachers, education assistants, administrators, support staff: gone from the education system. That

has an effect, and we're seeing that effect, Mr. Chair, today. We've seen it for several years.

The actions brought in by the government with regard to weighted averages, as others have said on this side, have left schools penalized in terms of those rapidly growing schools where many, many students would go in. I represent Calgary-Buffalo, downtown Calgary, the Beltline, the Mission area, and some subsequent other areas outside of that area. I can tell you that in those areas, the Beltline in particular, the west downtown, there is a tremendous influx of new Canadians because of the availability of housing, not always family-oriented housing but housing nonetheless.

In terms of the condo towers, 30, 40-story towers that are right across the street from my office, families move into them because there has been a lack of housing stock outside of that area, and many families start in that area. They go to a school called Connaught school in the Beltline. This year over the summer I saw portables move onto the playing field of Connaught. They were doing that because the school is bursting at the seams. It's the place that I bring those backpacks that we all get from a company that wants us to distribute and support children. Every year I go to the same school with the same number of backpacks because, just as I was saying, you know, they're bursting at the seams and many, many new Canadian families are going to that school. Their children go to that school. Big families.

8:00

Sometimes I get to walk the halls and go into classrooms and say hello to kids and maybe read a book or two. The most recent time I went there, there was a little boy sitting outside on a chair. The reason he couldn't go into the classroom is that he wasn't, kind of, socialized in the way he needed to be in the classroom and to achieve, so he was outside the classroom. The thing that struck me is that what would have really helped him out on a daily basis is an education assistant, somebody who could be with him and help him learn English as well as help him learn the kind of mores of what he's supposed to be doing.

I don't want to read too much into this because I didn't spend a great deal of time with him, but talking to the teacher and the assistant principal a little bit about his situation, the underfunding of the school system meant that he couldn't achieve the best he could in that school system and in learning. That's incredibly disheartening, I guess. His capacity is not being fully utilized, and what would help him out is not in Bill 6.

Bill 6, as some around this table have said, is a distraction from what is really needed. What is really needed is a way to address the complexity. I would say he's a fairly challenging young student and has some complex learning needs, but that's not what he's getting. That's not what this bill will offer him. The bill is a distraction from fixing the public education system as we know it.

The other thing that would help out many, many students is putting caps on the number of kids who are in that class. As I said, that school in particular is bursting at the seams. They've got portables out on the playing field, which reduces the size of the playing field but allows teachers to spread out a little more.

I just want to point out a few things that stakeholders have said about Bill 6, particularly the Alberta Teachers' Association. They note that, Bill 6 is "nothing more than government bureaucracy" and extra work for teachers who have already full workloads. They were on strike for two things: complex class size assistance and caps on classrooms. To really improve literacy and numeracy, that would be the best way to do that, address the needs that the teachers believe need to be put in place: make sure that we're not the lowest funded per student in the country, invest in public education, invest

in our future, and do that before Bill 6, do that before all of the other bad bills that are brought before us get passed.

We need to have a government that addresses the needs, not continues to bring forward bills that purport to do things but really are further evidence of a government that does not believe in its citizenry, the students, and wants to address their needs.

With that, I'll take my seat and we'll see the next person get up. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Bill 6 is a distraction and honestly, in my view, it's a bit of an offensive one to be perfectly honest. The UCP came in. They stopped measuring class sizes and complexity. They asked folks to stop reporting on the data, and then, ultimately, their response to massively increased class size and complexity and public protest on that was to say: we'll have a committee to think about maybe looking at that.

They don't need a committee, Mr. Chair. They could just look at their inboxes. The fact that the minister of education can claim that this is all new to him, that he had no idea that class has become so – like, look at your inbox. I see you on CCed on the e-mails. I know you've received them. This is, honestly I would call it weaponized incompetence.

What is Bill 6 a distraction from? Well, it's a distraction from basically everything else that's happening in education. It's a distraction from the classroom conditions that they're doing absolutely nothing about. This will create busywork. It will create a bunch of busywork for overburdened teachers. It will do absolutely nothing to address the actual problems we have.

Mr. Chair, there's been a lot of talk about fundamental rights in this Chamber, and I understand that education is not a fundamental right, that the right to a public education is not a fundamental right, but in my view it ought to be. I think it ought to be. I think that these students, some of these students with learning differences that are being thrown into these massive complex classrooms with no EAs, are being denied a right to an education. This bill, which is an attempt to distract from that fact, to pretend that the government cares when they don't, is a bit offensive.

It's also a distraction from what just happened. We saw the largest teachers strike in the history of the province, and we saw a government that moved immediately upon reconvening the Legislature to come in and force teachers back to work. They rammed the legislation through the House using closure. They used a motion that had never been used before in this House, and, ultimately, those teachers were advocating on these very same classroom conditions, the very same classroom conditions that this government claims that this bill will be doing something about. I mean, Mr. Chair, I don't know how they can claim that. It's transparently obvious that this will do nothing to address the actual problem. They removed teachers' rights, but further within the bill, Mr. Chair, they removed their ability to advocate on this issue. There are massive fines for them for advocating further on this issue.

Mr. Chair, I do believe that education should be a right and that the government should respect it and they are not. Teachers in fact had rights. They had the right to stand up and complain about the classroom conditions. They had a right to advocate on behalf of their students, and the government revoked that right from them. The public had a right to see this government's legislation, to have time to digest it, and this government revoked that right, too.

This is a bill that will do nothing, that is insulting to teachers, to parents, to students, to the public generally, and it is a distraction. It's a distraction from the very real problems that this government

absolutely refuses to address. I would urge all members to vote against it.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This government insists that Bill 6 is about improving literacy and numeracy, but what it actually does is create a legally mandated testing regime that diverts precious time, money, and energy away from what matters in classrooms. It undermines teachers. It overwhelms families, and it restricts children to numbers instead of giving them the support they need. This bill is not about learning; it's about compliance.

You know what, Mr. Chair? I used to work in many different schools across this province, in Calgary, in Edmonton and, of course, my favourite place was in Mini Thni. I spent years as an acting vice-principal, as a teacher, and I started as a rehabilitation assistant supporting children with special needs back when inclusion mattered and investment followed.

8:10

I am also a mother who has spent decades navigating the system for my own children, children with complex needs who have been diagnosed with cognitive developmental disabilities. Let me tell you: they were failed repeatedly by underfunding, overcrowded classrooms, and complete absence of support. It's not just what I've experienced in my own life. It's also what the research and real classrooms tell us. Students need supports, not mandated screeners. They need classroom supports, resources, and respect.

This bill is embarrassing, particularly since Alberta students are funded at the lowest level in the country. That itself is a clear indication of how this UCP government values children and families. They simply don't. If this government did, it would be proudly bragging to the world that we are the highest funded in Canada, which would be a logical thing since we are the richest province. Somehow, Mr. Chair, the math just is not adding up.

What we are witnessing is classrooms in my constituency and, as we've heard, everywhere else in Alberta, that they are bursting with complexity, no supports, no room. The library is a makeshift classroom. There's no more indoor gym in another. The list truly goes on and on. I've seen the e-mails and the phone calls. I know that the minister has also gotten these because I've been CCed on many, and I'm summarizing quite kindly, to be honest, Mr. Chair.

If this government is not going to listen to parents or teachers, how about some peer-reviewed research? I mean, I did a quick academic search, and what I discovered is overwhelmingly the same thing. Smaller class sizes improve literacy and numeracy outcomes significantly for early grade students and marginalized learners, more educational assistants improve outcomes especially for children with disabilities and English language learners, and screening and repeated standardized testing do not improve outcomes.

Mr. Chair, as a mother, I know exactly what endless testing does without supports to a child. It is devastating. I know what testing procedures do. I have lived it, deeply and painfully. When my children struggled, they were clearly not being supported in classrooms that were too full and underresourced. I did what every parent is going to do. I got them tested. I got them tested again and again and again. I spent thousands of dollars that I as a single mother did not have to spare on private assessments because the system offered no timely support or relief. What did all that testing do? It confirmed exactly what every teacher knew, what every educational assistant knew, and any parent spending time with my children already knew: there was a problem, but testing did not fix

the problem. Testing did not give them resources, and it did not make the classroom safe or accessible. It did not change a single thing; it simply labelled them. When those children made their way into postsecondary, the failures followed them. Supports are still scarce. Accommodations are inconsistent. Barriers remain high.

When this government insists that testing will improve outcomes, I wholeheartedly disagree. I know with absolute clarity that testing does not help children. What helps children are supports in a classroom. Investment helps children. Human beings in classrooms help children. That is what helps children. Testing children with a diagnosis without treatment is not help; without a plan is not help; without investment is not help.

What Bill 6 does is legislate diagnosis without a guarantee of any treatment. It's not policy, it's pure and utter negligence, the vicious compliance kind of negligence.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Happy to stand and provide a few more remarks about Bill 6. The first thing that I will provide everyone in this House tonight is a quote from a parent I have a great deal of respect for. I ran across her in actually a journal and she, like my colleague who just spoke, is a mom of a special needs child. She comes from B.C. One of the things that she talks about is the fact that B.C., much like Manitoba, much like here, much like other places around North America, are looking at literacy screeners with the hope that those screeners will somehow miraculously improve literacy results for particularly our young and most vulnerable learners.

One of the things that she says – and I think it's one of the most important things I've read in terms of the research that I've done before speaking to this bill. Here's what she says, Mr. Chair: being screened is not the same thing as being supported.

It's pretty simple, Mr. Chair. What it means is the screener might point you in a particular direction, but that screener will not by itself confirm gaps, nor will it diagnose what's going on underneath, nor will it help the teacher to write that individualized program plan, nor will it help the teacher to actually program for whatever is going on underneath, whether it's a tiny little gap in literacy, in understanding and knowledge and comprehension, or whether it is something different like a learning disability.

Teachers do not at all dispute that the screeners have a place, but if this government is going to be asking teachers, which it absolutely is in this bill, to offer up multiple times a year screeners instead of actually teaching, instead of actually instructing children in the curriculum, which they are, of course, legally mandated to instruct them in, then we're just wasting our children's and our teachers' and our parents' time, quite frankly, Mr. Chair. The reason we are wasting all of the time, particularly for the people who are really at the heart of all of these discussions, the kids of this province, is because we simply do not have in place the conditions to allow for the intervention, which will be the thing that will actually work. It doesn't exist. It didn't exist when I was in a school two years ago, and it certainly doesn't exist now. In fact, it's even worse than it was not two years ago.

In order for that screener to work, there needs to be someone behind that screener who can interpret it appropriately, and then there needs to be someone else behind that person who then, if people agree, can do a different sort of assessment, a formal assessment that will give you the actual diagnosis. Once you get that actual diagnosis, then you need to have the team meet. Theoretically, it should be a team made up of both health care specialists as well as education specialists as well as the child him

or herself as well as the teacher because that will provide the most fulsome response in terms of intervention, Mr. Chair.

After that, after that IPP is done, then you have to have resources. Resources include people. Resources include things like specialized programs that can run off of iPads, things like LAMP or TouchChat, which help children to read and to write and to express themselves in different ways when that's what they need to do. You might need specialized equipment. You might need specialized books and other reading materials. You might need to do a one-on-one intervention or a small-group intervention with a particular group of children, in which case you, again, need people.

This government has committed to something like "Yes, we will hire 3,000 teachers," but the trouble is that's really just kind of making up who's already going to be gone in the next year or two. None of those 3,000 teachers will be new teachers to the educational system. It's committed to hiring 1,000 EAs over the next three or four years. Exactly the same situation. Without the people who are trained, without the paraprofessionals, without the psychologists, without the speech-language pathologists – and right now, Mr. Chair, in Alberta we have fewer speech-language pathologists per capita now than we did six years ago. There are not enough SLPs to do the assessments that are already required right now.

This is a failing of this government, and, like my colleagues before me, this is indeed nothing but a distraction. It will in the end not help our kids learn. It will not get the desired result because we are still living with an educational system that is grossly underfunded and has been for years since this government came into being in 2019.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to take you into the kindergarten classroom in Edmonton-Ellerslie last month. Five-year-olds are sitting in the class. The teacher is reading a book about a lost penguin. Half of the kids are leaning toward. Eyes are wide. Half are wiggling, whispering, or staring at the ceiling. That's normal. That's five-year-olds.

8:20

Now imagine the same room, same kids, same teacher, but this time the lights are bright, the timer is ticking, and every child has a table and a clipboard. They have to point to the picture that starts with "b". They have to count plastic bears as fast as they can. If they get stuck, they cannot ask a friend; they cannot look at the teacher for a smile. They just see a red X appear on the screen.

One little boy froze. He knows the answer at home. Here his hands shake. He started to cry quietly. The girl beside him sees him cry and starts to cry, too. The teacher wants to stop everything and hug them, but the rules say: keep going. That's what Bill 6 will make the law, Mr. Chair. That's not learning. That's fear.

Alberta has the oil, the gas, and the money. We have the smartest parents and the hardest working teachers in Canada. Why are there 40 kids packed in one classroom? Why do we have the lowest school funding in the country? Why are the teachers using their own paycheques for glue sticks and paper? Because the UCP choose headlines over helpers. They choose tests over teachers.

A couple of weeks ago teachers stood outside the Legislature in the cold and asked for help. They did not ask for more money for themselves. They asked for more adults and classrooms so no child gets left behind. The answer they got was a law that took away their rights and sent them back into the same broken classrooms. Then the government turned around and said: we have a magic plan; more tests.

There is no magic in the test, that will make six-year-olds hate school. There is no magic in the test, that tells a teacher what she already knows. There is no magic in the test, that ends with no money for help. Real magic happens when a child who could not read a word in September runs into December and says: look, I read the whole book by myself. That magic needs time. That magic needs a quiet corner with a cushion. That magic needs another grown-up who can sit and listen while a child sounds out "cat." The magic costs money. Bill 6 costs almost nothing. That's why the UCP loves it.

They say the score will be public so parents can see which schools are good. Actually, they will shame schools in poor neighbourhoods. Families who can move will leave. The kids who stay will have even less. We have seen this movie before. It never ends with better reading. It ends with tears.

Mr. Chair, I have a different picture. Picture a class with 20 kids. Picture a helper in every kindergarten classroom. Picture speech teachers who come every week, not once a month. Picture books that are new, not taped together. Picture a teacher who can go home at night proud, not crushed. That picture is possible. We are the richest province. We can afford it. We just have to choose children over politics. Bill 6 is the wrong choice. It chooses fear over joy. It chooses blame over help. It chooses numbers on a screen over a smile on a child's face.

Mr. Chair, what all we need to do: fund our classrooms, hire the helpers, lower the class sizes, trust our teachers, and give our kids the Alberta they deserve, the one we choose to be proud of.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any others wishing to provide comment, question, or amendment?

Ready for the question.

[The clauses of Bill 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

Bill 13

Regulated Professions Neutrality Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to provide comment or questions? The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to speak about this act. I am, as many members will know, a member of a regulated profession, and I have some pretty strong views on this particular act. I consider it incredibly problematic.

We are speaking about Bill 13, the Regulated Professions Neutrality Act. I just had to say the title because it's so ridiculous, right? There was this history under former Prime Minister Harper of, like, titling bills the opposite of what they actually did, and I feel like the UCP government has really taken that to heart here. This bill is anything but neutral. It is a bill entitled to enforce an ideology on regulators that regulate professions. It's intended to enforce an ideology that these professionals don't believe, Mr. Chair. They are educated professionals. They don't believe this false ideology. I mean, it's just not neutral. This is an ideology, an ideology that this government is forcing on regulators that flies in the face of research, science, and common sense.

What is it about? Well, in short, it's about pretending that the results that the system turns out now, results that massively underrepresent Indigenous people, people of colour, women, transgender people, gay people, basically anyone that isn't a cis, white male, are the result of merit. But all of the evidence, Mr. Chair, strongly suggests that it isn't. This system that we have currently is not a result of merit; it's a result of privilege, something that as a member, as a bench member in the Law Society, I would no longer be allowed to say. I would be prohibited from saying it. What does it say about the government that they are so afraid of a bench member of the Law Society saying the word "privilege"? Their argument is so weak that they aren't even willing to make the argument. They are going to prohibit people from saying the opposite, from saying the facts. I mean, it's fragility on the next level.

This is targeted, Mr. Chair, at cultural competency education being provided by the Law Society. As members of the Law Society we took a very good course, world leading – other places have adopted it – called the path, which teaches about the Indigenous people in this province and the history of those Indigenous people. Basically the position that is being prohibited by this government is to speak aloud the fact that Indigenous children were systemically taken from their parents and their homes. They were put in residential schools, where they were subjected to physical abuse and sexual abuse and death, and we are now to be prohibited from saying that that has had any sort of impact.

Mr. Chair, it's shameful. It's absolutely shameful that not only would a government march in here and prohibit members of regulated professions from making decisions on the basis of the fact that ripping children out of their homes, subjecting them to sexual abuse, didn't have a generational impact, but they are so fragile that they're unwilling to even defend their position. They are to prohibit anyone from saying it.

8:30

This bill is incredibly problematic. The section that's targeted at this education is section 8, and I'm going to read it because there are a lot of things said in this House, and I think we should deal in facts.

Despite anything to the contrary in section 7, a regulatory appeal body or regulatory body must not require a regulated professional or person seeking to become a regulated [member of a profession] to complete education or training that addresses . . . the following matters:

- (a) cultural competency;
- (b) unconscious bias;
- (c) diversity, equity or inclusion;
- (d) any other matter specified in the regulations.

So we're prohibiting cultural competency or education on cultural competency because this government is so afraid of cultural competency that they would take the steps to prohibit it.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

In addition, it talks about suggesting that a person's status or privilege or an advantage is determined by an enumerated characteristic. Madam Chair, I was the Minister of Justice for four years, and in that time, I appointed two-thirds women to the bench. That did not get us to parity. In my time: two-thirds women, still not at parity, still not 50-50, despite the fact that law schools have been graduating women at 50 per cent for 30 years. So for the government to come in here and suggest that result, where women who are 50 per cent of the law school graduates, 50 per cent of the population, don't make up – shouldn't make up – 50 per cent of the judiciary, and that is based on merit because the women just lack merit: it's ridiculous. It's absurd, and they know it's absurd, and

that's why they've brought this act. They have brought this act to prohibit people from speaking the truth.

I mean, it's on such a long list of incredible disappointments from this government, but, Madam Chair, for a Minister of Justice this is shameful. He should be embarrassed. I think that has probably stated my point.

Mr. Schow: That's a point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). Saying that the minister should be embarrassed: I mean, look, if we're going to be referring directly to the Minister of Justice – the hon. Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Great Seal – specifically from a comment from a member who used to be the Minister of Justice, I don't think that when that member sat on the government side of the benches they would appreciate if someone saying that one should be embarrassed by a piece of legislation that we think is very important when it comes to regulated professions. I think that language does rise to a level that would create disorder in this Chamber, and I think that member should apologize for that kind of language.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's not a point of order at all. More recently the Speaker of this House has ruled on it that, in fact, quite frequently the phrase "shame on the minister, shame on him" is used, and every government response, in particular some ministers, does include that kind of language. I think if you ask members of regulated professions, they do take issue with this bill, and the member was just reflecting what people in the community in the regulated profession think about this and the role the Minister of Justice is playing in it. It's not a point of order at all.

The Chair: While certainly not helpful language in this debate, it's not a point of order at this time. However, I might caution members to avoid assuming or telling other members or ministers in this House how they should be feeling. That's not helpful to the debate at hand but not a point of order at this time.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Debate Continued

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I think I had said about all there is to say on this matter. I would simply close by saying that this is anything but neutral. It prohibits people from talking about systemic racism, about unconscious bias, about systematic sexism. It prohibits us from talking about the fact that the makeup of the judiciary, that the makeup of most boards, of most companies, of even this Chamber disproportionately underrepresents Indigenous people, people of colour, women, many, many other identifiable groups, and I find it incredibly problematic.

I think that if there is any profession who should fight to ensure that there is greater equity, it should be lawyers. I think that prohibiting the regulatory body of lawyers from making decisions on that basis or for even speaking about it or requiring education about it is not only shameful but it displays the fact that the minister knows he can't support his argument because if he could, he wouldn't refuse to let us even talk about it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to join this debate, Bill 13, Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I also rise to speak to this bill, and it's a deeply troubling piece of legislation. As my colleague and former justice minister said, this bill in section 8 is essentially restricting the ability of a regulated profession to require professionals to take any training in cultural competency, unconscious bias, diversity, equity, or inclusion, or any other matter specified in the regulation. In a society which is complex like ours, I think those are the things that should be essentially the requirements for any professional, and knowing about your neighbours, knowing about your history, knowing about historical wrongs, knowing about historical injustices, knowing about the makeup of our society will make you only a better professional.

Not only is the government restricting their ability to mandate such education, they are also restricting their ability to discipline their members on anything other than strictly professional competence and criteria they are setting, and they are also restricting regulatory bodies' ability to affirm anything that has something to do with cultural competency or unconscious bias or diversity, equity, or inclusion. And they are doing all that in the name of free speech, in the name of people's right to free speech.

8:40

On its face value I think that right is enshrined in the Charter. When regulated professions sanction their members, they are certainly very much alive to people's right to free expression. Also those decisions, regulated professional bodies' decisions, can be challenged to the courts. In many cases they have been challenged based on free speech, and the courts are better positioned to deal with those arguments.

At the end of the day instead of this government, this Premier, imposing their world view on all these regulated professions, I think it would be better if they are left to the professionals to decide how they would regulate their peers, how they would elect those regulated bodies, and what they think professional competence includes, what's necessary for a member of a profession. But here in the name of free speech the government came up with a one-size-fits-all approach, and they are imposing their world view on all these professional bodies and professionals, which no one was asking for.

When they introduced the bill, they dubbed it as Alberta's Peterson law. As has been previously discussed in this House, Jordan Peterson was a psychologist with the college of psychologists in Ontario whose conduct was sanctioned for being nonprofessional, demeaning, degrading, and bringing the profession into disrepute.

He challenged that based on free speech in the superior court of Ontario, then the Court of Appeal, and he even tried to appeal all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, who refused to hear his appeal. The court certainly in that decision did weigh in on that individual's right to free speech but still upheld the decision of the regulator.

The second thing I would like to add is that government when they talk about free speech and the right to free speech in the past, what we have seen is that this government and many who sit on government benches were really bothered by restriction like masks and restrictions like not to gather in numbers like more than 10 for public health purposes. They were talking about those kinds of freedoms, otherwise when it suits them they will not hesitate to trample over the rights of teachers, constitutionally protected rights of trans youth, again, constitutionally protected rights.

But here they want Albertans to believe that they are somehow upholding the right to free speech. I think that right, as I said, is enshrined in Charter, but like every other right Charter rights have some limitations as well, and the right to free speech doesn't give anyone right to hate speech.

With that, Madam Chair, I do have an amendment to move that will, I guess, leave the right to free speech intact while making sure that this bill is not weaponized to proliferate hate speech.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Sabir: The Member from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to move that Bill 13, Regulated Professions Neutrality Act, be amended in section 5 as follows: (a) by adding the following after subsection (2)(b)(vii):

(viii) communications intended to vilify, humiliate or incite or promote hatred against a person or a class of persons on the basis of race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, physical disability, mental disability, ancestry or place of origin.

(b) By striking out subsection (3) and substituting the following:

(3) Nothing in this section precludes a regulatory appeal body or regulatory body from imposing a sanction on a regulated professional for the following:

- (a) the disclosure of client, patient or student information;
- (b) communications of the kind in subsection (2)(b)(viii).

Madam Chair, I think what this amendment is trying to do is ensure that we are not sending the wrong signals or implementing a piece of legislation that may have some unintended consequences, that people may feel that they are able to say things in the name of free speech that may cross the line. Certainly, the Charter gives the right to free speech. The Charter gives the right to the individual to practice their faith, to express things, but at the same time, the Charter doesn't give you the right to engage in or incite hatred against a person or identifiable group of persons.

When we talk about these hate speech, racism, and those kind of extreme views, we have a long history of how those kind of ideologies, how that kind of hate speech based on racism, based on extreme nationalism have resulted in millions of deaths. If we look to World War II and events leading up to World War II, two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population was killed, and the ideology behind that was racism. The ideology behind that was extreme nationalism. After that, when most European countries came together to reflect on the horrors of the war, many of the human rights instruments became a part of international customary law. That was the international charter of universal human rights, international covenant on civil and political rights, and so on and so forth.

Section 20 of the international covenant on civil and political rights states that "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility" to a person or identifiable group of persons "shall be prohibited by law." That covenant was adopted by many Western democracies, and certainly many of the rights that are contained in that covenant are also enshrined in the Canadian Charter and many other pieces of legislation, including the criminal law which defines and prohibits hate speech.

In Canada in most recent times, especially coming from the faith community, Muslim community, I do know first-hand that this community has been the target of that kind of attacks based on racism, based on prejudices, based on stereotypes, based on fear, in particular after 9/11. We have seen that kind of narrative in media, in particular on social media, that wherever anything bad would

occur, if the person involved somehow is of Muslim faith, everyone that belonged to that faith was seen with suspicion, and they were targeted.

8:50

We saw in Edmonton, the capital city here, many hijab-wearing women being targeted in 2020, prior to that in 2017, because of that kind of heated rhetoric, because of that kind of proliferation of hate speech, in particular through social media. We saw that unfortunate incident in a Quebec mosque in 2017. Then we also saw another incident in London, Ontario, where the Afzaal family was run over by a young person. So when people say things, when people say things based on stereotypes, based on racism, based on nationalism and extreme nationalism, those words, those things do have consequences.

I don't think that the government is intending to give everyone a licence with this bill that they are free to say things without any consequences. That's why I think this amendment is important, that we can all work together and send a strong message that, yes, people are free to express their views in the name of free speech, but that free speech doesn't extend or give them licence to vilify, humiliate, or incite or promote hatred against anyone in this society or anywhere for that matter. That provision will make sure that regulatory bodies are able to sanction their members for hate speech along with other things that the government has listed in this section.

I hope that government members, all members of this House will stand in support of this amendment and against hate speech in this province and in this society. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to this amendment that was put forward by the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to Bill 13. Now, this amendment goes directly to the purpose and the intention and the premise of the bill itself. Bill 13 draws a line, an essential line, between the freedom of expression and ideological pressures that our professionals are experiencing every single day, between a society that values open debate and one that punishes a difference of opinion. The amendment put forward simply erases that line, but it does a lot more than that. It erodes the rights of Albertans to speak freely about the things that they value. Ironically, I think that the member's amendment was well intentioned, but it does the very opposite of what we're trying to achieve here with Bill 13.

Let me be absolutely clear, and I'm going to say this very clearly for all members of this Assembly. This government cabinet and caucus do not support hate of any form or any kind.

Nothing in Bill 13 shields criminal behaviour, threats, harassment, or discrimination whatsoever, Madam Chair. The Alberta Human Rights Act, in fact, already exists to protect against these very acts of hatred. If a professional's conduct crosses into the line of criminality, this bill does not impact the regulators or their ability to deal with these acts. Our laws already deal with these actions and will continue to do so.

Now, if a professional's behaviour is deemed inappropriate, employers too have the tools to deal with that. That is their responsibility, Madam Chair. What is not the role of regulators, what is not the role of what the members opposite are trying to convey is to punish licensed professionals for expressing their personal beliefs, for their lawful opinions and expressions made in their own time simply because someone else, members opposite disagree or take offence with what they're saying. The whole purpose of public discourse and public debate is that there is a

difference of opinion, and that is what we are trying to make sure remains unrestricted.

Regulators are meant to focus on ethics, and they're meant to focus on professional competency. They're not meant to police political views, monitor social media posts, enforce ideological conformity, or tell their professionals what to say and what to believe in. Professionals should never fear losing their licence or their livelihood or their careers because of a social media post, an interview, or a personal opinion expressed in their own time.

Now, this amendment serves to accomplish absolutely nothing that isn't already addressed in the tools available to regulators today or covered by other acts that exist within this great province or governed by employers or the professionals themselves, Madam Chair.

It is a poor and disparaging view that the members opposite have to take of our doctors, lawyers, nurses, engineers, accountants, and others when they suggest that just because Bill 13 creates an opportunity for them to speak freely, they will be sitting and lying in the weeds, ready to explode and spew their hate in public. Madam Chair, our professionals are distinguished people all across this province who work day in and day out and do a phenomenal job. That's not what they're there for. They're not waiting for this bill so that they can go and continue to spew hate and racism and anger in public. These are professionals. These are the doctors that we use and see every day and rely on. These are the lawyers. These are the engineers. These are the nurses. These are people that we value in Alberta. It's not how we view our professionals here.

But don't take my word for it. Bill 13 has an incredibly important role. We know from countless examples that professionals both within and outside of Alberta have been sanctioned or have lost their licence for expressing important views about their communities. We have an ER doctor, for example, Madam Chair, in Nova Scotia who wrote an article about how criminals should be medically cleared before they're released to police. Well, the reward for that, I think a very common-sense approach, was that it provoked a complaint to his professional regulator by a number of other doctors who simply didn't agree with his point of view. That's ridiculous.

We have a doctor who was fired because he was commenting on what he believed to be inadequate funding by his province of the hospital that he worked at. We have nurses in other jurisdictions and, in fact, here in Alberta who have been targeted for simply expressing their beliefs. We have lawyers sanctioned for engaging in public discourse. These lawyers, Madam Chair, are the very people who are employed with challenging and advocating for rights of society, and they're being silenced right now. They're losing their social media accounts. In fact, we have a lawyer here in this city who was banned off LinkedIn for expressing views about geopolitical issues. That's ridiculous.

There's an interesting article that came out last year. It relates to a number of doctors and medical students who were sanctioned or fired from their positions. At least six doctors and health care workers were suspended at Toronto's SickKids hospital for social media posts supporting Palestinians, Madam Chair, while doctors at St. Michael's around the corner were allowed to share hour-long lectures about Israel to staff and students. Another half-dozen physicians were removed from their roles assessing medical students' residency applications at Queen's University because they signed a petition calling for a ceasefire.

9:00

Now imagine that, Madam Chair. Imagine the waste of time that this amendment is placing on this Chamber, an amendment

that achieves nothing that isn't already addressed. It is fuelled by political posturing and virtue signalling at best. Ironically, it is not going to achieve anything that the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall is seeking to accomplish here, and the opposite is happening right now. If the member is concerned about these case studies that we have – and this is just a drop in the bucket compared to what is actually happening in this country – then the member should vote for Bill 13. It is pandering to a very select community to try to score cheap political points, and lastly it is frivolous.

I would suggest that all members of this Assembly vote against the amendment put forward. Support Bill 13 if you believe in addressing the concerns that I've expressed here today in these case studies, and if you believe that professionals in this province not only do good work but deserve to engage in public discourse and public commentary, the only thing that the members in this Assembly should be doing is supporting Bill 13.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:03 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Ceci	Hoyle
Batten	Chapman	Ip
Brar, Gurinder	Ellingson	Sabir
Brar, Gurtej	Ganley	Wright, P.
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hoffman	

Against the motion:

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

Totals:	For – 14	Against – 44
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Looking for members wishing to speak on Bill 13 in Committee of the Whole. The hon. Member for Calgary-North East.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was born in the small town of Faridkot in northern India. When I was about

seven years old, one day I came home, face red, hair scattered, heart full of anger. I opened the door angrily, walked to the fridge breathing heavily, opened the fridge, took the water bottle, drank a bit, and threw it on the floor. Water and glass scattered on the floor. My grandmother came running and checked to see if I was okay. She took me outside and asked me very calmly about why was I angry. I told her about my fight with the kid on the other street. I told her how much I hate him and why I want to hit him with a cricket bat. She listened and told me a story. A story of a saint named Farid, who came to my town in the 13th century. He was old, poetic, and deeply respected. People came from near and far to hear him speak. He preached in a language so simple even a child could understand, and everyone loved him. He made disciples quickly. Even the king of the town became one of them. So moved was the king by Farid's teachings that he renamed the town Faridkot. That's how it got its name.

9:20

One day a disciple brought Farid a gift, a pair of ornate silver scissors. The disciple said, "I have brought these for you, master. May they serve you well." Farid smiled gently, held the scissors in his hand, and said softly, "Dear, thank you for the thought, but I have no use for these scissors. Give me a needle instead." The disciple was puzzled. "A needle?" he asked, and Farid replied, "Yes, scissors cut and separate, but a needle, it joins, it binds, and it brings together, and in this life, I wish to unite, not divide."

Eight centuries later we live in a world full of division, hate, and anger. As elected representatives it is our moral responsibility to be the needles and bring people together, but there are people who don't believe in an inclusive province. They want a future where only a few privileged would benefit. They spread anger, division, and hate. They are the ones who chanted mass deportations at the Alberta Next Panel and believe that immigrants are second-class citizens.

I read a social media post, and I quote: go home, Blacks, dirty refugees, sucking our country dry of milk, dark with their hands out, smell strange. Look what they have done to their own countries, what will they do to ours? End quote. Madam Chair, no one would leave home unless home chased you. It's not something you ever thought about doing. No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land. No one would choose to make a refugee camp home unless your home becomes the mouth of a shark.

It is important more than ever to fight anger, division, and hate. We can do that if we stick to the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, Bill 13 does the exact opposite. The Premier calls this bill Alberta's Peterson law. How shameful is that, Madam Chair? Peterson was sanctioned by the Ontario college of psychologists for saying unprofessional, demeaning, and degrading statements. He appealed to the King's Bench and lost, then he appealed to the Court of Appeal and lost again, then he tried appealing to the Supreme Court, and the highest court declined to even hear his appeal.

Are these kinds of people the ones we should be drawing our inspiration from? Certainly not, Madam Chair. This tells a lot about this Premier and this UCP government. Three former justice ministers, all Conservatives, are sanctioned for their unprofessional behaviours: one for threatening a doctor, one for calling a police chief over a traffic ticket, and the third one has a long history of disciplinary history with the Law Society. With this bill this Premier is making the voices of these people even louder. She is doing it at the expense of the province's diversity. We are seeing the right wing attacking our diversity, whether it is Donald Trump in the U.S.A., Nigel Farage in the U.K., and now this UCP

government here in Alberta. We don't just need DEI in the public sector, we need this in every sector.

Let me tell you another story, Madam Chair. A few years ago a person walked up to an automatic soap dispenser in a tech company's building. He placed his hands under it. Soap did not dispense. He tried again. Nothing. He moved to the second soap dispenser. Still nothing. Then another man walked in and put his hands under the same soap dispenser. The soap flowed instantly. Now, picture that moment: two people, same sink, same soap dispenser. There was just one difference. The first person was Black, with darker skin, and the second had lighter skin. One machine was built with such a narrow view of the world that it literally could not recognize the darker skin, not because the dispenser was evil, not because the engineers were malicious, but because no one in that room during testing, during design, during approval, thought: does this work for everyone?

That, Madam Chair, is why diversity, equity, and inclusion matter in the private sector: to design products that are inclusive. It is only possible if people from all backgrounds, all ethnicities, and all cultures have a seat at the table, and this is the heart of the issue. When the people in the room all look the same, think the same, carry the same experiences, they miss things, they miss people, and they miss entire communities. Machines designed to serve only one community are like the Caesars that tear the fabric of our society.

Madam Chair, Canada has marks of brutal colonial history on its body. Let me take you to St. Joseph's Mission residential school in British Columbia. It was the first day for six-year-old Phylis Webstad. On her first day she wore the most precious thing she owned, a brand new, shiny orange shirt. It wasn't just a piece of clothing. It was pride. It was home. It was her grandmother's love stitched into fabric. But within hours that shirt was gone, stripped, and never returned, and with it they tried to strip her dignity, her identity, and her spirit.

Phylis did something very powerful. She turned her pain into purpose. She founded the Orange Shirt Society, and she inspired a movement, Orange Shirt Day, a day when all of Canada stops to say: every child matters. That shirt now not only lives in millions of closets, it lives in millions of hearts. The Orange Shirt Society acts like a needle that has brought millions of Canadians together. Canadians hold the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion as guiding principles on the path to truth and reconciliation. Unfortunately, there is a fringe minority that spread hate in our communities. We cannot let this hate spread in the streets of our communities, Madam Chair.

Let me take you to Liverpool, where communities chose inclusion, celebrated diversity, protected equity, and defeated hate, anger, and division. A grey morning, heavy with tension, outside the historic Abdullah Quilliam mosque. The wind carried more than just a chill. It carried shouts, slogans, and fear. A group of far-right agitators had gathered, faces twisted in anger, signs scrawled with hate. But they didn't expect what came next. From every corner of the neighbourhood came the echo of footsteps, not of riot police but of grandmothers, nanas, dozens at first, then hundreds, scarves neatly tied, arms locked tight, hearts beating like war drums of love. One of them, nana Pat, stepped forward holding a handmade sign in her wrinkled hands: nanas against hate. No chants, no violence, just calm, unwavering resistance.

On one side 30 angry men shouting into the wind; on the other side a human quilt of solidarity. Students, priests, Imams, city councillors, grocery clerks all holding hands like stitches in the same thread. Instead of rage, they brought rice puddings and samosas. Instead of fists, hot tea and open hearts. You could hear children laughing beside the barricades. You could smell cinnamon, cardamom, and courage. In that moment, hate grew quiet and

humanity grew louder. Those nanas weren't just protecting a mosque; they were protecting the soul of their city. They were being the needles mending the torn fabric of their community.

Our province needs the government holding the hand of that Black man trying to get the soap, walking on the path of truth and reconciliation led by Phylis Webstad, and standing alongside those nanas protecting the soul of the city, being the needles, not the scissors. We have done that before, Madam Chair. The Alberta NDP government celebrated diversity by recognizing April as Sikh Heritage Month, June as Filipino Heritage Month, August as Muslim heritage month, establishing the anti-racism council, designing the antiracism curriculum that this UCP government shredded.

I can recall the words of Nelson Mandela, Madam Chair: "No one is born hating another person . . . People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love." Dr. King has said: We may have all come on different ships, but we're [all] in the same boat now. When my grandmother told me the story of Farid, scissors, and needles, she asked me what I wanted to be: a scissor that will cut, hurt, and shear, or a needle that will bring people together? I remember that lesson even today. This is why I carry the legacy of that needle.

Today I don't stand before you as a politician. I stand here as a needle, ready to stitch this torn world one story, one stand, and one hand at a time. I ask all members to oppose this bill, stand on the side of the needles, support our diversity, inclusion, equity, and support a vision for an inclusive Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

9:30

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Well, I'm proud to rise to speak to the amendment put forward by my colleague, the member from Calgary . . .

An Hon. Member: The main bill.

Member Hoyle: Oh, the main bill. Okay. No problem. Sorry. We'll start all over.

I'm happy to rise and speak to Bill 13 here. You know, Madam Chair, this bill that discusses the Regulated Professions Neutrality Act, to be honest, is a deeply disturbing piece of legislation.

We need to make sure that hate speech is not protected from disciplinary measures. Madam Chair, there's a significant difference between hate speech and free speech. There is a clear difference between speech that is unpopular and undesirable and the use of hate speech. Ideologically charged language to degrade or bully any specific group is not simply a difference of opinion and should not be protected by any government.

Bill 13 would oblige professional regulators to remain neutral relative to personal identity characteristics when regulating or making decisions about members. To be clear, this bill is not about protecting freedom of expression and it's definitely not neutral; it's about weakening professional standards, undermining public trust, and advancing an ideological agenda under the guise of free speech. Madam Chair, free speech is defined as the right to express one's beliefs, thoughts, ideas without restriction whereas hate speech is defined as speech that publicly incites violence, hostility, or discrimination against a group of people. Freedom of speech does not mean freedom from consequences.

The Premier says that professionals should never fear losing their licence because of a social media post or a personal opinion, and that sounds reasonable until you look at what this bill actually does. It strips regulatory bodies of the ability to enforce codes of conduct

when off-duty behaviour undermines public trust by allowing professionals to make irresponsible claims and comments free from accountability. Bill 13 creates a significant change in regulators who previously were free to impose discipline for off-duty conduct as they see fit when it impacts the interests of the public or harms the reputations of the profession. Many of these professions also include ethics courses that establish behavioural conduct as part of training. That's not neutrality; that's deregulation. Madam Chair, this legislation is not about fairness; it's clearly about ideology. It's clear that Bill 13 reaches far beyond free expression, and it fundamentally changes how professional regulators operate.

This legislation will directly impact policies, competency frameworks, code of ethics, and standards of practice that currently address inherent bias and privilege tied to personal characteristics, promote measures to achieve diversity and inclusion, and rely on frameworks such as antiracism, antibias models that recognize systemic barriers based on identity. In other words, Bill 13 strips regulators of the ability to require training or standards that ensure fairness and equity in professional practice. It's about legitimizing harmful narratives and rolling back diversity, equity, and inclusion training, training that helps ensure safe, respectful workplaces and professional accountability.

This government's own news release admits that this bill will restrict mandatory education programs unrelated to competence or ethics, such as DEI training. That tells you everything you need to know about the real intent here. The restriction on mandatory diversity, equity, and inclusion training is not neutrality; it is government overreach, which this government is all too familiar with as they grapple to secure more and more control over anything they can in this province. This bill gives politicians the power to decide what self-regulating professions can and cannot require, undermining the independence that protects public interests.

Regulatory bodies may allow DEI training, but they cannot make it mandatory for professionals to maintain their certification or employment. While this sounds harmless, it's alarming when you consider the full impacts. In compassion-based professions, like health care, social work, education, criminal justice, removing unconscious bias training risks worsening patient-client Albertan experiences, outcomes, and safety. These programs exist because bias, often unconscious bias, directly affects outcomes. Eliminating mandatory training does not protect free speech; it compromises safety and equity, affects the outcomes for all Albertans.

It doesn't stop there because this bill also includes a vague clause stating, "Any other matter [determined] in the regulations" cannot be mandated by regulatory bodies. What does this even mean, Madam Chair? We don't know. It gives government the sweeping authority to block future requirements without consultation or debate.

Bill 13 here, as we look at it, applies to more than 100 regulated professions: lawyers, engineers, nurses, teachers, doctors, architects, accountants, tradespeople. No regulatory body would be able to regulate expressive off-duty conduct once this bill takes place. These professions carry enormous responsibility. Being in a regulated profession is a privilege and with that privilege comes accountability, and when you undermine accountability you put all Albertans at risk.

Bill 13 states that regulators can only discipline off-duty conduct in a very narrow circumstance: threats of violence, sexual misconduct, or communications with minors. Everything else? Off-limits, including hate speech. This is absolutely unacceptable. This means that a doctor can spread dangerous health misinformation online without consequence, a lawyer can post racist and hateful comments and still represent clients, a teacher can publicly attack

marginalized communities and still stand in front of a classroom. We need this to be better addressed.

This government claims that this is about protecting professionals from cancel culture, but let's look at the facts because the examples this UCP government lean on can be misleading. One nurse disciplined for statements targeting the transgender community and another investigated for opposing vaccine mandates, complaints that were ultimately dismissed. Madam Chair, these cases show the system works and that's why, you know, focusing on making sure that this government has clarity on what this means on regulating and neutrality is important. Regulatory bodies already weigh contacts and evidence when evaluating these cases so it's very apparent to me that Bill 13 is a solution in search of a problem.

Let's not ignore the hypocrisy here, Madam Chair. This government says that it wants to protect free expression, yet it passed legislation forbidding 51,000 teachers from exercising their right to strike. Where's the consistency here?

This bill also signals something deeper: an attack on personal integrity. When you undermine regulators' ability to enforce standards, you erode public confidence and trust in professionals like law, engineering, and health care because when a doctor or nurse posts false claims about vaccines or gender-affirming care, those statements are amplified and can influence decisions.

Madam Chair, what's next for the government; following Trump's declassifying of degrees as not professional? This Bill 13 tells us exactly what ideological playbook this government is following, and it's not about protecting rights; it's about dismantling safeguards that protect the public good.

Let's just be clear here. This bill is heavy handed, controlling, and it's clear that they, this government, don't trust people to make their own decisions, and they're happy to take away all Albertans' freedoms. This bill is not about protecting freedom of expression. Quite frankly, as I stand here as the first and only Black woman ever elected into the Alberta Leg., it is a disgrace to see a bill brought forth that is literally removing rights and freedoms for those who may look different and be from different backgrounds than the average.

9:40

Ms Hoffman: First woman so far.

Member Hoyle: Yeah. There'll be more.

With that being said, Madam Chair, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Madam Chair, it has been a productive evening of debate. We will return to Bill 13 for more conversation, but in the meantime I move that the committee rise and report Bill 6 and report progress on Bill 13.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 6. The committee also reports progress on the following bill: Bill 13. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 12 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce second reading of Bill 12, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

Madam Speaker, this legislation includes important amendments that will improve government efficiency, advance government priorities to attract investment, support vulnerable Albertans, and strengthen the economy. They are amendments that ultimately move this province forward and improve program delivery for Albertans. I'd like to take a few moments now to outline these important changes.

First, we're proposing changes to the Securities Act to support companies in disclosing environmental information. Madam Speaker, there's a growing demand by investors for companies to provide climate-related disclosure, and companies should be able to meet this demand by providing environmental information in good faith without fear of being subject to frivolous and malicious lawsuits. These legislative changes would protect companies from unnecessary lawsuits resulting from disclosures made in good faith.

We're also proposing changes to tackle false or misleading information that affects stocks. These particularly relate to the rise of financial influencers online. These legislative changes make sure the Alberta Securities Commission can deal with inaccurate or misleading information online that could hurt investors and degrade trust in the market. It would also allow the Alberta Securities Commission to halt trading on stocks that have been affected by false or misleading information shared online.

The legislation is also tackling the problem of contraband tobacco. Contraband tobacco not only undermines public health; it creates unfair competition for legal retailers and diminishes the revenues that fund the programs and services Albertans rely on. Under proposed changes to the Tobacco Tax Act we would introduce new penalties on those who purchase, sell, or possess illegal tobacco products. The penalties would be three times the tax normally paid on legal tobacco. This rule would apply to the possession or sale of contraband cigarettes, tobacco sticks, and fine-cut tobacco and unauthorized possession of cigars that in total contain more than 1,000 grams of tobacco.

The changes would also require law enforcement to report the seizure of illegal tobacco products to the government. This change allows the government to collect consistent, reliable, enforcement data. Enforcement data matters because it shows whether our efforts are working and helps us direct resources where they'll have the greatest impact. The new rules are aimed at removing the financial incentives that fuel contraband tobacco.

Next we're proposing changes that will help Alberta attract major data centre investments to the province. Madam Speaker, data centres represent a significant economic opportunity for our province. Alberta has the resources, competitive tax system, cold climate, and business-friendly environment that make us a

destination of choice for these investments. We want to attract this investment while making sure Albertans' interests come first.

When we were looking at these issues, we found that under the current rules some of these companies – large, multinational, sophisticated companies – may have the ability to avoid paying corporate income tax. We're proposing a new levy of up to 2 per cent on the value of computer equipment for large data centres, those with 75 megawatts of power or more. Data centres that bring their own power generation will pay a lower rate, and companies that pay corporate income taxes can deduct this levy from those taxes. Madam Speaker, these data centres are an important opportunity for this province, and we're excited by the potential they will bring. This levy is one way we can continue to make sure these investments are in the best interests of Albertans.

Next this bill makes the necessary legislative changes to enable the Alberta Disability Assistance Program, or ADAP. Madam Speaker, people with disabilities shouldn't have to choose between getting the support they need and having the opportunity to pursue a meaningful career. ADAP will allow for the highest employment income in the country, meaning Albertans on ADAP can earn more from working while continuing to receive benefits, and of course the AISH program will remain for those who need it. This is a way we can provide the kind of flexible options that are responsive to the unique needs of those on disability assistance.

We're also modernizing the Public Trustee Act and the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act. When Albertans turn to the public guardian and Public Trustee for help, they deserve to be able to access the help they need in a timely manner. These proposed amendments would improve services for vulnerable Albertans by reducing unnecessary wait times and helping Albertans receive the care they need when and where they need it. The proposed changes would improve the streamlined services provided by the office of the public guardian and trustee while also ensuring that decisions are transparent and in the best interests of vulnerable Albertans.

Other legislative changes will increase the annual funding limit for the Alberta heroes fund for first responders. There is no higher form of public service than to risk one's life to protect public safety, and this fund is one way to honour those sacrifices while helping to ease the financial burdens for families. Increasing the fund's annual limit ensures the amount available is high enough to cover all eligible claims while reducing the need for a new regulation if the annual limit were to be exceeded. Madam Speaker, the heroes fund provides a one-time, tax-free \$100,000 payment to the families of eligible first responders, provincial correctional officers, and wildfire responders who die as a result of a work-related injury or illness. These proposed amendments would increase the annual limit to \$3 million from 1 and a half million dollars.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Moving to the next set of amendments, we're proposing changes to the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation Act. Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that the changes we're making don't alter policy, and it doesn't reflect a new position or approach to the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. Instead, it provides clarity that Alberta's government continues to financially backstop the AIOC.

We're also proposing amendments to the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act to support the work of AIMCo as Alberta's primary investment manager and to protect taxpayer money. In November 2024 we appointed new leadership at AIMCo to reset its focus to deliver the very best returns at lower costs for Albertans and pensioners. These proposed amendments to the AIMCo Act would ensure AIMCo and its officers won't be

constrained by investment decisions that were made before the new leadership took over. This amendment will remove any potential liabilities from the volatility trading strategy that operated from 2018 to 2020. This action protects taxpayers' money, avoiding significant financial risk and curtailing future legal costs over past investment losses. Due to these changes, there will be no impact to the defined benefit pensions, and no pensioners will see a reduction in payments. These pensions remain fully funded.

Finally, we're making some necessary housekeeping amendments to provide clarity, fix phrasing and typographical errors, ensure our legislation aligns with federal legislation, and other small-scale changes. For example, we're proposing changes to the Legislative Assembly Act that would provide guidelines for the payment of parliamentary secretaries. We're also making housekeeping changes to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, Employment Pension Plans Act, Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability Act, and the Joint Governance of Public Sector Pension Plans Act. Again, these housekeeping changes don't impact policy in any way.

9:50

Mr. Speaker, this is a comprehensive piece of legislation that reflects a vision for a province where opportunity and innovation take the lead, backed by a strong legislative foundation. With that, I move second reading of Bill 12, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you. Hon. minister, I just tagged in, so maybe you did this, but I've got to check. Did you also make note that it was recommended by the – it's a money bill, right?

Mr. Horner: I didn't in the second reading, but I did in first reading.

The Speaker: Okay. All right, then. Good. Thank you. Just to make sure.

On the second reading for Bill 12? Okay. The Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 12, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). I guess as I do so, I should commend the minister for making his introductory remarks sufficiently dull as to, like, distract anybody from really paying attention to what's in the bill.

As we know, it does amend 14 separate acts, with all of them kind of listed in such a way as if this was the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, that this bill is really just doing, you know, some cleanup, some alignment, making some things more efficient. While I certainly agree that that might be the case for some of the clauses in the bill, Mr. Speaker, it is certainly not the case for all of the clauses of the bill. I will say that I also personally find it a little bit problematic when a bill that comes forward with so many amendments to pieces of legislation, put forward as if it's being clerical, but there are sections of the bill that – in and amongst all of those 14 there are sections of the bill that I expect all members of this House will agree on, and others, to use parliamentary language, might be up for debate.

Before I get into the focus of my debate, I do want to be clear that there is certainly one thing in this bill that we support: the changes to the Heroes' Compensation Act and the increase of the fund from \$1.5 million to \$3 million. The Alberta New Democrats advocated for wildland firefighters to be added to the heroes fund. That happened this past May, and we are happy to see the government increase the fund to support the families of first responders who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

Now, there are three areas of concern in this bill, Mr. Speaker, that I'd like to spend some time talking about. The first is with respect to the changes to the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act, the recipients of AISH. There have been quite a few things put out from people in the community with respect to this act, one coming from Inclusion Alberta, which is a not-for-profit federation of 40 not-for-profit agencies and thousands of families that advocate on behalf of children and adults with intellectual disabilities. This is an organization that pays very close attention to this legislation, and here is a quote from their publicly available statement on Bill 12.

Inclusion Alberta is deeply disappointed with the introduction of Bill 12, which enables a 10% benefit cut to tens of thousands of AISH recipients who will be moved to the new Alberta Disability Assistance Program (ADAP) and sweeping changes to AISH. These changes will harm thousands of Albertans with disabilities, erode fundamental rights, and push many deeper into poverty. This bill affects more than 79,000 Albertans currently on AISH and their families.

Mr. Speaker, I'll give a little bit more of a quick summary of what this bill enables for AISH recipients and what it's doing to thousands of Albertans reliant on AISH. AISH recipients will be reassigned to the new ADAP program. When they have been reassigned, there isn't really an opportunity to appeal. In making the determination for the reassignment, those receiving benefits must provide information about their physical, mental, psychological, or other condition and undergo examinations to determine if the severe disability prevents employment or substantially impedes employment. At the very least this is going to place a lot of burden on our health care system that is already overwhelmed.

Those reassigned to ADAP will receive a benefit from the government at \$200 lower than when they were living on AISH. Earnings exemptions will be reduced. Cost-of-living adjustments to benefits will be removed. Future changes and benefits can be made through regulation, avoiding the legislative process, public engagement, and public disclosure. Mr. Speaker, I cannot even begin to understand how this government believes that people living on a monthly benefit less than their own housing allowance to maintain a home in Edmonton should be thrown into a program that pays them even less.

I would challenge any member in this House to attempt to live on \$1,700 a month. Seventeen hundred a month, Mr. Speaker. Let that sink in. Take a moment to do the mental math: mortgage, transportation charges, groceries, utilities. This is even less than a minimum wage earner would earn in a month and far below what it takes to live in Alberta. Indeed, the most recent report by Living Wage Alberta reported that the lowest living wage in the province would be about \$19 an hour. That's 25 per cent higher than the legislated minimum wage, which is higher than what AISH recipients get and more than what the new ADAP benefits will be.

Mr. Speaker, the UCP says that this will make it easier for those who can work to work, that it opens up opportunities. But here's the thing: this isn't an incentive to work. This is hardship and punishment for those who cannot find employment. The unemployment rate in Alberta today is the highest it has been in a decade and the highest in Canada outside of the Atlantic provinces. People are already struggling to find work, and this is the environment in which the UCP is forcing those with severe disabilities to try and find work so that they can keep earning what they used to be earning on their benefits.

In the midst of all of this the UCP refuses to bring forward legislation that would require basic standards for accessibility and is bringing forward legislation that prevents professional regulatory

bodies from implementing diversity programming. Mr. Speaker, most employers simply are not equipped to hire people with severe disabilities. The government claims that it will help ADAP recipients earn more, but the amount that people on ADAP can earn before benefits are clawed back is less than currently under AISH. Overall, people will be earning less each month.

The UCP shows a shocking disregard for these barriers to employment. They show a shocking disregard for the 80,000 most vulnerable among us and the challenges they face every single day. AISH recipients already have all of the information on file documenting their disabilities: medical records, interviews, time with caseworkers. Why are we now making them prove again that their disabilities make working a challenge? Why, Mr. Speaker, are we doing this? To save \$16 million a year? That doesn't even equate to a single settlement for a foreign corporation this government promised could mine our eastern slopes for coal.

10:00

This government should be supporting AISH recipients, not placing them in fear and anxiety, not exacerbating their living conditions where they already struggle to survive. This government should be ashamed of this bill and the decisions that they're making within it.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to the second area of concern with Bill 12, the amendments to the Legislative Assembly Act. I think many of us would struggle to find a clause that is more hypocritical than the amendments in this bill to the Legislative Assembly Act. Here's what it says.

The Lieutenant Governor in Council may authorize, on any conditions that the Lieutenant Governor in Council determines, the payment of allowances to Members appointed as parliamentary secretaries by the President of the Executive Council.

To keep people happy in caucus, an additional nine caucus members – or at least nine is the count today – will get more pay.

Mr. Speaker, I used to think that Conservatives cared about government largesse. I guess not when 42 members of the government caucus are now being paid salaries and benefits that are above the standard remuneration for an MLA. I guess the housing allowance Christmas gift that they gave themselves last year wasn't enough, at least wasn't enough for the nine members that will now be paid more for their parliamentary secretary title.

Every day Albertans are struggling to find work. Every day Albertans are struggling to afford housing, groceries, auto insurance, utility bills. Mr. Speaker, this clause is a slap in the face to those Albertans. In response this government refuses to increase minimum wage, refuses to address the unfunded maintenance liabilities for supportive housing, introduces legislation that increases auto insurance by 15 per cent, and introduces legislation that will make electricity bills more volatile and more expensive. They aren't doing anything to help Albertans through this affordability crisis, but they are making sure that they pay themselves more.

Imagine, Mr. Speaker. Rachel Notley's NDP had a cabinet half the size of the current cabinet. This government has been creating new ministries with the swing of a magic wand. They create positions for ministers to supervise quasi-ministers, while none of them do anything to actually help everyday Albertans.

They certainly aren't helping the hundreds of thousands of Albertans with public-sector pensions managed by AIMCo. This is the third item, Mr. Speaker, that I'd like to spend some time on in this debate. AIMCo manages the pension funds for 375,000 Albertans. In 2020 AIMCo lost an estimated \$2.1 billion in an investment strategy called volatility trading strategy. Since that

time the local area pension plan, the public service pension plan, and the special forces pension plan have been engaged in arbitration to recover \$1.3 billion of those losses. According to an article in the CBC a Court of King's Bench ruling from 2023 found that AIMCo and the Alberta government would both be held liable for those losses if the pension plans were successful in their arbitration.

Note that the special forces pension plan is part of this group, Mr. Speaker. The UCP, through layers of legislation, is moving to create an Alberta police force. Municipal police force members and Alberta sheriffs have their pensions held with AIMCo. I wonder how those members feel about the government's disregard for their pensions. This must be part of the government's recruitment strategy. I'm sure the line will be used to say: we're not going to be protecting your pension, but maybe we'll give you a pat on the back.

This risk was too large for this government, so they introduced the amendments here to the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act to shield AIMCo, their board and executive team prior to November 2024, and themselves from any settlement. It's kind of like using the notwithstanding clause without using the notwithstanding clause. We know how that's going for this government. Why did they need to do this to protect themselves from pension plan holders? We do nothing to protect ourselves from foreign coal corporations.

I'll take a moment to note, Mr. Speaker, that at the UCP AGM members voted overwhelmingly for Alberta to remove themselves from the Canada pension plan and create an Alberta pension plan, another ideological drive of this government that Albertans don't want. At Alberta Next Panel town halls this summer the government made it clear that is their intention. But it is likely that the Alberta pension plan would be managed by AIMCo.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans don't trust this government to manage their pensions. AIMCo earnings are below the benchmark. When AIMCo makes mistakes, the government covers it up. Indeed, just one year ago the minister sidestepped all mechanisms in place to protect AIMCo from government interference to fire the board, the CEO, and senior executives and place himself as the interim leader.

They've already paid out \$238 million in settlements to foreign coal companies, with more to come. Why didn't they protect themselves from those payouts? I guess it's okay to hand over hundreds of millions of Alberta taxpayer dollars to foreign coal companies but not to our own pension plan holders.

I do have some comments and questions on the remaining 11 acts that are amended by Bill 12, Mr. Speaker. Bill 12 amends the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation Act. That amendment guarantees that the government of Alberta will cover debt incurred through AIOC projects. I can appreciate that this would provide certainty to investors and maybe the suppliers and project proponents attached to these projects and that this could be, you know, a positive move for attracting investment to Alberta. But I think what's interesting is – maybe I need to spend more time with that act itself – that the amendment doesn't mention: are First Nations partners held accountable or liable for any of that debt? While investors might be protected, are First Nations communities protected? I don't know that. I think that's a question that needs to be responded to.

An Hon. Member: It's a backstop.

Member Ellingson: A backstop for investors.

How will First Nations and Indigenous partners engaged in the AIOC projects be protected from defaults or penalties or debt?

Bill 12 also acknowledges that some data centre investors may not be paying corporate taxes in Alberta, and the inclusion of a nominal data centre levy that is considered a tax credit flow through

for those that do pay corporate taxes in Alberta ensures that the government of Alberta does receive some revenue from these data centres while not placing additional burden on investors. In general, again, it's a good idea, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, Bill 12 amends the Tobacco Tax Act to impose new penalties on the purchase, storage, or sale of contraband tobacco. It is estimated that the sale of contraband tobacco amounts to hundreds of millions each year. While this makes it appear that this is important to the government, I'll note that they didn't use Alberta's share of the Canadian tobacco settlement to address the harm done by tobacco to Albertans. Alberta received an initial payment of \$713 million from this settlement. Instead of using the funds as intended, to treat illnesses and fund prevention strategies, the UCP put it into the heritage trust fund.

Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up and say that there's a lot here. It's challenging when there's a couple of clauses that we could agree with, many that are clerical, but three that are definitely problematic. That makes it very challenging for us to move forward with this bill. On that, I conclude my remarks on Bill 12 and look forward to hearing further debate on this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

10:10

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

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 12, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2), a bill that despite its technical title is more than that. It contains sweeping changes that will affect vulnerable Albertans and even accountability of this government itself. This bill is not a housekeeping bill. It's not a minor update. It's a massive omnibus bill that reaches into core areas of public trust, and in many cases it erodes that trust. The government is making changes and amendments to 14 laws all at once. It's more of a flooding-the-zone strategy. There's a bit of a distraction strategy here.

I'm going to start by how this bill completely restructures AISH and the disability assistance. Instead of simplifying life for people with disabilities, Bill 12 adds complexity: new definitions, new program streams, new discretionary powers for directors, and new grounds for suspension or repayment. Nowhere in this bill or outside the bill do we see evidence of deep consultations with AISH recipients or disability advocates or service providers before this ADAP program was introduced.

How does the government come up with a bill in which people who are actually impacted by this program weren't given a seat at the table, Mr. Speaker? And now somehow people with disabilities should trust the government, especially that they're cutting monthly support for AISH recipients by \$200. Meanwhile the UCP MLAs are giving themselves raises and parliamentary secretaries are getting raises.

Nowhere do we see a commitment that benefits will actually increase or keep pace with the cost of living that Albertans are experiencing right now. Albertans are facing the fastest growing rental rates, the highest inflation rates, the highest auto insurance rates, and some of the highest unemployment rates. Albertans with disabilities deserve security and dignity, not more bureaucratic hoops and uncertainty, Mr. Speaker.

What's alarming about this bill is how the UCP government has quietly given itself the power to decide who should be moved off AISH. AISH applicants will face new eligibility rules, meaning fewer people will qualify. This ADAP program has less financial support than AISH, which increases pressure to find work when someone has a disability, and there is no actual pathway or plan to ensure jobs exist or that they're even accessible at the workplace.

This means that thousands of disabled Albertans could lose the financial stability of AISH without a way or a road map towards gaining dignified employment.

Nobody is asking for these changes to AISH, Mr. Speaker, and we've heard a lot from people with disabilities. So why is the government making these changes? Who's asking for it?

It's important to highlight that Alberta lacks accessibility legislation to protect the most vulnerable, Mr. Speaker. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the tenacious Member for St. Albert who has been an excellent advocate for the most vulnerable population in Alberta. [interjections] Yeah. She has brought this issue of the lack of accessibility legislation numerous times to this Legislature, and it's about truly protecting people with disability. Even if ADAP worked as intended – let's imagine if this actually worked – Alberta doesn't have accessibility legislation to guarantee that disabled people can access workplaces.

Right now accessibility in Alberta is handled through ad hoc policies, optional guidelines, the Human Rights Act – and this actually only happens when they respond after discrimination happens – good intentions, hopes and prayers, but none of these require proactive, systemic change. Accessibility legislation would set standards instead of suggestions, it would require barriers to be removed, it would prevent new barriers from being created, and it will ensure a consistent expectation around the province, Mr. Speaker. It moves Alberta from reactive human rights complaints to proactive inclusion.

If the UCP wants the fair and inclusive access of people with disabilities to employment, as is the intention of ADAP, supposedly, they should develop the appropriate laws so that disabled Albertans can actually access workplaces. Incentivize employers to hire disabled workers and strengthen protections of disabled workers facing discrimination.

Frankly, none of this is new or novel. Like, this is not novel, Mr. Speaker. Other provinces already have dedicated accessibility laws: Ontario in 2005, 20 years ago; Manitoba, 2013; Nova Scotia in 2017; British Columbia in 2021. The federal government also passed the Accessible Canada Act in 2019. So why is Alberta still a province without an accessibility legislation? That's what we need to be discussing.

Businesses operating across provinces and all over the country expect consistency in all these jurisdictions, and without accessibility or laws around accessibility Alberta risks becoming a more difficult market to operate in, it loses out on workers who need accommodation, and it misses out on economic opportunities that come from inclusion.

When accessibility is legislated, economies grow and workplaces adapt. An accessible province, Mr. Speaker, means more people can work, more people can participate in education and training, more people can access services, and fewer people are pushed into poverty. It unlocks labour force potential, it reduces pressures on our social programs here in Alberta, and it increases independence and earning power. It's not just the right thing to do; it is good economic policy.

This was the biggest piece in this legislation for me, in Bill 12, Mr. Speaker, but there's also the change to the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. In this bill the Crown now guarantees all liabilities incurred by the Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. It is the Crown, basically, and I think this was a known fact, maybe rather a known assumption. It is a provincial agency, after all, so who would take the liability other than government? If the AIOC loses money or defaults, the Alberta government is legally responsible for that. That's what the bill is clarifying. But I wonder if this is a random edition, or is this because of all the potential

pipeline conversation right now, and it's maybe asking, or giving more clarity, to investors? Maybe. I'm still unclear on that change.

Then we have some surprise changes in the bill, Bill 12. The UCP government is moving to stop any future claims over AIMCo's 2020 losses, a shift that places a \$1.3 billion question directly in front of every pension plan relying on the Crown manager's performance. It is a retroactive legal immunity granted to AIMCo and the Crown for actions taken before November 2024. Bill 12 not only shields AIMCo from future lawsuits, it shields the government from past ones, Mr. Speaker, and it is a concerning precedent because this government is giving itself legal cover for investment decisions that have harmed pensioners and public-sector workers, and Albertans deserve accountability. They deserve more transparency from their government, Mr. Speaker, and we still don't have the answer to what happens to all these people who lost their pension because of the UCP mismanagement of AIMCo. What happens to the hundreds of thousands of people who hold pensions managed by AIMCo? They have very legitimate questions about their claim to the \$1.3 billion that was lost in their pensions and how they will be paid out.

10:20

Not only that, this legislation is classic UCP, in which they put up a big slammer hammer, big legislative tools, and the big government interventions, again, on everything while escaping accountability, Mr. Speaker. This clause, again, should not be acceptable to anyone who believes in any shred of responsible governance.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, Bill 12 is a patchwork bill that expands government power over a vulnerable population, the most vulnerable, actually, in Alberta. It rewrites disability support without strengthening it, and it shields the government from accountability. Albertans deserve a government that listens. Albertans deserve policies that build confidence, not confusion, in their government, and they deserve a legislation that reflects transparency, fairness, and respect. Bill 12 fails on all three counts. For these reasons, I cannot support this bill and I urge all members of this Assembly to vote against Bill 12.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and offer some remarks on Bill 12, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No.2), all of the official title.

Mr. Speaker, in my view, this bill is simply an attempt to save money on the backs of disabled Albertans. It's also an attempt to save money on the backs of Alberta's workers. In addition, it is an attempt to shield this government from the responsibility it should bear: responsibility for decisions made by AIMCo.

Over the past couple of weeks we've had the occasion to have back and forth, Mr. Speaker, in this Chamber about the word "perception," how this government is seen by Albertans. Well, the perception now, thanks to some of the most troubling parts of this bill is, I think, clear. This is a government more interested in paying its own caucus members than supporting vulnerable Albertans. This is a government more focused on helping its friends than on helping everyday people. Frankly, this government might want to go back to school and take perhaps an ethics course because it seems to need a refresher on what it means to govern not just competently but ethically.

According to a handy table provided by the ministry on its website, the portion of the bill which would amend the AIMCo Act reads as follows.

The Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act... in combination with public sector pension legislation, establishes AIMCo as the investment manager for public sector pension plans and other designated entities in Alberta.

- The amendments to the AIMCo Act relate to potential financial aspects associated with investment management services delivered before November 2024.

As we've already heard,

- These provide protection to Alberta taxpayers and apply only to actions taken before the governance reset.

Reset, Mr. Speaker, but the trouble is that this isn't about just, sort of, resetting. This is about, as I've said, shirking responsibility and not protecting workers. As my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods noted just yesterday in this House during question period:

A few years ago the UCP took control of several major pension funds and forced them to let AIMCo control their investments. AIMCo then lost billions on what became known as the VOLTS scandal.

The member went on to say:

Now in Bill 12, the UCP is preventing those pensions from suing the government and getting justice for the UCP's choices. And in that same bill, the UCP is giving its own MLAs yet another raise.

She noted that the hypocrisy is staggering, and then went on to say that hundreds of thousands of Alberta workers and pensioners suffered losses to their retirement savings because of AIMCo's reckless VOLTS strategy. And now the UCP government is passing a law to shield AIMCo from accountability. She said that this is shameful. It is shameful, Mr. Speaker. AIMCo's VOLTS strategy resulted in significant losses for hundreds of thousands of Alberta's workers and pensioners. That should not be happening.

I come back to that term "ethical" governance, Mr. Speaker. Albertans, of course, deserve transparency. They deserve a government that is willing to accept responsibility even when it doesn't want to, particularly when their own pensions are concerned, and this move by the UCP government does the opposite. This is a government that is simply looking out for itself, not looking out for the needs of hard-working Albertans. The issue itself, kind of at the bottom of it, is relatively simple, that AIMCo was mismanaged. This government should be acting to protect those everyday Albertans instead of using the shield of this bill, as I say, to shirk its responsibility.

There was a time in 2019, Mr. Speaker, when a few of our public-sector pension plans, including that of AUPE, were moved over to AIMCo. This was after the previous NDP government had changed things up a little in the world of pensions. The NDP had a bill called Bill 27, and the NDP's Bill 27's changes included a five-year transition period for the exclusive use of AIMCo, after which pension boards would be free to move investments to other providers. The act took away the government's role as a trustee and administrator of the funds, and it mandated that any changes to benefits or to the structure of the plans would have to be negotiated jointly between employers and employees' representatives.

This is kind of the model of the Canadian plan, I think it's called, the Canadian model, Mr. Speaker. It works pretty well because it really is about joint governance between the folks who are administering the plans and the folks, quite frankly, who contribute to the plans. This would also mean it would be virtually impossible for the public-sector employers to unilaterally change an existing defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan, something I know has been bandied about in the past.

In 2019 AUPE, one amongst many, was less than pleased. I've taken the following from a November 20, 2019, article that discusses the bill, which was Bill 22 at the time. I will say that the words that AUPE used at that time, all those years ago, are very familiar to what unions have been using today. What they said at

the time, Mr. Speaker, was that “the changes give more control to the government and take away the voice AUPE members have fought so hard to have in the management of our pensions.”

Bill 22: seats at the table are given to nonunion employees. Bill 22 cuts the number of AUPE reps on the LAPP sponsor board from two to one. They also lost a seat on the corporate board, and they noted that both AUPE seats were given to nonunion employees. It meant that all appointments to the corporate pension boards had to be approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Counsel, meaning that AUPE had no say in the matter.

In addition, at the time, Bill 22 forced the pension plans to operate through AIMCo and Alberta Pension Services. It took away the right to switch to a different provider, which they had just won four years earlier, if they think AIMCo isn't doing a good job or if the switch can generate better returns. This meant a lack of an ability of the pension funds to create the best and most stable retirement for members. As we have heard through many, many bills and many instances of legislation in this House, the union, the representatives, the people who contribute the pensions at the heart of all this matter,

were not consulted, Mr. Speaker. They were simply told. As AUPE noted at that time:

This is our money . . .

These are not government funds.

This is not money [taken] from taxation.

These are your retirement savings.

I will admit, Mr. Speaker, that this part of the bill speaks to me because this is about my pension, too. The teacher pension was summarily taken over and moved into AIMCo, exactly the same as the AUPE pension was.

With that, I will adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, happily I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 on Wednesday, December 3, 2025, the year of our Lord. Safe home, everybody.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:30 p.m.]

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