



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 3, 2025

Day 20

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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Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Independent: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 3, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have an important guest seated in my gallery today whom I had the honour of meeting earlier. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Mr. Shahzad Hussain, the consul general of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Vancouver. Mr. Hussain was appointed consul general in June this year. Prior to that, he has served in a range of senior policy, protocol, and diplomatic roles. I invite Mr. Hussain to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-South.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Christina Hollingworth and her mother, Corina Morin Hollingworth. Christina is a constituent, student, community volunteer, and renowned award-winning vocalist. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to introduce Sandra Palazzo, the chair of Edmonton Catholic schools. I ask that she rise and be recognized, and I ask that the Assembly please welcome her.

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

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'm honoured to introduce Mary Haggart, a resident of Edmonton who has become a powerful advocate for improved mental health and addiction supports on behalf of her daughter Lisa Marie. Please rise, Mary, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you one of our political staffers, Elina Pachon, and her husband, Dr. Chris Sheardown, who now gets to see where all the long hours are spent. Elina, we appreciate all you do. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you it's my pleasure to introduce Dan Patten and Jim Toner, members of the Edson Fish and Game Association conservation team. They're

here seeking clarity on why the government is proceeding with cervid harvest preserves through Bill 10. Please rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: Are there other introductions today? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd love to introduce a wonderful constituent of Edmonton-West Henday, Tarra Carlson, who's often here. She's an advocate who is here today on International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly the most handsome member of the gallery, my son Gus, who's here to watch question period this afternoon. I ask that Gus rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Support for Persons with Disabilities

Mrs. Johnson: Today on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities we celebrate the strength, resilience, and contributions of persons with disabilities and we reaffirm our commitment to ensuring every Albertan has the opportunity to succeed. Mr. Speaker, 1 in 5 Albertans live with a disability. These are our parents, our children, our friends, and our neighbours. Albertans with disabilities are woven into the fabric of our lives, and it is our responsibility as members of this Assembly to build a more welcoming and empowering province for them.

This commitment is reflected in our actions. This year Alberta is investing over \$3.6 billion to support Albertans with disabilities, a record amount that strengthens the programs and services people rely on. We're also expanding pathways to opportunity. Our province is often a bright spot in Canada, and employment for people with disabilities is no exception. In fact, Alberta has the highest employment rate for persons with disabilities in all of Canada, and while that is certainly something to be proud of, we know there's more work to do.

That's why our government has doubled its investment in employment supports and launched WorkFirst Alberta, our \$185 million commitment to connecting Albertans with good jobs and helping employers build more inclusive work spaces, and in 2026 the Alberta disability assistance program will launch. It's a major step forward in empowering Albertans with disabilities. It will allow folks to earn the highest levels of income in the country while receiving benefits, and it will extend support to thousands of Albertans with disabilities who are not eligible for support under the current one-size-fits-all approach.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans with disabilities strengthen our communities, they enrich our workplaces, and they shape our province for the better. Today we honour that contribution and we recommit to building an Alberta where everyone has a chance to thrive.

Support for Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: International Day of Persons with Disabilities was never meant to be comfortable. Alberta was once a leader in progressive disability policy within Canada. Alberta led the country

with one of the first disability income programs with the creation of AISH in 1979 under Premier Lougheed. Recognizing disability as a rights-based eligibility, not charity, was a monumental shift towards stability and inclusion. In 1988 Premier Getty recognized that disability policy must be informed by lived experience and created the Premier's council on the status of people with disabilities, a body to actually advise the Premier and her cabinet, not a rubber stamp. In the 1990s and 2010 Alberta adopted major reforms supporting inclusive education, mandating accommodation and funding support.

Our reality in Alberta is deeply political. Whether a person thrives or survives depends on the choices that we make as elected people in this place. Alberta now has the lowest education funding per student in the country, and the systemic lack of support for disabled students will be felt in the future in unemployment. Alberta is the only province after Prince Edward Island not to have passed accessibility legislation, and without a framework to remove all barriers, disabled Albertans will continue to be left behind. Alberta does not make public the wait-list for vital disability services, and they have uncoupled all benefits from inflation. Sweeping changes to AISH currently being debated in this place will deepen poverty and remove the rights to appeal government decisions.

Mr. Speaker, I wish none of this was true. On International Day of Persons with Disabilities we need to return to our proud Alberta roots in disability policy. We need to commit to reclaiming Alberta's leadership on disability policy and making life better and showing our work. IDPD was never meant to make anybody comfortable.

The Speaker: The Member for Grande Prairie.

Alberta in Canada

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today and every day Albertans have every reason to celebrate. In 1904, right before our province was born, Sir Frederick Haultain, then Premier of the North-West Territories, declared that one big province would be able to do things no other province could. While that dream was cut down in 1905 by the federal government, who carved a big province into Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories because Prime Minister Laurier feared a strong west, that didn't stop the people.

Albertans did not stop at that, and last week, when Alberta signed the historic MOU with the federal government, we proved something important. The size of your province isn't what defines you; it's the people with vision and boldness that can define the future. People have historically come to Alberta because this place offers more than land and prosperity. Alberta offers an ideal, a dream of family, of freedom, and of prosperity, a spark of something special that said: with hard work, a can-do attitude, some grit, and a little bit of entrepreneurial spirit, you can create something profitable, meaningful, and lasting.

1:40

That belief, Mr. Speaker, is still woven into every corner of our province, but there have been times, painful but brief, when governments actively worked against those ideals. There were four NDP years when Alberta's voice was weakened, when investment fled, and when our Alberta spirit was tested. Now we hear a federal NDP leadership candidate who voted to support the west coast tanker ban claiming that Alberta is stuck looking backwards. Well, we do look back, and we look back proudly because our history is rich in family; it's rich in faith, in culture, in innovation, and an entrepreneurial spirit unmatched anywhere in Canada.

Last week Alberta proved it again. We secured a monumental MOU agreement, and these changes are more than many Albertans ever imagined as possible. This deal doesn't just walk, Mr. Speaker; it runs, and running hard is the Alberta way. We're not slowing down, not now, not ever.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Public Health Care

Ms Chapman: There are so many community builders in Calgary-Beddington, folks who not only know their neighbours but support them, too, folks who volunteer their time because they believe in the power of community. They understand the need we have for connection, and they have the capacity to bring people together.

One of those people is Cheryl. I met Cheryl in my first month as an MLA, so I've had the pleasure of knowing her now for two and a half years. Cheryl is the beating heart of a community seniors group. Cheryl gives great hugs. Cheryl goes to great lengths to provide opportunities for connection and belonging in our community. I have never seen Cheryl without a smile on her face, but I have also never seen Cheryl with a spring in her step. That's because Cheryl needs a knee replacement. She's needed one for going on two and a half years now, but she doesn't have \$20,000 to pay to have it done privately. She needs the public health system that she's been paying into her entire life, so she waits.

This government's ploy to introduce American-style, two-tiered health care isn't going to help Cheryl. Where are the doctors who are going to perform all these extra surgeries? Where are the anaesthesiologists coming from? Surely this government is aware that Alberta has a chronic shortage of anaesthesiologists. Surely, right? While this government flails around bereft of good ideas to address the challenges in health care, Cheryl has mastered waiting. She does it with a smile on her face, but she shouldn't have to. She shouldn't be expected to live in pain or to watch her mobility slip away. She should have a government who takes care of her; instead, she's got the UCP.

Conservatism in Alberta

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are tired of division and conflict. What they want is simple: stability, honesty, a government that quietly does its job and lets people live their lives. Good governance doesn't rely on spectacle. It's built with steady hands, sound judgment, and respect for democratic rights. It is rooted in fundamentals: living within our means, supporting communities, protecting services, and creating the conditions for enterprise to thrive.

Like many Albertans, I come to this place as a parent, a small-business owner, and someone who has seen both the strength and strain of government up close. I have seen what happens when fear replaces confidence, when control replaces trust, and when power is used to silence rather than serve. We can do better.

Albertans' best days have come when we blend principle with pragmatism and when we match fiscal discipline with strong institutions as well as opportunity and compassion. That tradition is bigger than any brand or label. Today there are many Albertans who feel politically homeless, people who believe in economic freedom and personal responsibility but also believe in the Charter, the rule of law, and in the right to organize and speak without intimidation.

To those I say this. A movement is under way. They can change the rules, they can ban a name, but they cannot legislate away our belief in responsibility. They cannot stop a Progressive Conservative movement built on integrity, competence, and hope. Our goal is the same: to offer a home for those who believe in

capability over disorder, service over slogans, and a return to normal, reliable, accountable government. This movement will not be deterred. It will not be defined by fear. We will be defined by purpose.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Policies

Mr. Kasawski: What if someone else had won the 2022 UCP leadership contest? I wondered that a lot during the last election. It was the closest provincial election in Alberta's history. It was a campaign of the reasonable people's party against the UCP, but what if they had a different leader?

Would Albertans be paying hundreds of millions of dollars in settlements to foreign coal companies? Yes. The UCP wants coal mining so badly that it was certain they were going to make Albertans pay for their bad decisions. Would Albertans be out hundreds of millions of dollars for the DynaLife debacle? Yes again. Albertans were always going to pay for the UCP's privatization schemes. Would they have been caught sitting in skyboxes at NHL playoff games with Sam Mraiche? Definitely yes. It's an astonishing abuse and misuse of taxpayer money. Would the UCP be bringing in American-style health care to Alberta so they could make more of their friends rich with fat contracts paid for with taxpayer money? Yes. It is their MO.

It would not matter who won the party leadership because who leads the UCP does not change their policies, but the depth of corruption on display and the self-enrichment carried out by the UCP during this term is remarkable. They are giving parliamentary secretaries a raise while those same members voted against increasing the minimum wage for Alberta's lowest paid workers. Together, united in secrecy, united in their dislike of democracy, united in their rejection of ethical oversight along with checks and balances for a democracy, the elected representatives of the UCP make terrible, horrible, very bad decisions, and Albertans will have to pay because the UCP always makes Albertans pay. More for auto insurance, more for electricity, more for private security, more for health care, and more for life here in Alberta: you always pay more with the UCP.

Presenting Petitions

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

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lisa Marie Haggart was six weeks shy of her 31st birthday when she passed away in April this year. Her mother, Mary, sister, and brother miss her terribly. Mary looks to her faith for solace and to the government for action. Mental illness or addiction should never be a death sentence.

The Speaker: Hon. member, a speech is not included in the tabling of a petition. Please give the title, the general purpose, and stop, please.

Member Eremenko: I'm proud to submit this petition asking for timely, compassionate, effective support by government on behalf of the memory of Lisa Marie Haggart and other Albertans who have died by suicide.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two, both written by students here in Edmonton public schools talking about class sizes of 30 and 35 respectively and calling on the government to do better.

The Speaker: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table the five requisite copies of *The Bureau* article titled From Illegal 'Police Stations' to Rolling Consulates: Beijing's New Interference Tactics Expand Beyond Major Cities on Canadian Soil.

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is from Inclusion Alberta, a media release titled Bill 12 Erodes Rights and Deepens Poverty for Albertans with Disabilities.

The second one is a brief written by Zachary Weeks, Bill 12 and ADAP: The Biggest Rewrite of Disability Supports in Alberta in 20 Years.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an e-mail from Emma, a grade 10 student from Red Deer who notes that her MLA is failing students. I urge that member to read this e-mail.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. First, a constituent asking why it's so hard to vaccinate her children; second, a constituent asking why the vaccine booking site asked for her sexual orientation and religious affiliation; and finally, a response from the minister's office claiming that there is nothing she can do.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a letter from a constituent of Red Deer-North, and it is about the constituent's concern on a two-tier health care system in our province.

1:50

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the five requisite copies of an article in Wikipedia called *Bless the Beasts & Children*, a novel from 1970 and movie telling the story of disturbed boys away at summer camp who unite to stop a buffalo hunt shooting buffalo in an enclosure.

The Speaker: Are there any more? Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mrs. Sawyer: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five requisite copies of a table from Statistics Canada showing that Alberta not only has the highest rate of employment of persons with disabilities in the country but that we also have the lowest rates of unemployment, highest participation rates, and highest hourly earnings for persons with disabilities.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings? The Member for Bonnyville-St. Paul-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table the five requisite copies of two different instances of the hon. Member for St. Albert telling Albertans with disabilities that the government will be using the

Harry Potter sorting hat to determine which disability support programs they will be replacing.

The Speaker: We'll get back to tablings later.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition has the first question.

Supports for Students with Disabilities

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we know, today is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, yet people living with disabilities in Alberta feel under attack by this government every day, not more so than students living with disabilities. In a town hall earlier this week the Premier yet again seemed to say that she doesn't believe in inclusive education. What did the Premier mean when she said that disabled students need to earn their way into a classroom and earn their way out with their behaviours?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I was talking about violent students who have kicked a teacher in the stomach so hard that she needed surgery, another student who bit a teacher's breast to the point where she also needed surgery, teachers who tell us that they get beaten up and are afraid to go back to class. That's what I'm saying, that we know that there are some self-regulation issues that we're having in classrooms. Maybe rather than clearing the classroom, we need to take that student out for some one-on-one time. We have very complex classrooms. We are having our cabinet committee deal with this, and we're going to be developing solutions that work for front-line teachers.

Mr. Nenshi: You know, the Premier has often spoken about the need for supports, as she just did, but hiring fewer than one education assistant per school isn't going to solve the problem. The minister of education has often said that some schools will lose their education assistants so that other schools will get more education assistants. This really is shuffling of the deck chairs, and hiring 1,500 more EAs isn't going to get us there. So does the Premier believe that shuffling these deck chairs is going to solve the problem? If not, where are the other supports coming from?

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we've committed to do is hire 3,000 more teachers and 1,500 more education assistants over the next three years. We're going through and analyzing the data that we have. We were able to get most of the data in on November 24, and one of the things that we found was that the number of students who speak English as a second language went from 49,000 to 77,000. That's what's causing the biggest pressure in our system right now, which may require specialized English language learning teachers or maybe specialized classrooms with more EAs. That's what we're going to be focusing on, and we're going to put the resources where they're needed.

Mr. Nenshi: Well, those supports are certainly needed, but the government hasn't funded them. They funded .5 additional EAs per school, but the government's attacks on people with disabilities go far beyond the classroom. We remain the only province that's clawing back the Canada disability benefit. People on AISH living in affordable housing are going to see massive increases in their rent, and we have yet to hear anything from the government on how to support people with disabilities that they want to enter the workforce at a time of massively high, historical unemployment.

Why does the government feel the need to target people with disabilities instead of improving affordability for everyone?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd invite the member opposite to talk to his friends in British Columbia in the NDP and in Manitoba in the NDP and ask them to raise their level of disability payments to match what we do in Alberta. In Manitoba they are \$554 less per month than Alberta. In British Columbia they are \$417 less per month than in Alberta. What we're doing is that we are matching what it is the federal government is asking every other province to do. We're well above the \$1,814 a month, and we're going to stay that way.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: I remember a time Premiers used to talk about the Alberta advantage rather than trying to be just as good as the other guys.

Health Care System Governance

Mr. Nenshi: Now, the Premier has often blamed Alberta Health Services for all the failings of the corrupt care scandal despite scads of evidence to the contrary. This also ignores the fact that the government runs AHS. They've hired four hand-picked CEOs and subsequently fired three of them. They fired two entire boards of directors. There is no board right now. What is the Premier's plan here? Will there be a permanent CEO of AHS, and will there ever be a new board of directors?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our plan is to go to site-based management and activity-based funding. We want to make sure that there is a CEO at every single hospital so that they can manage the care at each hospital, determine the services that are needed, and manage the patient experience, get paid based on the number of surgeries that they're able to provide. That's the model that we're putting in. We've been hearing for a long time that communities would far rather have somebody in the community making those decisions than a faraway bureaucrat who has never visited the town, and that's what we're moving towards.

Mr. Nenshi: More and more CEOs and more and more management. That's an interesting conservative argument there.

In question period yesterday the government announced – surprise – they are cancelling those ASG contracts after three front-page stories in the *Globe and Mail*. There have been problems with these contracts from the start. In fact, that is what the previous CEO of AHS was complaining about, but they didn't listen to her. Instead, they fired her, and now they're cancelling those selfsame contracts. Why didn't they cancel them in January, and will the government apologize to the CEO because she was right?

Ms Smith: We wish that the CEO had given us the information. The health minister had to ask her to give a directive so that we could have that information. We only discovered many of the things and the problems with the contracts after the fact. Our health minister has done an amazing job of looking at a new model for how we're going to fund surgeries. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's hear the answer.

Ms Smith: One of the ways we're going to fund surgeries is to look at what the rate should be and apply that same rate across the board no matter where they get their surgery. Then those surgical centres who can do the most surgeries, attract the most patients: they'll get the most money.

Mr. Nenshi: To quote the Premier on multiple occasions, read the government's statement of defence, in which the CEO was excoriated for making questions about these contracts. Now we know she was right.

Now, the Premier replaced the former CEO, whom she hand-picked, with another hand-picked CEO, Andre Tremblay, and in epic bad governance the government set it up so that he as CEO reported to himself as official administrator, reported to himself as deputy minister. That was never going to work. Now rumours are rife that even the new CEO is in trouble. Can the Premier confirm today whether Mr. Tremblay has been placed on administrative leave?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we don't comment on HR matters, so that is an issue for AHS. What I can tell you is that we continue the work of improving the patient experience in every single hospital. We've made great strides in moving alternative level of care patients out of the Royal Alex. We've made great strides in creating a new model for paying for surgeries at individual hospitals and charter surgical centres. We've got 50,000 more surgeries that we're going to be doing over the next three years to clear backlogs on those who have been waiting longer than medically necessary. The work continues.

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

Mr. Nenshi: A remarkable nonanswer even by the standards of this government.

Support for Immigrants

Mr. Nenshi: Yesterday the minister of public safety made a wild accusation in the House suggesting organized crime is the fault of immigrants and somehow of provincial New Democrats. Now, this is part of a disturbing pattern of anti-immigrant rhetoric from this government. Even the Premier has suggested in this House that there are the right kind and the wrong kind of immigrants. Will the Premier take responsibility for the ramping up of this rhetoric? Will she renounce the comments of her minister?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My public safety minister quoting an RCMP report saying that there are 4,000 organized crime and other gangs that are operating in Canada is just a statement of fact. There is absolutely nothing in that answer that suggests what the member opposite is trying to suggest.

What I can tell you that we're doing is that we're making sure that our Alberta sheriff's police force is going to be able to fill the gaps in the communities that are suffering from high incidence of crime and make sure that somebody answers the phone when the 911 call comes in.

2:00

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier may wish to read *Hansard* because that is not at all what the minister said.

Let me tell you that the Premier has in the past suggested that former South Dakota governor and director of Homeland Security Kristi Noem is her political hero and her role model. Now, this is

what Kristi Noem said this week about immigrants. They are "foreign invaders [who] slaughter our heroes, suck dry our hard-earned tax dollars, [and] snatch the benefits owed to Americans." Is the Premier still taking her cues from Kristi Noem, her hero? Does she agree with this kind of rhetoric?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that my view on immigration is this. We have had in the past a large number of primarily economic migrants who have come to Alberta and fit in seamlessly. We've got more than 150 different diaspora communities that are able to provide that support. One of the most successful examples was the Ukrainian diaspora that came here as evacuees, 65,000, that were supported by their community. That's when you have a system that works, when you've got skilled immigrants who come here supported by community, and it benefits everybody. We want more of that.

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier never finishes that thought. She never tells us who she thinks the wrong kind of immigrants are, and the fact is that casual racism and hate crimes are up again across the province. People are scared . . .

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

Mr. Nenshi: . . . that they no longer belong here under this government. Careless use of this kind of rhetoric, the kind of rhetoric that we hear from the government, inflames the situation. Simple question: will the Premier commit today to ramp down the government's anti-immigration rhetoric, to stop blaming immigrants for all of the problems of the government's own making, and to work to create an Alberta where everyone belongs?

Ms Smith: Well, will the Leader of the Opposition stop doing exactly what he's accusing this government of? He's the one that's continually amping up on this issue. I have been very clear about what we would like to see. We have a large diaspora community. The people who have done so well here and are able to support their families are ones who come here with a job and are supported in finding a pathway to permanent immigration. That is exactly what we want to continue to do, Mr. Speaker. We need to get back to the level of historic numbers of newcomers that we had prior to COVID, and that will make sure that we're able to support . . .

The Speaker: The fourth set of questions today goes to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

A point of order was noted at 2:01.

Recovery Community Contracts

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the government repeatedly claims that the Wyant report exonerated all dealings that they had with their close friend Sam Mraiche, but anyone who reads the report knows that that is absolutely not the case. In June 2023 the government officials talked to ROSC Solutions Group about buying a building to use for detox residential treatment. Land title searches show that four months later Sam Mraiche bought that same building. None of this was reviewed by Justice Wyant. Will the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction reveal how much ROSC Solutions Group has paid to Sam Mraiche's numbered company to lease that space?

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, why do they want to block people trying to get help? I don't understand that. We're working hard to get recovery communities going all across the province. We're going to be opening four brand new ones on First Nations, one at the Métis

Crossing. I've seen this. We're out there helping people, and they're trying to block us from doing it. I don't understand what the problem is. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Gray: Let me help the minister. We are talking about corruption in government procurement. We've been talking about it for more than a year now. The building in question, again, owned by Sam Mraiche, is beside the ROSC Solution Group's headquarters. It's a really short thread between the two. ROSC Solution Group wasn't even a company until December 2022, but somehow three months later they ended up with \$70 million of Mental Health and Addiction contracts. In the middle of it all: Sam Mraiche. Did the Premier's chief of staff brief her or others about ROSC Solutions Group and Sam Mraiche connections?

Mr. Wilson: We're helping people who are just . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: We'll just hear the minister now.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're doing a lot on this side. I mean, they're attacking people that are trying to help people in addictions. I don't understand it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members. Members, we just did this. Minister, start over. We're going to hear you.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you again. We've done so much on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker. We're helping people that are suffering from addictions, unlike the people on the other side of the House, who want to keep people living in tents. It's terrible.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Wilson: We've done a lot. I tabled it in the House. They can look it up. It's tabled as to where the procurement came from. I don't know why they have such trouble finding it. They could go on the computer. Maybe they don't know how to do that. It's been tabled. It's out there. [interjections]

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: Order.

Two points of order were noted at 2:05.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, in the face of allegations of corruption the government is only hurling slurs and insults. It's ridiculous.

Justice Wyant had a narrow, restricted mandate and did not look into Mental Health and Addiction, so he couldn't look into Sam Mraiche's involvement in hundreds of millions of dollars more of procurement decisions, this time involving ROSC Solutions Group and the Premier's former chief of staff. FOIP documents reveal political staff toured the site just before Sam Mraiche bought it. Who got Sam Mraiche to buy this building? Who made the connection? How much are taxpayers on the hook for? Call a public inquiry.

The Speaker: All members need to make sure they're finished talking when the clock hits zero.

Minister.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, if they want to find out what really happened, I've tabled it. It's easy to find. They do a lot of tablings on that side, so they should know how to find them to see where the answers are. It's out there.

Mr. Speaker, we have more record investments across many service providers. There are many. I have literally probably hundreds that we're working with. So many good things are happening out there, especially with youth. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Let's just hear the minister right now, and then we'll just hear the next person answering the question. That's how it works.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Especially with youth mental health, it's a huge issue. Our department is really focusing on that. Just the other day I was visiting CASA House, and we saw what they're doing over there.

The Speaker: The next set of questions, and of course no preambles on the supplementaries.

Chartered Surgical Facility Contracts

Ms Hoffman: We're often reminded that question period isn't answer period, but yesterday it was actually announcement period. One of the current health ministers decided to tell us that the Lethbridge and Red Deer surgical centres, valued at \$430 million, well into the works with Sam Mraiche, were cancelled. Before the UCP even thinks about contracting out surgeries again, Albertans deserve to know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So will the Premier finally call a fully independent public inquiry into the corrupt care scandal?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The procurements referenced in the member's question were initiated in 2022, and no formal agreement had been reached. It has been quite some time. The health system has been completely reformed. Procurement has been shifted from AHS to the Health Shared Services organization and Acute Care Alberta, and it's been updated to include more robust due diligence and conflicts of interest practices. We're also moving towards activity-based funding, where any accredited and approved provider in Alberta will be able to provide the same surgeries for the same reimbursement. That's fair. That's transparent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Hoffman: Given that that's another refusal for a public inquiry and clearly no transparency and given that the government was aware that the contracts for-profit, American – style centres wanted were far more expensive than the surgeries provided in public hospitals but given that the Premier tried to justify these high prices per surgery, how many presents, donations, box tickets, trips from the Justice minister's close relative and the Premier's election night insider did it take for the current government to abandon any fiscal responsibility principles they once espoused to hold?

The Speaker: The hospitals minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the members in here know, we did a record 318,000 surgeries last year, and we were able to do that because of the growth in our chartered surgical facilities, which now do over 20 per cent of our surgeries. The opportunity is for CSFs to take the low-complexity surgeries out of hospitals so we can do more emergent and complex surgeries in-hospital. We've been analyzing the prices between the two. On ASA level I hips and knees, for example, it's about the same. When you get up to levels II or III, the CSFs are upwards of 50 per cent less expensive for the same procedure.

2:10

Ms Hoffman: Given that the government clearly knew there was a problem with these contracts for a year but waited until it was a front-page story making them look bad before they finally cancelled these contracts and given that officials were clear with the UCP that there wasn't enough staff capacity in Lethbridge or in Red Deer to expand these surgical centres and given that American-style profit in health care always means Albertans pay more, which one of the health ministers over there wants to explain to the people of Red Deer why they put profits for Sam Mraiche over providing safe care for the people in the Red Deer regional hospital?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, as the members in this Chamber are aware, we are expanding the Red Deer regional hospital. More than that, we're expanding our surgical programming, and that will apply to Red Deer in the central Alberta area. We've allocated funds to do 50,000 incremental surgeries over the next three years. That's going to be in hospitals and in CSFs, more across the board. Alberta is not an island. The members opposite seem to think Alberta is an island. They told everybody to move elsewhere to get a job. We're recruiting thousands of physicians and health care workers every year.

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

Wildfire Prevention and Control

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2017 a massive grasslands fire tore through southeastern Alberta, destroying homes, lives, and families. Earlier this year a wildfire in Cypress county forced the evacuation of residents from their homes, bringing back memories of fear and loss. Thanks to the historic and heroic effort of our firefighters and partners the fire was contained without loss of life or destruction of homes, ensuring history did not repeat itself. Can the Minister of Forestry and Parks please explain what this government is doing to continue to support Alberta's wildland firefighters and rural municipalities like those in my community?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. We invested \$160 million in base funding this year to ensure Alberta's wildland firefighters had the resources they needed on the front lines. That included more air tankers, helicopters, and heavy equipment along with stronger technology like an enhanced fire weather monitoring network and two additional night-vision helicopters. We also co-ordinated closely with the municipal fire departments for efficient response across the province. We started the wildfire season earlier. We had trained crews earlier. We hired more crews. We used drones for thermal imaging. We started the hoist program to move firefighters safely. We did all of this to support our front-line wildland firefighters.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that just a few weeks later a forest fire started in the Cypress Hills provincial park but was quickly extinguished due to fast responses from the county firefighters and Alberta Wildfire and given that Albertans living in areas prone to wildfires deserve to know their homes are safe from this risk, can the same minister please explain what this government is doing to reduce wildfire risks in vulnerable areas like the Cypress Hills provincial park and how these measures

will protect Albertans from future evacuations and property loss in and around Elkwater?

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

Mr. Loewen: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. Our government is conducting important mitigation work under way across Alberta. We're funding 28 community fireguard plans and four construction projects now in progress in places like Canmore, Hinton, Whitecourt, and Slave Lake. Another great example is the Elkwater town site in Cypress Hills, where FireSmart crews and arborists have been reducing hazardous fuels, including a 1.8-kilometre, 50-metre-wide firebreak to help protect the community. Our community hazardous fuels reduction program is also delivering strong results, and we're working with municipalities to help prepare them for the next wildfire season. A lot has been done, but there's a lot more to do, and we're on it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that Albertans most vulnerable to wildfires are often in tight-knit, isolated communities and given that effective wildfire response and prevention require strong collaboration across communities and jurisdiction, can the same minister please explain how this government is working with municipalities, Indigenous communities, and other stakeholders to develop co-ordinated wildfire strategies to ensure processes are practical, well co-ordinated and resources are developed effectively?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Wildfire prevention and mitigation is a collective effort. We're working with industry communities, all levels of government, and Indigenous partners to reduce risk and build resilience across Alberta. We're investing in key mitigation programs, FireSmart, community fireguards, public education, and vegetation management in our parks. In order to respond efficiently and effectively to wildfire, we need to co-ordinate with stakeholders. Mitigating wildfire impacts takes a whole-of-society approach, and we look forward to sharing our full mitigation strategy in the new year. I'd like to thank the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for his advocacy for wildfire prevention and for his constituents.

AI Data Centre Projects

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, this government's entire data centre strategy assumes that the proponent will bring their own energy generation, taking advantage of Alberta's relatively inexpensive natural gas resources. Great idea, right? Well, what they haven't considered is that there is currently a shortage in the industrial equipment needed to build natural gas power plants with a backlog until 2031. To the minister: what is the government's plan to address this very present supply chain challenge, and will they admit that they haven't actually thought this through?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the work that this government is doing on the data centre file. We're the government that saw this opportunity 18 months ago and decided that we need to be at the forefront of this, and that is why we launched our data centre attraction strategy, and that is why we have unprecedented levels of interest from companies from all around the world saying: "You know what? Alberta is one of the best places in the world to invest." We're going to work closely with them to help make sure

the best projects move forward, and we are confident that the first step at that is the 1,200 megawatts that the grid operator has allocated to data centre projects. Those projects are very far advanced, and we're confident that we're going to see some very good news very soon.

Mr. Ip: Given that there are credible concerns by industry experts that we are in the middle of an AI investment bubble and given that by some estimates 90 per cent of proposed data centre projects in Alberta are underfunded or running out of money competing for the same number of investors and further given that this could mean leaving Albertans to bear the cost of yet more stranded assets like half-built data centres, why does this government have no plan to mitigate against these risks?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite demonstrated how little they really understand about this industry with that exact question. Nobody is going to proceed with building a \$20 billion data centre if they only have half the money. Nobody's going to be building shelves of data centres and leaving them incomplete. In order to build a project of that magnitude, you need to have the money lined up, you need to have the engineering done, you need to have the approvals done, and that's what our government is doing. We are working with these companies and these project proponents to make sure that the best, most organized, best funded projects are the ones that will move forward and only those ones.

Mr. Ip: Given that cuts to the budget of Alberta Innovates by 30 per cent show that this UCP government is not serious about developing the AI sector in Alberta and given that this government has also slashed research and development funding for postsecondary institutions educating the next generation of talent in emerging industries like AI, will this government come clean to Albertans that there is no plan and that when it comes to attracting investment, the UCP is all hype and no substance?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government is committed to innovation, and that is something that we stand behind. We stand on our track record, which is one that has seen unprecedented growth in investment in Alberta's tech sector. When the NDP were in government, we saw \$30 million in 2017 invested in venture capital deals in Alberta. Under our leadership we've seen that for three years running at \$700 million. I'll take our track record over theirs any day.

Health Care Accessibility

Member Irwin: Now is the time that this UCP government should be doing all they can to address the intense affordability issues that so many Albertans are struggling with like the crushing costs of car insurance, groceries, and rent. Instead, the UCP are adding a brand new cost for Albertans by putting a price tag on health care and doubling down on a two-tiered, private, for-profit health care system, the type of health care that's great for the rich but hurts those who don't have the means. How on earth can this Premier face Albertans who are struggling with daily costs and offer nothing but more bills? If she's so confident in her plan, then call an election.

The Speaker: The hon. minister of preventative health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. News flash: there was an election; we won. We are actually doing the work that needs to be done to fix health care. In fact, we are providing more surgeries than ever before. Prior to the pandemic, under the

members opposite, their numbers actually went down. Wait times went up, and the number of surgeries went down. We are actually making sure that we're increasing the number of surgeries and making sure that people have access to quality health care.

2:20

Member Irwin: Given that this is a UCP government that campaigned in 2023 on public health care and now they're shredding that health care guarantee, they need to listen to people like my constituent Tia, who waited for 16 hours.

Speaker's Ruling Exhibits

The Speaker: Hon. member, it's well known that you don't use props here. That was a textbook case of that, and I'm not going to wait for the point of order. Why don't you just apologize real quick and we'll move on.

Member Irwin: I apologize. I did not know.

The Speaker: Thank you. Carry on. Finish your question.

Health Care Accessibility (continued)

Member Irwin: Okay. My constituent Tia waited for 16 hours in an emergency room, and she was frightened and traumatized by what she saw as she waited. It was so intense that even the physicians she got to see finally acknowledged that the conditions were inhumane, and given that Tia wants MLAs to advocate for more staff and more health care resources, not a private system that will give better access to only those who can afford it, why won't the minister listen to people like Tia?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the members opposite really like political theatre, but in fact on this side we like doing the work, and the work means getting more doctors to come to Alberta and take on more patients. I know I've said the numbers before. During the NDP, 10,600 physicians; 12,769 and more coming every day. We have got 50,000 nurses. That's 13,000 more than when they were in government. We're not...

The Speaker: The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright – oh, I'm sorry. After the third question for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: It was tricky. Thank you.

If Bill 11 isn't bad enough for Albertans who aren't rich, the UCP have gone one step further and harsher with Bill 12 cutting benefits for tens of thousands of AISH recipients and given that organizations like Inclusion Alberta have warned that the UCP's cruel changes will not only push many deeper into poverty but will also add more strain to the health care system with people forced to undergo additional eligibility medical assessments, how can this government justify these cruel, callous cuts and attacks on disabled Albertans, and why would they add more stress to an already overburdened medical system?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, another day of the NDP spreading fear to the disability community. It's shocking. What's more shocking is that they want to talk about investments in the disability community. That member is part of a party that, when they were in government, only

spent \$1,588 a month on people with disabilities, spent almost a billion dollars less than this side of the House, who continues to spend record amounts. Their critic just recently said that investing with people with disabilities is a waste of resources and time. Shame on them.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:23 p.m.

Health Information Sharing in Lloydminster

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, for years Lloydminster residents have faced medical delays, duplicate tests, and frustration because their health records were split across the provincial border. Community health providers on the Saskatchewan side never had access to Alberta Netcare, the system used for storing vital medical information for Albertans. With regulatory changes finally allowing Saskatchewan-based providers to access Alberta Netcare for Alberta residents, can the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services please share how these changes improve continuity of care for families in my constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister for preventative health care. Please finish on time.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the great question. This is a big win for Lloydminster families. For years if you saw a doctor on one side of the town and then went to the other side, they couldn't see the same health records. That meant delays, repeat tests, and frustration. Now with these changes, your care team can see your lab results and medication history right away, no matter which side of the border you're on. It's about making care faster, safer, and less stressful for people who just want to get healthy and get back to living their lives. I've heard from Lloyd. They really want this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the changes allow select Saskatchewan-based providers to access Alberta Netcare and given that Albertans expect their personal health information to remain secure and confidential and given that misuse of health records can have serious consequences, can the minister explain what specific safeguards and enforcement measures are in place to ensure that privacy is fully protected?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans trust us with their sensitive health information, and that trust matters. Every provider who is eligible for access must follow strict rules and use the system only for Alberta patients. We will closely monitor the pilot project that will onboard some community providers right away, and if someone misuses the system, there are very serious consequences. Your information stays protected, and there are safeguards that make sure that better access doesn't come at the cost of your privacy. We respect that privacy.

The Speaker: Minister, you've got to finish when the clock gets to zero.

The member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that regulatory changes took effect on October 22 of this year and further given that Lloydminster residents have waited years for seamless access

to their health records and given that onboarding for eligible Saskatchewan-based providers is expected to begin in early 2026, can the minister explain when residents will start seeing the benefits of this change and what steps are being taken to ensure onboarding happens quickly and effectively?

Member LaGrange: I'm happy to, Mr. Speaker. The first group of Saskatchewan providers will start joining early in the new year. We're starting with a pilot project to make sure everything runs smoothly, and then we'll expand access beyond that. In a new era of health care we're implementing common-sense, practical health solutions that make everything accessible and simple. These changes mean fewer delays and better care as soon as those providers are connected. Lloyd residents have waited way too long for this. We're happy to provide it.

Thank you.

COVID-19 Vaccination Policies

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, the COVID and flu vaccine registration system is a morass of failed hopes and dreams. The constituents of Calgary-Elbow are responsible stewards of their community. They shovel their walks early in the morning and shovel their neighbours', too. They also look after one another by getting vaccinated, but my constituents are having trouble with a broken 811 line and website for booking vaccines. Why did this government break vaccine distribution the same way it broke emergency rooms?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of preventative health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we are seeing that well over 300,000 Albertans have already gone out and gotten their COVID vaccine shot. That doesn't include the numbers that are getting them in the private pharmacy market that is available. We took our advice from NACI, which said that universal immunization for COVID was not required in this year, that we actually needed to take a targeted approach, so that's what we're doing. We took a targeted approach and made sure that it was accessible to those that need it most.

Member Kayande: Given that constituent correspondence floods into my office about vaccine access and given that Calgary-Elbow residents informing me about a buggy website and hours-long 811 wait times e-mailed the minister's office and given that her office responded with "beyond advising constituents to call back when call volumes are not as high, there is nothing our office can do," why would the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services tell my constituent there is nothing she can do?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, 811 was set up to handle the calls. They had a huge influx of calls in the beginning. They added additional support resources to make sure that all of those calls were answered. There were additional times allocated to the various clinics that are offering the immunization. They're continuing to make sure that they meet the demand, and that will continue until every Albertan who wants a vaccine gets it.

Member Kayande: Given that COVID and flu vaccines save lives and that millions of Albertans want them, given that at least one senior in Calgary received a bill for her COVID shot despite being eligible for it, given that she wrote the Premier about this demanding an answer and given that this government appears to be

preventing people who want vaccines from getting them, instead of billing 80-year-old diabetics who need protection, why won't the government simply make the COVID vaccine freely available once again instead of making it so, so hard just to get a vaccine?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Of course, we're going to make sure that all of those that qualify to get their vaccine for free absolutely have that available. I apologize on behalf of the organization that sent out the inappropriate or the wrong fee, but I know I've been charged fees for certain things inappropriately as well or by mistake. I apologize for any mistakes that have been made, but, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day our province can't afford to throw away vaccines that are being wasted.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

2:30 Support for Persons with Disabilities

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is International Day of Persons with Disabilities, a time to recognize and celebrate the contributions and achievements of persons with disabilities. Here on this side of the House we know that Albertans with disabilities are vital to the success of our province and strengthen our communities across the province. To the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services: what is our government doing to support Albertans with disabilities and empower them to continue contributing to the success of our province?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, when this government came into power, we immediately started taking action to be able to help the disability community. Unfortunately, things like AISH payments had been stalled out for almost a decade underneath the NDP. Where they paid \$1,588 a month, this government pays \$1,940 a month. That's just one example. We spent \$3.6 billion helping people with disabilities. The NDP was below \$3 billion helping people with disabilities. They don't seem to care, but we're going to continue to invest in this important sector, and, unfortunately, the NDP have indicated that they think that's a waste of time and a waste of resources.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that on this side of the House we know that Albertans with disabilities are valued members of our communities and our workplaces and given that the NDP have made it clear that they don't believe in employment for Albertans with disabilities, saying that there are no successful pathways to employment for Albertans with disabilities, will the same minister please correct the record and share with Alberta how Alberta's government is empowering Albertans with disabilities to pursue meaningful careers?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the number one thing we're doing is record investments in this space, making sure it's clear that we care about this issue, that we want to make sure that individuals are cared for. For example, my ministry is investing \$185 million this year alone in supports for people with disabilities. The NDP invested zero dollars in supports for people. In fact, they kept AISH, at that time, up and running in a way that punished people with disabilities for working. Shame on them for that. We're not going to do that on this side of the House.

Mrs. Petrovic: Given that it is crucial that Albertans with disabilities know that there are supports for them to rely on and given that it is critical that Albertans with disabilities, their loved ones, and support systems are able to rely on the accuracy of

information being provided by elected officials about supports available to them, can the same minister share with the House the dangers of the NDP continuing to share blatant misinformation with Albertans about critical supports for Albertans with disabilities?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, sadly it's not just only sharing blatant misinformation; it's going on things like TikTok and other platforms and implying to people with disabilities that they need to commit suicide. [interjections]

Ms Ganley: Point of order.

Mr. Nixon: Absolutely shameful actions for that to take place. Alberta is going to continue to invest in programs. AISH is not going anywhere despite the fearmongering that some people might hear. ADAP is going to come along and take care of thousands of Albertans who have disabilities that want to work that were left behind by the NDP.

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:33 p.m.

The next question belongs to the Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Environmental Policies

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of environment and parks is responsible for protecting our environment, and that means regulating natural gas flares that pollute our air. Secret documents obtained by FOIP show that this government stopped enforcing and then cancelled the limits on these flares, leading to exceeding air pollution limits. The ministry did it. All hush hush. No transparency. No accountability. If the minister's job is to keep our air clean, why did she pressure the AER to sweep its enforcement duties under the rug?

The Speaker: The hon. minister for the environment.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is nothing secretive about this. All of this information is posted online, and we also undertook an engagement to determine what decision to make following this report. We reviewed and we removed the unnecessary solution gas flaring limit because it was arbitrary. It was outdated. It wasn't used anywhere else in Canada. It was introduced over 20 years ago, and it no longer worked for the development that we were seeing here in Alberta. It was originally meant to reduce smoke orders and local air pollution, all of which have declined significantly over the last 20 years.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that wetlands also fall under this minister's purview and given that one hectare of wetland produces an average of \$106,000 in ecosystem services per year, given that the minister is considering changes to the wetlands policy that would facilitate draining more wetlands on private land . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Dr. Elmeligi: . . . and that wasn't part of the Water Amendment Act we just debated, it appears the minister isn't being transparent about these intentions either. Who has the minister consulted with about these changes to the wetlands policy, and why aren't we debating them in the House?

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:35.

The minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Despite the fact that there is absolutely no connection between those two questions, I'm happy to stand up and talk about both the Water Act and the wetlands policy that we do have in place. I'm so very proud of Bill

7, the work that we undertook to overhaul the legislation that governs how we manage water here in Alberta. I'm grateful to the thousands of Albertans who took part in that engagement. We're hearing great feedback so far.

When it comes to the wetland policy, this is a major topic that I've heard, especially from ag producers, around the impacts of our wetland policy. Policy isn't part of legislation, Mr. Speaker, and I'm happy to talk about that with the member as well. [interjections]

The Speaker: Thanks for all the help, but I'm going to recognize the Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I'm hearing from stakeholders about that wetlands policy as well, I look forward to future conversations.

Given that the Upper Smoky land-use plan is also in this minister's responsibility, given that this subregional plan was part of a section 11 agreement with the federal government to recover caribou, given that the final plan doesn't protect caribou winter range, only summer range, which could extirpate these herds, given that this has led to the federal government needing to come in and do an imminent threat assessment because the minister hasn't done her job to recover caribou, can the minister explain why she chose to make decisions that necessitated federal interference?

The Speaker: To the minister, who will finish on time this time.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I'd like to point out to the member opposite that the questions are supposed to be related to each other, but I'm still happy to answer because the member is absolutely incorrect. The new Upper Smoky subregional plan will expand caribou production and support more recovery, not less, including 3,200 additional kilometres protected in this plan, much of which is caribou habitat. Only 87 kilometres of seismic lines were restored under the NDP's entire time in government; we have restored over 4,500 kilometres in just the last five years.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Dach: While Christmas wreaths decorate the office doors of UCP ministers, record numbers of Albertans will spend the holidays visiting the food bank. This government continues to make life more expensive for the very people who are struggling the most, forcing people to pay \$100 for a COVID shot, charging them to renew their health card, removing the rate cap on utilities. Albertans are worse off this year than last. Why is this government giving lumps of coal to regular Albertans but expensive gifts for their friends and insiders?

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, it's great to get up and answer on behalf of a government that works across every single ministry making life more affordable and making life better for Albertans. In fact, the greatest gift that we gave all Albertans happened twice in the last six years, and that's making sure the NDP were not re-elected as they cost hundreds of millions of jobs and hundreds of billions of dollars. We're a government that looks to put the people of Alberta first.

Mr. Dach: Given that record numbers of Albertans are using the food bank, contrary to what the minister would say, and given that Alberta now has the highest unemployment rate for young men at 20 per cent and given that Alberta has the lowest minimum wage and the highest rate of inflation in Canada, will the minister commit to raising the minimum wage to match the real cost of living so that fewer Alberta workers will need to use the food bank this holiday season?

The Speaker: The House leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. During Members' Statements the Member for Sherwood Park talked about "what if." What would have happened in 2023 if a different party was elected? I can tell you exactly what would have happened. They would have driven investment, driven jobs, and driven Alberta right out of this province to our neighbours in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. They don't want them here. The members opposite don't want to do the work attracting investment people because – guess what? – they don't know how to do it. They're lost. It's a tragedy on the opposition side. On this side of the House we're attracting investment, and that's how we're supporting Albertans.

2:40

Mr. Dach: Given that this government has chosen to raise pay for themselves while taking away a much-needed \$200 federal benefit from Albertans on AISH and given that Albertan renters now face some of the highest rent increases in the country with no protections in place and given that food banks are reporting record demand as we head into the holiday season, what will this government tell Albertans who are facing hunger and homelessness as a result of their cruel policies?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government increased AISH payments by 22 per cent. We lowered taxes for Albertans. We have rent going down in our province, all across the province, by 7 per cent, only jurisdiction in Canada who's done that. We've increased investment. Our Premier signed a great MOU that's going to continue to bring energy investment to this province, a sharp contrast with the NDP, whose leader when he was the mayor increased Calgary's property taxes by 82 per cent.

The Speaker: Calgary-Lougheed.

Bill 13

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have to push back against cancel culture. Over the last five years many professionals in Alberta have been wrongfully accused of spreading misinformation, faced unjustified investigations, some even losing their jobs, not for professional misconduct but for expressing opinions. Their only offence was disagreeing with the narrative. That is censorship. To the Minister of Justice: how does Bill 13 guarantee professionals are judged on their skills instead of whether they pass an ideological test?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Happy to promote Bill 13 once again because professionals in this province should never fear losing their licences or their livelihoods for views expressed on their own time. Regulatory bodies should not regulate personal expression over professional competence, and that's exactly why Bill 13 was tabled in this House. It makes it clear that professionals should be able to express themselves freely while being treated fairly by their regulators. It's because Albertans value free rights in this province, and here in Alberta this government will always protect free speech.

Mr. Bouchard: Given that professionals in Alberta, including doctors, nurses, teachers, professors, and engineers, need the freedom to do their jobs without political pressure or fear of being punished for their opinions and further given that good regulation should protect the public, not police people's thoughts, can the same minister explain why it is important that Bill 13 draws clear

lines between political agendas and professional standards used to regulate Alberta's professionals?

The Speaker: Now it's time to hear from the hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We've said it time and again: professional regulators should focus on overseeing competence and ethics only. That's what they're designed to do. That was the purpose of professional regulators here in Alberta. Through Bill 13 we're making sure that we're restoring balance; we're making sure that regulators do what they were originally supposed to do. We've heard of too many cases not just all across Canada but here in Alberta where professionals have been disciplined, where they've lost their licence, and where they've lost their livelihoods for sharing their thoughts. We're not going to let that happen here in Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Sadly, it was hard to hear you because of the noise from your side, Minister.

The hon. member.

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans trust professionals who can speak openly, think independently, and do their jobs without political pressure and further given that government overreach into policing opinion rather than protecting standards slows innovation, causes confusion amongst professionals, and weakens public trust, once again to the Minister of Justice: can you please explain to this Assembly why protecting freedom of speech strengthens trust in Alberta's professionals rather than undermining it?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and that is in fact a great question. Professional regulators are meant to govern competence and ethics, not police people's private beliefs. Bill 13 establishes clear principles to make sure that operators operate freely and remain neutral in their assessments. These principles prohibit bodies from assigning value or blame to individuals on the basis of personal beliefs or political viewpoints. This legislation is not symbolic. It's going to change the landscape. It's going to create clarity, consistency, and, above all else, fairness for all professionals.

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, we were partway through tablings. Are there any more tablings? Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table the requisite five copies of a tweet from the Member for St. Albert spreading falsehoods that the UCP lied in saying the feds will cover the cost of the federal disability tax credit application though she had been provided with evidence that the feds would in fact cover the cost.

The Speaker: It's not a time for debate, but thank you for the tabling. Are there any other ones?

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: Yes. The Opposition House Leader. It was a point of order?

Ms Gray: Yeah.

The Speaker: Okay. Tablings. Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a tweet from the Member for St. Albert telling disabled Albertans that they will have to go without food to pay for paperwork.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings? Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the five requisite copies of a video in which the Member for St. Albert fearmongers by telling Albertans with disabilities that disability supports in the province are not going to survive this blatant attack.

Ms Ganley: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Another point of order. Okay. Are there any other tablings? Yes, go ahead.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five requisite copies of photos from seven unique instances where the Member for St. Albert is telling Albertans with disabilities that the government is blowing up AISH, which is simply incorrect.

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table five requisite copies of a screenshot from a video in which the Member for St. Albert talks about the increased investment in unemployment, or employment supports for Albertans with disabilities.

The Speaker: I think we've got it. Yep. Thank you. The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of a tweet from the Member for St. Albert telling Albertans with disabilities that it's a lie that the federal government has committed to reimbursing the cost of the disability tax credit.

The Speaker: Okay. That's good. Got it. This is not a time for debate, government members. This is a time for tablings, which is not the same thing.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of hon. Mr. Nicolaides, Minister of Education and Childcare, pursuant to the College of Alberta School Superintendents Act College of Alberta School Superintendents annual report, 2024-25.

The Speaker: Okay, members, we are now at points of order. We are the champions. I'm told that sometimes in Ontario they have one or two points of order per session. We are sitting at about eight or nine today. It's not the kind of record you want to set, but that's the path we're on. The first point of order was called at 2:01 p.m. by the Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, this record is not our fault. It would be the opposite members, who might want to include . . .

The Speaker: I'm going to be hard on everybody today, and you're the first one. Save the debate; deal with the point of order.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll get into it very quickly here. At the time noted, the Leader of the Opposition was asking a question to the hon. Premier, and, with my unofficial records, he said, "The Premier never tells us who the wrong type of immigrants are. The fact is racism is up." This is clearly indicating or clearly trying to say that the Premier is a racist and responsible for the racism in the province. Now, I find this especially . . . [interjection] 2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.
Sorry. When he's back, we'll deal with him.
Go ahead.

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I certainly don't appreciate being called a racist by a member leaving the Chamber, and it's not the first time that member has called me a racist in this Chamber. I can tell you that I take exception to that. I take exception to that comment. It's really inappropriate, and, frankly, it's below any member, but I digress.

Anyways, the Leader of the Opposition made an insinuation that the Premier is racist and that racism is up in the province because of our stance on immigration. Now, I will not delve into the arguments of immigration and what kind of immigration we would like to see in the province, but it's important to note it's economic.

In this instance, I think, under 23(h), (i), and (j) this definitely raises to the level of a point of order because it creates disorder in this Chamber and also attributes false motives.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I disagree with the Government House Leader. This is not a point of order. We are talking about a matter of debate. I do not have the benefit of the Blues. My understanding was that just before the point of order was called, the Premier stood up and described the good type of immigration. The Leader of the Official Opposition said in his response that the Premier never tells the second half and who is the wrong kind of immigration. Then he proceeded to ask his question, where it says the fact is that casual racism and hate crimes are up across this province. Just this week the government has made the case that the language used by politicians can have an impact on the public and on how people are reacting to things. That's what this question is about. But in no way, shape, or form did the leader imply that the Premier was racist or make an accusation.

We are debating policy. We are debating language. This is not a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is a comment about what the Premier did and did not speak about, and then he continued to ask a question.

The Speaker: Well, this is what the Blues say.

The Premier never finishes that thought. She never tells us who she thinks the wrong kind of immigrants are, and the fact is that casual racism and hate crimes are up again across the province. People are scared . . .

I suppose if the Leader of the Opposition had stopped there, it could have easily been suggested that now it's time to talk about the other half of racism. Then the Leader of the Opposition continued with "that they no longer belong here under this government," which kind of sounds like a suggestion that there's racism there.

You know what? Here's the problem I have. It's a technical problem, and I hate it, but those are the rules I live under, so you all have to. The point of order was called before, really, the most egregious part. So I would ask the Opposition House Leader to let

the leader know that had the point of order been called later, it certainly would have been a point of order.

Calling anybody racist here is not something we will tolerate and live with. I would say that only through a technical reason is this not a point of order. We'll move on to the next thing, but with a strong caution to everybody in this Chamber that using expressions like calling someone a racist or a group of people racists in here is just not what we're going to do.

The next point of order, 2:05 p.m., by the hon. Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do not have the benefit of the Blues. At the time noted, I was the one asking the questions, so my recollection of the exact words being used may not be fully accurate, but I do recall the minister, in response to questions that I was asking about corruption, specifically – apologies; let me make sure I'm naming the correct minister. It's the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), but more specifically given past rulings in this place because of the level of disorder it caused in previous sessions.

There have been multiple points of order and multiple debates around the very specific language of a member or the NDP wanting people to live in tents. It got incredibly heated in previous sessions to the point that the Speaker needed to intervene and set down some very clear guidelines, including ruling out talking about the other party or the other side of the House wanting people to live in tents. I will quote from May 22, 2024. This is then Speaker Cooper referring to this being out of order, and he said he was prepared to rule.

The hon. Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services said the following: "We reject the NDP's philosophy when it comes to keeping people in tents in this province." At the time . . . this particular language was ruled out of order . . . the Speaker went to great length to speak specifically to the language that was ruled out of order, and that was the NDP or any facsimile of members' offices, the NDP, et cetera, . . . want people to live in tents.

That was the Speaker reiterating the new rule and the new guidelines in this place.

Today we heard that language from the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction in a question related to something completely different. I find that this is a point of order. I would ask that the member apologize and withdraw, should you agree and based on the reading of the Blues, because, again, Mr. Speaker, I will admit there was a lot going on.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Member?

Mr. Wilson: I'd like to withdraw and apologize.

The Speaker: Well, that was refreshing.

While I'm on my feet, I'll apologize ever so quickly to the opposition that when we started back on people presenting things, I probably should have stopped a couple of – but there was a lot going on here. I realized too late that I should have shortened up a couple of the tablings or at least the first one. That was just a matter of I had too much going on. My apologies – okay? – and thank you for that.

That deals with points 2 and 3. [interjection] Just 2? Okay. Point 3.

Ms Gray: On point 3, I will withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Let's move along to point 4, which took place at about 2:23, called by the House leader for the opposition.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At 2:23 – apologies; if I can have your patience for one second. I'm just making sure that I have not confused my points of order today.

Mr. Schow: The one from Nixon.

Ms Gray: Thank you. I appreciate that. At that point, I believe – and please, with the benefit of the Blues, correct me if I'm incorrect, Mr. Speaker – the minister at that time said something along the lines of: Mr. Speaker, that critic just recently said investing with people with disabilities is a waste of resources and time; shame on them.

Mr. Speaker, we have a long tradition of trusting members at their word when they say they have done or not done something and, honestly, it often becomes a matter of debate when something gets mischaracterized. But I rose to a point of order here because certainly I know that the Member for St. Albert has never in any way, shape, or form implied that investing in people with disabilities is a waste of resources and time. This is absolutely language that will create disorder in this place, as I saw it create disorder within my caucus as this interaction went back and forth. It's very apparent that there are some very deliberate personal attacks going on around what people said or did not say. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) and given what we continued to see throughout the afternoon, including in tablings, I think we can see that personal attacks do lower the quality of debate, do cause disorder in this place, and it continued to happen. This was the first instance, so I called the point of order.

I believe this should be ruled out of order or we are going to see this type of piling on and mischaracterization continue in this House, but I do not have the benefit of the Blues. I will have to rely on your judgment and review, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The government side.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also don't have the benefit of the Blues, but, as the Opposition House Leader has said, it's important to take people at their word. I trust that the member in question was quoting from one of the many articles that were just tabled a few moments ago. Now, if the members opposite don't like their own words being used against them, I would encourage them to choose better words. But I'll finish my point of order on a very brief story, Mr. Speaker. I have a constituent who loves animals. On a safari overseas . . .

3:00

The Speaker: Stick to the point of order.

Mr. Schow: I'm getting there, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You better bring this back pretty fast.

Mr. Schow: Yes. The giraffe: the skin on the neck is very thick. It's important to have thick skin, Mr. Speaker, and this is an insight where I would encourage members opposite to be like the giraffe and have thicker skin.

The Speaker: The advice on having thick skin isn't helpful. It's creative, but it's not helpful.

Okay. I have the Blues.

. . . is [a member] of a party that when they were in government only spent [a certain amount] on . . . disabilities . . . almost a billion dollars less than this side . . . Their critic just recently said that investing with people with disabilities is a waste of resources and time. Shame on them.

It's not super helpful.

Let me just say this. This is where I'm a little bit stuck, folks. If, indeed, one of what was just tabled includes some public record of that being said, then I guess that makes this a matter of debate. If it doesn't, then it's a point of order. So here's my problem. You know, I know I heard people stand up and make tablings. If you're really sure that this was tabled, it's a matter of debate that it was actually said and recorded. If, on the other hand, it wasn't, then someone should stand up and apologize. So it's a little pressure on you, Government House Leader, but I guess you can apologize tomorrow if you find out it's not part of the tablings.

At any rate, the one part of your argument that I'll say is: if you don't want things to be quoted, then maybe you should be careful what you say. If there's evidence that was said, then that kind of makes it a debate, and if there wasn't, that kind of makes it a point of order. Either way it's not super helpful. It's a little unusual, but we'll look for an apology tomorrow unless that's part of the tablings.

Next point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Ms Gray: Thank you. At 2:33 the same minister, responding to the Member for St. Albert – and I do not have the benefit of the Blues, Mr. Speaker – in referring to that member directly said something along the lines of: going on things like TikTok and other platforms and implying that people with disabilities need to commit suicide.

Now, Mr. Speaker, just this week, I believe, we had a point of order with a very heated back-and-forth argument around the verbiage of “will kill people” and programs and whatnot. The arguments that were made there by the government and the final ruling by the Speaker essentially said that the language we use and how we imply these things is incredibly significant.

Under 23(h), (i), and (j), I believe it is, given that previous ruling, a point of order to suggest that another member told any Albertan to commit suicide. I think it's offensive. I think it is highly, highly torqued rhetoric, especially on an issue as serious as this, Mr. Speaker. When I heard that language directed at a very specific member of my caucus, I raised a point of order, especially reflecting on the conversation we've had across previous points of order recently in this place. To suggest that member implied that people with disabilities need to commit suicide is absolutely an allegation, is absolutely language that would create disorder, and I believe should be ruled as a point of order and apologized for and withdrawn.

The Speaker: The government side.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was listening intently as the minister was speaking. I did not hear a reference to a specific member. However, the language could definitely be considered to cause disruption and disorder in this Chamber, and for that I will withdraw and I will apologize on behalf of the minister.

The Speaker: Thank you. That puts this one behind us.

You know, people, everybody that got elected here I'm sure at some point promised that they would be responsible adults. I understand that we can't be perfect, but accusing people of counselling suicide is, as the Opposition House Leader has said, pretty much on par with what we heard yesterday. Both things are unacceptable. Do better. I don't think anybody here should be offended by me saying do better in this case. I think we need to do better.

That takes us to number 6. I'm not sure who made the point of order. Government House Leader?

Ms Ganley: It was the same one. Sorry.

The Speaker: It was the same one. Okay.

That takes us to 7 and 8. How good is that? There are two more. The Government House Leader at somewhere around 2:35 or 2:33.

Point of Order Supplementary Questions

Mr. Schow: Yeah, my records have it around that time, maybe 2:36-ish. Mr. Speaker, there is a long-standing tradition in this Chamber as well as in practice, somewhere written in one of the big, thick, green books that we have collected on the table in the centre that I cannot quote off the top. But I will say that questions' supplementals 1 and 2 are supposed to be somewhat, even loosely, related to question 1. In this instance, the member from Banff-Kananaskis asked a whole slew of questions that were completely unrelated, one to the next. Graciously, the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas stood up and answered those questions because she's such a stellar minister in this Chamber, and we're lucky to have her, but I do believe that this is a point of order.

The Speaker: Anything from the opposition side?

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have to rely on your reading of the Blues. I do not have copies of all three of my member's questions. My recollection is that they were all items that fall under the minister's purview and related files, but perhaps I am misremembering. I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Well, I heard it. I don't have the written copy, and it did occur to me that the questions weren't – I couldn't find a link. I'm not sure a point of order will help, but, Opposition House Leader, I will ask you to advise your member and members of the rules that questions need to be related when you're asking them, and find some way to staple them, tape them, nail them together, glue them together, but there's supposed to be a connection. I didn't hear it, so I'm going to call it a point of order. It's probably the lesser of the offences today but, nonetheless, a point of order.

Ms Gray: On behalf of the member I'll apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Okay. There's another one at 2:46.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point I was calling points of order during tablings, which is not a common practice here, in part because the guidance has been very clear that a tabling should not be used for partisan attacks, something that the Government House Leader has said on a number of occasions.

In this case at 2:46 I called the point of order on the Member for Camrose. I do not have the benefit of the Blues, Mr. Speaker. I hope

that you do, but I'm very confident that I heard the Member for Camrose accuse the Member for St. Albert of misleading Albertans. To call someone a liar in this Chamber is absolutely a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j) as well as previous rulings in this place. If I did hear what I thought I heard, I believe this is a point of order. The member should apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The government side.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Camrose did not say "mislead"; the member said "lying," which is in fact a point of order, and I will withdraw and apologize.

The Speaker: No. What the member said was "spreading falsehoods," which is accusing somebody of lying. And let me just say that debating during tablings and adding and dressing up your tabling – I know it's probably good practice on both sides to find unfortunate things that the other side said on the public record and table them. That's kind of politics. That's how it's done, but you don't get to dress it up with accusations while you do it. That's why it's a point of order.

Another one at 2:47.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Ms Gray: Thank you. With your help and the Government House Leader's help to ensure I've got the accurate words . . .

The Speaker: I'm here. I've got the Blues. I think both House leaders – I'm going to gamble – won't be offended. What was said, "I rise to table five copies of a video in which the Member for St. Albert fearmongers." So, again, I'm guessing that something was tabled that wasn't complimentary to the Member for St. Albert, which is fair game, but dressing it up with something you can't say in the House isn't fair game.

3:10

Mr. Dyck: I withdraw and apologize, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, and thank you for everybody's co-operation in letting me have us all spend a little bit less time on my least favourite part of the day, which is points of order. But now it takes us to a more favourite time of the day.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 6

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move third reading of Bill 6, the Education (Prioritizing Literacy and Numeracy) Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

Bill 6, Mr. Speaker, transcends politics. It's not about partisanship; it's about pedagogy. It is not about budgets; it's about the fundamental life-altering trajectory of every single child in this province. If we accept, as we must, that education is the single greatest determinant of long-term economic prosperity, social stability, and individual human potential, then we must also accept that the foundation of all education rests upon two pillars: literacy and numeracy.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

These are not merely school subjects; they are the enabling conditions of success in life. They are the keys that unlock the entire curriculum, allowing a student to progress from learning to read to reading to learn. Yet for far too long we have operated in a fog of uneven data, inconsistent practices, and delayed action. We have relied on a system where foundational learning challenges are often identified too late, after a child has already internalized a sense of failure, after the small, manageable cracks have become chasms of difficulty. This is not only inefficient; it is a moral failure.

Bill 6 is our government's commitment to end that failure. It is a promise to Alberta's parents that every child regardless of where they live or what school they attend will have their foundational skills measured accurately, early, and consistently. This is the definition of equity in education, and it is why this bill is not merely advisable but, I argue, absolutely essential.

The first and perhaps simplest argument for Bill 6 is that it enshrines a critical education priority into law. The opposition has questioned the need for legislation as universal screening is already a policy. Well, Madam Speaker, a policy is transient. It can be changed with the stroke of a pen by any future government. A legislative mandate, however, commits the province, commits the minister, and all school authorities to a singular, nonnegotiable standard. By amending the Education Act, we are declaring that prioritizing foundational literacy and numeracy screening is not a temporary educational fad but a core, ongoing function of schooling in Alberta. Who would disagree with something like this? Well, it's the Alberta NDP.

Furthermore, we must address the issues of standardization, which I've heard here before. Our province is vast and diverse. We have large metropolitan school districts with larger budgets, and we have smaller rural divisions operating with leaner budgets. Relying on individual school boards to select, implement, and analyze screening tools has unfortunately led to a patchwork system. Some schools excel and do incredibly well using evidence-based tools that rapidly pinpoint phonetic awareness deficits or subskill gaps in mathematics. Other schools, through no fault of their own, may rely on general observations or subjective internal metrics that may miss subtle but critical learning difficulties. Bill 6 ends this inconsistency.

In addition, under Bill 6 screening results must be shared with parents. This is empowerment. Parents are a child's first and most essential teacher. By providing them with objective data on their child's prereading subskills, we equip them to be effective partners in intervention. Furthermore, the mandatory reporting of data to the ministry allows us to identify systemic issues and allocate resources where they are needed the most. Accountability is not punitive, Madam Speaker; it is the responsible use of public funds and a driver for continuous improvement. Bill 6 makes foundational learning a nonnegotiable metric of success for our education system.

Now, another key argument that I believe is important in supporting Bill 6 lies in the nonnegotiable urgency of the early years. In the field of educational science there is a concept known as the Matthew effect in reading, where essentially the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Students who start behind in reading often hate to read, read less, encounter fewer complex vocabulary words, and fall further and further behind. Their learning curve flattens while their peers surge ahead. The window to effectively intercept this negative trajectory is remarkably small.

This legislative focus on kindergarten to grade 3 recognizes the crucial transition point, which of course is grade 3. Educational research confirms that before grade 3 students are generally learning to read and after grade 3 they must now read to learn. If a child crosses that threshold without solid foundational literacy

skills, they face a steep, almost vertical ascent. The effort and resources required to remediate a reading disability in grade 6 are exponentially greater and far less effective than the effort required for targeted intervention in kindergarten or grade 1.

The specific screeners mandated by this bill are designed not to grade a child but to diagnose the component subskills of reading and math. Now, reading is not a monolithic skill. It is a complex braid of language comprehension and word recognition, as famously described by the reading rope. Does the child, Madam Speaker, struggle with phonological awareness, with decoding, with fluency? A high-quality screener identifies the precise broken thread in the rope. Similarly, in numeracy it identifies specific gaps in number sense or early computational skills.

This is the promise of Bill 6: to shift our education system from a reactive model where we wait for a student to fail to a proactive preventative model where we predict and prevent failure. By identifying a child at risk in kindergarten, we gain three to four critical years to implement targeted, high-dosage, evidence-based instruction before they hit the unforgiving wall of grade 3. Failure to pass this bill is to tacitly accept that we will continue to let thousands of children drift toward that wall without a life raft. We cannot in good conscience permit that to happen.

Now, I want to address concerns raised by the opposition and other partners that I've heard. While we respect, of course, the voice and commitments of our educators, the objections raised in many ways against Bill 6 are often rooted in a flawed understanding of the legislation's purpose and/or an understandable but misplaced fear of overtesting. This is a common objection, suggesting that Bill 6 simply adds more testing and paperwork without providing the capacity to act on the results. I've heard the NDP talk about this. This argument, unfortunately, fundamentally misunderstands the utility of these screeners.

First, this is not another test, and to characterize it as such is grossly incorrect. In fact, it replaces inconsistent, often unreliable local assessments with a mandatory, high-quality clinical-grade tool designed for rapid diagnosis. A screener properly deployed is a 5 to 15 minute check that precisely isolates the problem. It is not an end-of-unit, high-stakes exam. Second, the very purpose of this legislation is to ensure that resources are directed efficiently. As resources, of course, are finite, they must be spent on evidence-based, targeted intervention. Without reliable data, resource allocation becomes a matter of guesswork or generalized spending.

Bill 6 acts as a sophisticated diagnostic filter. It tells us which students need help, what kind of help they need, and in aggregate which schools or districts are facing the greatest challenges. This focus allows us to deploy specialists, reading interventionists, and professional development training precisely where the data indicates the highest need is, maximizing the impact of every dollar spent. To support this, the government of Alberta is allocating \$40 million over the next three years specifically to support intervention work.

Screening is a diagnostic process, not an evaluative one. Diagnostic screeners are designed to be fast and check for risk factors. Their purpose is simply to segment the student population between those who are progressing normally and those who need some more specialized assessment and intervention.

3:20

Madam Speaker, Alberta's government is working to help teachers to teach phonics, phonemic awareness, and number sense effectively. If a teacher focuses their instruction on these core foundational elements, they are not teaching to a test; they are teaching the essential curriculum and the foundations for success.

Madam Speaker, the move toward mandatory universal early screening is not a uniquely Alberta experiment either. It is a calculated step based on decades of rigorous educational research and recommended by the world's most respected authorities on cognitive development and literacy. When we enact Bill 6, we will align our education system with a proven global standard. We are implementing the explicit recommendations of many authorities.

For example, in a landmark study by the U.S. National Reading Panel they reviewed over 100,000 studies and concluded that systemic screening and explicit instruction in foundational skills are critical for reading success. Their findings form the scientific basis of early diagnostic assessment. In its exhaustive 2022 report the Ontario Human Rights Commission explicitly mandated the provincial government to standardize the use of evidence-based screening tools for all students in kindergarten to grade 2 to address systemic reading barriers. The U.K. Department for Education operates mandatory phonic screening checks in year 1, demonstrating a national commitment to systemically identifying and addressing reading risks.

Furthermore, of course, Alberta is joining a clear Canadian trend. British Columbia has recently announced the implementation of early literacy screening for all students in K to 3, while Manitoba has introduced universal early reading screening tools for all students in kindergarten to grade 4, with a pilot under way.

The International Dyslexia Association strongly advocates for universal screening in kindergarten and grade 1 specifically for phonological and decoding skills that are necessary preconditions for reading. They emphasize that waiting until a child fails dramatically is too late. Major governmental and academic bodies in Australia as well, including those informing the Gonski Review and the work of the Centre for Independent Studies, advocate for the development and implementation of a universal early numeracy screening tool to identify risks before difficulties become embedded. I continue to go on. The National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Education both fund and rely on studies proving the efficacy of universal screening as a tier 1 mechanism to identify students who require reading and math interventions.

Madam Speaker, these agencies, commissions, research bodies spanning continents and political systems all share a singular, unequivocal conclusion. Early standardized diagnostic screening is the most effective and equitable way to ensure that no child falls through the cracks. They prove that our decision is not arbitrary; it is evidence-based. They prove that Bill 6 is the appropriate legislative tool that executes on this global consensus right here in Alberta.

Madam Speaker, Bill 6 is a commitment to the future of Alberta. It is a legislative acknowledgement that the first few years of a child's education are too important to be left to chance, inconsistency, or transient policy. The cost of failing to pass this bill is measured in the lost confidence of a child who believes they are not smart simply because we failed to give them the key to reading. We must stand here today, honour the evidence, empower our teachers, inform our parents, and secure a brighter and more equitable future for every young learner in the province of Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, can you just move third reading for me, please?

Mr. Nicolaides: I will do it again, Madam Speaker. I am happy to move third reading, as I did at the beginning of my speech, on Bill 6.

The Deputy Speaker: I may have missed it. Thank you very much.

Mr. Nicolaides: Here to help.

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

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will do my best to transcend politics in our few minutes together.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise a final time on Bill 6. Actually, the minister did just answer a question. This is what happens when you prewrite your comments. I was feeling a bit disappointed that the minister had not been able to answer questions I had raised in debate, but I will give him credit. He did answer one just now. But as often happens here, I believe we will continue to remain at loggerheads on this bill.

There is a simple reason for this, Madam Speaker. The minister attests that "this bill is about making sure that every student in Alberta has the strong reading and math skills that they need to succeed not just, of course, for success in schools but also for success in life." It is here that lays the crux of our disagreement about Bill 6 because, of course, it does nothing of the sort. What Bill 6 does is make law a set of assessment tools, just that and nothing more. I suspect that all members in this Chamber can agree that testing or screening or whatever you want to call an assessment does nothing to inform the success, academic or otherwise, of a student.

The minister has gone on in previous debates to say that "by giving teachers simple screeners for [literacy] and math, we make it easier for them to spot problems early and give students the support that they need." Now, when you talk to teachers, what becomes clear is that spotting the problem is not the issue. The issue is their capacity, as the minister says, to "give students the support that they need," and no wonder this is the case. In our growing metro areas we have classrooms that are literally bursting at the seams. Unlike private schools, who are able to keep class sizes small, public schools are required to accept every child who comes to their door, and there are a lot of kids showing up these days.

We have school boards in the province operating at 95 per cent capacity. Now, obviously that 95 per cent isn't spread equally amongst all schools, so the reality is that we have many schools operating at well over 100 per cent utilization. I'll remind members of this Chamber that when a school is operating at over 85 per cent, that is when they start to convert other spaces into classrooms: the library, the gym stage, the hallways. Any and all available space can and will be converted into a classroom because, again, that public school turns away no child, even if they are at capacity, even if there are not enough desks or teachers or education assistants.

Do we think that teachers are truly able to support the children who need it when they are teaching them on a gym stage while the basketball unit is happening on the other side of the folding partition? To be clear, teachers are doing their level best with what they have. They are professionals after all, literally trained in how to teach and how to provide support to children who need it. But this government has been expecting teachers to do it all, keep a class of 25 eight-year-olds on task while simultaneously providing extra support for half the kids who have some sort of extra need.

Now, I have raised concerns in here about how this bill provides no support for teachers when it comes to delivering, scoring, and entering this assessment data. Teachers aren't getting support to deliver these assessments, so who is meant to keep the class running while the teacher spends a week of instructional time delivering, scoring, and entering the data from these assessments? For goodness' sake. The ministry isn't even providing preprinted assessment booklets, so schools that are already squeezed incredibly tight on budgets have to make room for more printing. I do wonder if that wouldn't be a benefit of standardizing these

assessments across the province, for the minister to find ways to make it easier and more efficient to deliver these screeners.

Instead, it is just another task that they have heaped onto the overflowing to-do lists of classroom teachers. It's an affront to educators who have already had their Charter rights violated, to a workforce that took the incredibly rare step of strike action to send a message to this government that they are underwater, that they could no longer be asked to MacGyver their classrooms with nothing but gumption and the lowest education funding per student in the country. Teachers asked for resources. Teachers asked for help to support their students, and what does their government deliver? Screeners, assessments, and no commitment beyond that lowest funding per student. That is why on this side of the House we do not support this bill.

3:30

Madam Speaker, the minister claims that Bill 6 is designed to prevent a child falling behind and not getting what they need, that Bill 6 will ensure that "if a student is having trouble, we find out right away and, more importantly, do something about it." But, again, this piece of legislation, Bill 6, does nothing of the sort. All the bill does is mandate the delivery of screeners. The minister has failed to clarify how a child will not fall behind because he or she was on the receiving end of a literacy and numeracy screener.

The minister has made frequent references to the investments his government has made to math and reading supports but never with context, Madam Speaker. Seventeen million dollars may sound like a lot of money, but we need to ask ourselves: how many children are we spreading that across? Is \$50 or \$100 per student a level of investment that is going to allow a child who is years behind in reading to get up to grade levels? When it comes to government investments in math and reading supports, it would be helpful for the minister to show his work because he has claimed that these funds are being targeted to support the children who need it.

Now, my understanding is that these funds, like all education grants, are disbursed to school boards after being run through the weighted moving average funding formula. I'm very happy for the minister to correct me, though, because that simply can't be the case. If these funds are indeed being targeted to the areas and populations of greatest need, they wouldn't be doled out through a formula based on enrolment numbers. They would be purposefully directed to support the specific students being identified in these screeners.

When it comes to showing his work, the minister already has, or should have, two years' worth of data. That's how long these screeners have been used in our schools, Madam Speaker: two years. The minister should have a wealth of data at his fingertips to show us. We're not unconvinced. I'm not unconvinced. Convince me. Show me the data. Show me how effective these screeners are. How many children have had learning disabilities diagnosed by these screeners, as the minister promises will happen? How many children have been identified as needing extra support? How many children received that support, and what did it look like? How many children who were reading below grade level were brought up to level by use of these screeners? Show it to us.

The ask the minister has made is essentially that we just trust him, that somehow these screeners are the golden ticket to address growing illiteracy rates in Alberta, but how have the past two years of delivering these screeners impacted those illiteracy rates? Or is two years not enough time to reverse this trend? If so, what timeline is the minister working on?

The minister says, "this bill is about equity" and that it will "[dismantle] the systemic barriers that prevent children with learning disabilities from achieving their full potential." How,

Madam Speaker, will delivering a screener achieve this very lofty ambition? The minister speaks of broad support but can only provide one organization who has spoken publicly in support of these screeners, so I ask: how many disability service organizations have given public support for these screeners? How many were consulted? How many came forward to tell the minister that this was their top priority for the education bill tabled in this legislative session?

And while I am asking questions, I will reiterate a question the minister, unfortunately, did not have time to answer about second-language programs that have a very unique approach to early-years literacy. The question was: are these screeners designed for or even appropriate for children learning in a second-language program? If not, what is the minister's plan for screeners for use in second-language programming? Madam Speaker, there are simply too many questions to be able to support this bill.

I had written here that I didn't think we had gotten an answer on why these screeners need to be made law, but the minister did address that today in his comments with the suggestion that we make it law so that it always stands, which is not my experience of what happens in this Chamber. I know I'm new here. I know I'm in my first term, but I am pretty sure I have seen some pieces of legislation come through here that all they're doing is unpicking legislation that happened in the past.

So I don't take that as a reasonable answer to the question: why now? Why does this need to be made law? Why is something that was already mandatory for schools to deliver being made law? It simply cannot be for this reason, that it cannot be changed at the stroke of a pen. It's the stroke of a pen and some hours of debate. It absolutely is something that could still be undone. The minister is asking for our trust when he is not able to provide a clear and direct answer to a very simple question.

Now, credit where it's due. One thing the minister has said in his comments and reiterated today that I absolutely agree with is around the importance of early intervention. The NDP have always been cognizant of the science around early intervention. That's why we funded the PUF program fully and not only that, but we ensured that those PUF dollars were allocated very specifically to the early education years, the years where those dollars would have the most impact for the children who needed them. But it was this government, this UCP government, that not only cut PUF funding – and huge cuts, Madam Speaker. Just one example, and I'll table the article tomorrow for reference. One school board saw a 76 per cent reduction in PUF funding to their board under this government. So not only did we see these huge cuts to PUF funding, though, but rather than keeping those dollars focused in the early years, where now the minister seems to understand is where the funding should have been allocated all along, they spread those dollars out across the entire K to 12 education journey.

I would ask the minister and the members across the aisle to please spare us the lectures about the effectiveness of early intervention because not only do we understand the need for and benefits of early intervention; the NDP also understands that early intervention is about funding, resources, and supports, which is why our record is of support for PUF while the UCP's record is cuts to PUF and a desperate attempt to hide those cuts by spreading funding well beyond the window of early intervention that the minister talks about.

Madam Speaker, the minister claimed in one of these stages of debate here that "Bill 6, through universal accessible screening, is the ultimate equalizer." That one really stuck in my craw because the ultimate equalizer is public education, without question. Your public schools are telling you – they are telling this government – what they need. They need this government to stop funding

education at the lowest level per student in the country. They need this government to stop funding education below population growth and inflation. Their costs don't stop rising even when this government decides to stop funding them.

3:40

Bill 6 is not the great equalizer. Bill 6 does not ensure that every Alberta student receives the strong reading and math skills they'll need to succeed in life. Bill 6 will not give students the supports they need, yet the power to do all of those things – to support students, to strengthen early intervention programs, to build those math and literacy skills, to prioritize equal access to high-quality education – is held in this minister's hands. The only question left is: will he use it?

I will not be supporting Bill 6, and I encourage all members of this Chamber to vote in opposition. Thank you.

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

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to take a moment on Bill 6 and just try to address the question that my esteemed colleague the Member for Calgary-Beddington just raised, hoping to get an answer from the minister of education, and that question was: when it comes to Bill 6, why now? Why does this need to be made law? I think the answer is that the reason why Bill 6 has been introduced is that this is performative condescension from a government who is on the defence because Albertans are painfully aware and very loud about the UCP's failure on public education. That's why Bill 6 was introduced, because, to my colleague's point, there's absolutely no need for this to be made into law.

As the minister has described, the kinds of assessments that Bill 6 codifies into law were already happening. Those assessments were happening for the past two years. We also know that the ministry of education administers every year provincial achievement tests. Nothing is required specifically in law to do that. In fact, even when it comes to the collection of the data, that's outlined in Bill 6, or that the minister intends to gather through Bill 6, the minister already has that broad authority to collect that data. I encourage him to read section 66 of the Education Act, which indicates that "a board shall provide the Minister in writing with any information the Minister requests." That section goes on to say that "the Minister may publish or otherwise disseminate any information the Minister receives under [that] subsection." That authority to collect data, to administer assessments, to disseminate or to otherwise publish some of that data already exists.

So there's no point to Bill 6 being introduced other than that this government needed to look like they were doing something on public education. The minister needed a good win story, I suppose, needed a good story to talk about: this is what I'm doing. But the reality of this, Madam Speaker, is that this is just performative action. And the tone in which the minister just delivered his remarks, the condescension to educators who are very, very aware of the importance of literacy and numeracy and making sure that early intervention takes place, just goes to show how out of touch this government is with the day-to-day activities of what happens in a public school and what happens in classrooms and the work that teachers are doing every single day. They are very aware of the importance of early intervention, of the importance of literacy and numeracy. What they don't have from this government, though, is the support to actually take action on that. As has been indicated numerous times by my colleagues, assessment and screenings mean nothing if there are no resources to do anything with them.

I remember I had the privilege, Madam Speaker, of serving as the Official Opposition critic on education for a period of time and having conversations with the minister of education in which he talked at that point, two and a half years ago, with great pride about all the assessments they were going to be doing in those early years. I said at that point and I'll repeat it now: assessment without resources is meaningless. Certainly, we heard that feedback from teachers across this province where they did those assessments and – guess what – they got told that a number of their students in their classes were years behind grade level average in terms of reading. They knew that, but they also had 36 students in their class, and they also had several kids who were coded and several kids who had English language learning needs, and they had zero EAs. So they're very painfully aware that the students in their classrooms needed more support, but what they didn't have was support from this government to actually deliver it. That is where we have a real problem, Madam Speaker, with the performance of Bill 6, when there's no reality that's taking place in Alberta classrooms and in public education to actually improve outcomes for those students.

Now, my colleague gave a fantastic overview – and I'm sure many of my other colleagues have as well – to talk about the history of this government, and here's the thing I need to highlight because it's a really interesting tone that has been taken by the government in the last few months where they assume that for some reason if they weren't the one who is personally at the table making that decision that somehow their government is not responsible or they're not responsible, as if the entire province has collective amnesia about what this government has been doing for the six and a half years or even the four years before the current Premier became the Premier or the current minister of education became minister of education. But here's the thing. Not only do Albertans remember it, but we continue to live with it every single day.

To hear this government talk about early intervention being so critical when they are the government – the UCP and this current minister of education sat around that cabinet table when the decision was made to cut PUF funding. They sat around this table, and he sat around this table, and he continues to use a funding method that deliberately underfunds growing school boards every single year. They want some sort of accolades for the fact that they've moved from a three-year weighted moving average to a two-year weighted moving average, but what they're saying is that they still are agreeing and deciding and making a decision every single day that there are students in our schools who are not being funded.

This is not just a couple of students, Madam Speaker. In 2024 Edmonton public school board reported that, using that weighted moving average formula, there were 4,000 students in Edmonton public that were unfunded, 5,000 students in Calgary board of education. So when the minister talks about or this government talks about how important it is to have screening, all they're doing is screening their own failures. When they're assessing how poorly kids are doing, they're doing it to assess their own failure to properly fund public education.

I sometimes tell the story, Madam Speaker, of formative moments in my first term as an MLA. There are quite a few of them, and many of them are related to children and to education and from parents. Certainly, during the pandemic, a very formative moment that I had a number of times with parents of children with disabilities was hearing them tell me with defeat and resignation that during the pandemic their children just didn't get an education. I had parents say that they were just resigned to the fact that for a full year or sometimes more their kids just didn't get an education because there were no supports, resources. Online learning didn't

work for their kids. EAs were fired by a tweet by this government. So they just accepted, because they didn't know what else to do, that their child wasn't going to get an education. What a failure of our public education system.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, when I hear the minister now talk about the importance of early intervention, I remember a moment that I had in my first term when I was in estimates on education. I heard the now minister of preventative care, who was then the minister of education. We were talking at that point in estimates about the huge drop of young children entering kindergarten and that we had seen a huge drop in early childhood education because so many kids and so many parents were worried about sending their kids to school when schools didn't feel safe during the pandemic, when supports weren't in place to make sure that their kids could be safe. So they chose not to send their kids to kindergarten.

Similarly, many of those kids – and I knew some. My daughter was in kindergarten that year, and one of her classmates – her parents said to me that they knew their student needed PUF, and they were not going to send their kids to school in September because it didn't feel safe, and they now knew that their child was not going to get the PUF funding they needed in school, so it was better just to keep them home where it was safer.

That's why we saw a huge drop in children enrolling in kindergarten for those first two years after the pandemic. Now, you could just say, I guess, that fewer kids entered school, but those kids not getting early childhood education, those critical years affected them and continue to affect them now. Those kids are now in grade 5. That's the age of my daughter. Those kids who didn't get that early childhood education because of this government's decision to not properly ensure there were safety mechanisms in schools to keep them safe and to cut PUF funding, they have lost out on early childhood education because of the UCP's decision.

That moment in estimates when I raised that concern with the then minister of education, her response was: well, that's the parents' choice. I thought to myself, this government is just ignoring and washing their hands clean of these children's education. So it's hard to hear this incredible condescension now from this government about how important early childhood education is when they certainly did not act that way in terms of their funding, their supports, and the cutting in critical resources to early childhood education.

3:50

The good news, Madam Speaker, is that now the minister of education is also the minister of childcare, and that's really important. We haven't heard much from this minister on this file yet, but I encourage him to quickly get up to speed because if he's so concerned about early intervention and early child care, he shouldn't just be talking about what happens in those kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, grade 3 years but actually what happens because children are learners as soon as they're born. Those critical brain years of zero to five are actually where the most development and most opportunity for early intervention comes in.

Yet, Madam Speaker, just yesterday the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta and the Muttart Foundation released a report on the impacts of this government's decision back in April to do the unthinkable, which was to eliminate the child care subsidy. They eliminated the child care subsidy for the lowest income parents. Now, why does that have an impact on early childhood education? Well, first of all, let's talk about the parents. This report shows that on average the monthly parent-paid fee increased for low-income parents, or actually for all parents, \$227 a month and \$478 per month for a family who has more than one child in care. The new flat-rate fee that this government brought in

while eliminating the child care subsidy, well, makes child care unaffordable for families who earn less than \$50,000.

These are the children, by the way, Madam Speaker, who most need to be in early childhood education programs, who would most benefit from early intervention and identification. Alberta is now one of only four provinces in the country that has no child care subsidy at all, who actually leaves the lowest income families with no supports. The impact that we're seeing from this report is that families are already withdrawing from regulated child care, reducing their hours, or those parents are planning to leave the workforce.

When those families and those children are leaving early childhood education and child care, they are less prepared when they enter in school at kindergarten age. They are coming into school with fewer tools and, more importantly, fewer opportunities for identification by early childhood educators for early interventions. That's just a fact. So it's really difficult for me, Madam Speaker, to listen to the minister talk like his government cares at all about early childhood education or early child intervention when they've done everything in their power to reduce that, to cut that, and to limit resources for those families and those children.

I also want to highlight, Madam Speaker, that one of the reasons why I cannot support Bill 6 is what we heard as a quote from the Premier at an education town hall held earlier this week, because the real reason, I believe, that this government is bringing in Bill 6 is to collect all the data that they can get to eliminate inclusive education. The Premier was quoted saying: these students need to earn their way into a classroom, and then they can earn their way out with their behaviours.

These are children that she's talking about, children who have, under the UCP, not had access to the same level of family supports, early childhood education, early childhood intervention, and FSCD. They wait years for FSCD supports. Classrooms that are more crowded, fewer EA supports than ever, absolute burning out of EAs and teachers, and the Premier is talking about these children, the children with disabilities, the ones who the most supports can have the most impact on, as having to earn their way into a classroom. I'll tell you something, Madam Speaker. On this side of the House we believe children don't need to earn their way into a classroom. Children have a right to a classroom, and all children deserve that right to have full support and opportunity to succeed.

When this Premier talks this way about children, refers to them as aggressive, what she's saying is that she's acknowledging her failure, and she's trying to put the blame on children and children with disabilities. And I find that very, very difficult.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Yeah. I figured this was coming. The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: Madam Speaker, we were doing so well. To make an assessment of what the Premier is trying to do would be imputing false motives under 23 (h), (i), and (j). That is a point of order. It's been called a number of times in this Chamber.

If the member had picked different language attacking policies, that may have achieved the same objective the member opposite is suggesting, that could be considered within the bounds of reasonable dialogue and reasonable debate, but in this instance there is no place for the member to make assumptions about what

the Premier intends or does not intend to do. Yes. I think it is a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j).

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do not believe that it's a point of order, and I do not believe that member was making false assumptions or anything. At third reading you can talk about the bill's overall content in its final form and also talk about how it affects different groups. She was just simply explaining how this bill impacts the Albertans with disabilities, and she may have drawn from public statements that have been made by government members and the Premier. So it's not a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: I was about to intervene on relevancy. I'm really struggling to figure out what the member's comments and the comments that the Premier made have to do with Bill 6.

However, I do agree with the Government House Leader that this is a point of order. I think that imputing false motives towards another member is a point of order. You will apologize and withdraw, and you may continue.

Ms Pancholi: I apologize and withdraw.

Debate Continued

Ms Pancholi: This government is trying to blame vulnerable children and children with disabilities for their failure to properly fund and support Alberta classrooms, and Bill 6 will allow them to collect the data to make the case to remove children from inclusive classrooms. This government is going to be the ones to make the determination as to which child, in the Premier's words, "has earned their way into a classroom" and which – these are the Premier's words, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I fail to see what this has to do with Bill 6. I already made this comment in the previous point of order and provided caution in regard to that, but we're back again at this point, and I fail to see what it has to do with the legislation in front of us, which is Bill 6. The title is education, prioritizing literacy and numeracy.

Ms Pancholi: Madam Speaker, I look forward to you reviewing the Blues. As you'll see, I just mentioned what Bill 6 does, which is allow for the government to collect data and to report it, as I believe it is being used by this government given the Premier's words, to determine which kids should be in a classroom and which kids should not. I stated that numerous times. The government may not like to hear that that is a concern that is being raised by the Official Opposition, but it is absolutely a legitimate concern given the action teams and the working groups and the focus on aggression and the collection of data that this government is looking to get from teachers and schools about what's happening in those classrooms.

Madam Speaker, I believe Bill 6 is being used as another tool to screen out students from being in classrooms, and I am very concerned that this government is going to make a determination about which students have a right to be educated fully and which kids do not. That, I believe, is a concern that many parents have. We have heard this government talk relentlessly about choice in education and parents' rights. However, when it comes to parents who have children with disabilities, this government's actions to roll back inclusive education, which the Premier today alluded to and this government has indicated may be coming, is a concern for

all parents, that they do not get to choose how and where their children will receive their education.

I believe that is why we cannot believe Bill 6. This opposition is not going to give cover to this government and to this minister to pretend like they're making action on education when there are real, pressing concerns around funding, around resources, around support for teachers, around support for children with disabilities, and screening tests are not going to cut it, Madam Speaker. For that reason, I will not be supporting Bill 6.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise just for a moment to talk a little bit about this bill, protecting numeracy and literacy. It is important for us as a government to lay a foundation for success, success for students who are moving on to the next phase of their lives, preparing them for success in the workplace, preparing them for success when they leave school. You need a strong foundation for that.

Now, that is exactly why we are taking real action, making real investments in education in this province: over \$8 billion in the school accelerator program. We're hiring 3,000 new teachers, another 1,500 educational assistants. Madam Speaker, this is real investment in education.

4:00

Now, to the point, though, that I wanted to get to, which is this line that keeps getting used by the members opposite from the Premier's town hall about who gets in and who gets out of class. As I recall, question period is the time when all members are in the Chamber, and all members here heard the Premier's answer today when she made it very specific what she's referring to, and that was that when some kids are in class – and there are specific examples where a student kicked a teacher in the stomach so hard, so hard, Madam Speaker, that that teacher needed surgery. Another teacher was bitten in the breast so hard that that teacher needed surgery.

The members opposite are wilfully leaving out information for clips on social media, and it's pathetic. I don't understand why the members opposite choose to pick and be overly selective and then as a caucus misrepresent information to the public for social media and for a small political gain. That doesn't benefit Albertans. If you want to come into this Chamber and have a substantive debate about the legislation, come with the facts. Come back down to Planet Earth a little bit, I would suggest to the members opposite. Let's talk a little bit about Bill 6 and what it does for Alberta kids. So much time is being spent talking about things that are not preparing kids for the next stages of life, not preparing them with the foundational information they need to be able to read, to do basic math.

Now, they talked about classroom complexities. Let's talk about it. Let's talk about who gets to be in class, Madam Speaker. Education is a right in this province, but I can tell you that if you have a class of whatever number of kids and there are violent kids in that class, they can't be in the class. I've even had issues in my own constituency – not immune to this problem – where students have shown violent behaviour. They can't be in the class. Everyone needs to have a good educational experience, and that means protecting the kids who might be coded, who might need special attention but also the other kids in the class who are just there to get that education, to learn about numeracy, to learn about literacy.

Madam Speaker, I'll finish by saying that I wish the members opposite would be a little more forthright with Albertans with their arguments in this Chamber when it comes to the main topics and the purpose of the bill. We just heard from a member who chose to

take a quote from the Premier that was already explained today in question period what was meant – and it was very clear; there was no equivocation about what the Premier meant in that instance and explanation – and portray it as something completely different. I think that is something that we're seeing a lot from the members opposite.

I would hope that they would support this bill and support the minister of education as he tirelessly works – tirelessly works – to improve the education system in this province by supporting building schools, hiring teachers, developing a curriculum that prepares kids in our schools to be successful, to go on to the next phase and help build this province that my ancestors and yours and everyone else's in this Chamber, whether you're a first-generation Canadian or you're fifth or sixth . . . [interjections]

Now, Madam Speaker, I hear members opposite have a lot to say under their breath. That's funny because I'm not hearing it, you know, when they stand to their feet, or maybe they just choose not to, don't want to engage in the debate, and that's fine. But I have every right to get up here and make my arguments.

I'll conclude with that.

Ms Hoffman: Will you welcome an intervention?

Mr. Schow: I'm done.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 6, Education (Prioritizing Literacy and Numeracy) Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2).

Just before I begin with my remarks, just a couple of things to say: first of all, I want to thank the teachers. You know, my colleague for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I think, has been a really good influence in this place and just reminds us that it really is important to thank our educators. A special shout-out to my daughter, who's also a fairly new educator and has her own struggles. I thank them for all of their work.

I want to go back to some of the conversation, Madam Speaker, where people were talking about behaviours in classrooms. You know, I've spent a good chunk of my adult life supporting people with disabilities. Some of them were young and some of them were adult, and what I learned very early on in school and then learned in practice was that every behaviour is a form of communication, so there are times when children or students are unable to communicate, maybe something that they need or they don't like or they want to get away from, and they don't have the tools to verbalize it or even using nonverbal communication. Very often, unfortunately, aggression is what shows or what comes out.

In my younger life working in education, I've certainly been punched in the face before. I have had my hair pulled. I have been, you know, all kinds of things like that, and it wasn't a part of the job that I liked, but I learned that it was communication. The real beauty of that was that I was surrounded by educators and aides – they were called aides at the time – who taught me that behaviour is communication, and this is about managing behaviours or introducing interventions before these behaviours sort of express themselves or show themselves. That was very much part of the education system, but the real difference many years ago when I was in that situation was that there were a number of educational assistants in that particular classroom, and it was an inclusive classroom.

Let me also say that I also believe in, you know, a parent's right with their child, with the student, to choose the kind of education that best meets their needs. Having a child fully included into a

classroom isn't the choice that all families make, and I respect that. However, it is the right of every child to go to their little community school, wherever that might be, and to be included into their classroom. That is not the state of affairs here in Alberta because the teachers do not have the supports they need to safely include their students.

Let me tell you that when you do inclusion properly, and that means funding it properly – and we do have the lowest education per student funding in the country. When you do fund it properly, Madam Speaker, it's actually a pretty beautiful thing because they go on to junior high and high school, and then some of them go on to postsecondary. Many of them go on to employment, whether it's apprenticeship or perhaps it's supported employment or inclusive employment of some kind. There are all different types of employment for people with disabilities. Some people do not require accommodations; others do. All of that becomes possible because we build a foundation.

Now, the real problem that I have with this piece of legislation and why I will not be supporting it is because it doesn't go any further than just applying a standardized test, and I think we can all agree that there are innate dangers to just relying on standardized testing. It's almost as ridiculous as only relying on an IQ test, for example, to decide whether or not somebody gets income support because they took a test at one point in their life and on that particular day they scored a 67 and not a 70, and that decided or that determined whether or not they were eligible for AISH benefits. That's another standardized test that we really need to look at. Standardized tests do not capture the needs of kids with disabilities or adults with disabilities.

Now, the one thing I was sort of encouraged about, Madam Speaker, was that the minister stood up and said that he did have the support of one organization, a national advocacy organization. He said that dyslexia – I think it's the dyslexia organization of Canada. I hope I didn't get their name wrong. I know that they have an Alberta chapter. I believe they have chapters in all of the provinces, and that's great. What the minister didn't go further to explain is that this particular screening is not the only thing that they asked for. They didn't say: this is the end-all, be-all. What they did say is: this is one of the things that we believe needs to be in place to support students. They also talked about, most importantly, what was needed was intervention.

Then I look back at the comments from the minister of education, and I think this was November 25. "This bill is about equity," the minister says. "It is about dismantling . . . systemic barriers that prevent children with learning disabilities from achieving their full potential."

Now, what I would suggest, Madam Speaker, is that what is preventing them from their full potential is the support that they need to actually learn. We know that children with disabilities need to be in a classroom, whether it's a fully included classroom or perhaps it is a separate classroom of some kind, but they have the staff, the educational support that they need so that the staff aren't having to call their parents to come pick them up because they don't have the staff to work with them.

The minister went on to say, you know, that this will help us identify what kinds of interventions are needed. Well, that's where the rub is, Madam Speaker. We don't have the money for interventions. We have sadly cut PUF funding, so kids are entering school really behind the eight ball. We've cut FSCD. The minister will say: no, we've increased it. Sure, because of population and growth and all of that, but what we have done is place people on a wait-list for them to linger for up to four years. That's the reality, and when these kids don't get supported in those early years, they are going to fail later on. That is a sad reality.

4:10

I'm going to end on one other comment, Madam Speaker. What we did not hear today from the minister was the work that they did to consult here in Alberta, here at home, on this bill, and we have some really terrific bodies that we can use that are very easy. First of all, happy international persons with disabilities day, but one of the bodies that was created at the same time, really, that this day was created was the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. What that body does or was supposed to do – it doesn't look like it does it anymore. I was on there for a few years and had some concerns then, too, but what it doesn't seem to do is to actually provide direct advice to the Premier and her cabinet. So my comment or question to the minister of education is: did you stop and speak to the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities? I'm quite sure that properly funding education for students with disabilities is pretty high on their priority list.

Next is the disability advocate of Alberta. I know for a fact that this advocate's office is pretty overwhelmed with calls and e-mails from parents that are concerned about, number one, lack of PUF funding, lack of FSCD funding, the time that they're on the wait-list in addition to supports in classrooms. I know this because they call my office, and I tell them to call the disability advocate. They often copy my office on their e-mails. I think probably lots of us are in that same position, and I know that that office would have collected a lot of information and advice – they're supposed to be nonpartisan – to give to the Premier and her cabinet, which would include this minister, but I haven't heard anything about that in this debate, Madam Speaker.

So the two bodies that are under the direct purview of this cabinet, this government, have been ignored, but instead they're talking about an organization, a dyslexia organization, which is great. I am happy there's at least one. But what about Inclusion Alberta? What about the Cerebral Palsy Association? What about the MS Society? What about Voices of Albertans with Disabilities? What about Easter Seals? What about the Autism Network? What about the Autism Society? What about the Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta? What about the Alberta Committee of Citizens With Disabilities? What about FSCD parent advisory group? Those are just a few, Madam Speaker.

Again, when we fail as legislators, all of us, when we fail to listen to our constituents, to experts, to people in the field, we will get it wrong. This government continues to get it wrong. I will not support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to join the debate? Seeing none, would the minister like to close?

Mr. Nicolaides: Waive.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

Government Motions

Firearms Regulation and Jurisdiction in Alberta

17. Mr. Amery moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly approve pursuant to section 3 of the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act the following motion:

1. The Legislative Assembly is of the view that

(a) in accordance with section 92 of the Constitution Act, 1867, the Alberta Legislature has exclusive legislative jurisdiction over, inter

alia, property and civil rights within the province and matters of a local and private nature,

- (b) firearms ownership is a matter that falls within this exclusive legislative jurisdiction over property and civil rights and matters of a local and private nature within the province,
- (c) the Alberta Bill of Rights guarantees the right of every Albertan to acquire, keep, and use firearms in accordance with the law,
- (d) the Alberta Bill of Rights guarantees the right of every Albertan not to be subject to a taking of property without just compensation,
- (e) the government of Canada has, through amendments to the regulations prescribing certain firearms and other weapons, components and parts of weapons, accessories, cartridge magazines, ammunition and projectiles as prohibited, restricted or non-restricted [SOR/2020-96, SOR/2024-248, SOR/2025-86], prohibited ownership of over 2,500 models of firearms based on arbitrary criteria and has initiated the federal assault-style firearms compensation program (collectively, the "federal firearms seizure initiative"),
- (f) in association with clause (e) the government of Canada has made temporary amnesty orders SOR/2020-97, SOR/2024-249, and SOR/2025-87 under the authority of section 117.14 of the Criminal Code to shield owners of prohibited firearms from criminal charges associated with unauthorized possession of prohibited firearms while still prohibiting them from using or enjoying their lawfully obtained property,
- (g) the federal firearms seizure initiative will unjustifiably interfere with the rights of law-abiding Alberta firearms owners and violate the jurisdiction of the Alberta Legislature,
- (h) the Alberta Legislature has exercised jurisdiction over firearms by enacting the Alberta Firearms Act, which establishes the office of the Alberta Chief Firearms Officer, provides for provincial regulation and enforcement in relation to firearms, and empowers the government to control firearms seizure activities,
- (i) in 2023 the government enacted the Alberta firearms regulation, which requires the written approval of the Minister of Justice before municipalities may pursue federal funding for the seizure of legally acquired firearms,
- (j) in 2023 the government enacted the seizure agent and provider licensing regulation, which requires that anyone seizing firearms under the assault-style firearms compensation program must first be licensed to do so by the Minister of Justice,
- (k) the Attorney General directed that the Alberta Crown prosecution service assume the responsibility for charges under the federal Firearms Act in addition to their existing responsibility for charges under the Criminal Code effective January 1, 2023,
- (l) the Attorney General has issued directives to the Alberta Crown prosecution service that the

- prosecution of offences for continued possession of firearms referred to in clause (e) will generally not be in the public interest,
- (m) the Attorney General has issued a directive to the Alberta Crown prosecution service that prosecution for the use of reasonable force to defend oneself and others in one's home will generally not be in the public interest,
 - (n) the Premier, the Minister of Justice, and the Alberta Chief Firearms Officer have strenuously advocated against the federal firearms seizure initiative in all available venues,
 - (o) it is the position of the government that it will not assist in any way with the federal firearms seizure initiative, and
 - (p) the government is committed to ensuring that law-abiding Albertans maintain the right to acquire, keep, and use firearms and are not unreasonably restricted in their ownership by any other government.
2. The Legislative Assembly is of the opinion that
- (a) the federal firearms seizure initiative is unconstitutional and interferes with exclusive provincial legislative jurisdiction over property and civil rights and matters of a local and private nature, and
 - (b) the federal firearms seizure initiative will cause or is anticipated to cause harm to Albertans by:
 - (i) criminalizing the continued possession of firearms arbitrarily classified as prohibited under the federal firearms seizure initiative after the expiration of the associated amnesty orders,
 - (ii) stripping the monetary value of previously valuable, legally obtained property,
 - (iii) removing their ability to participate in and sustain long-established, safe shooting sports and other firearms-related cultural activities that have occurred for generations, and
 - (iv) diverting federal funds from initiatives that directly enhance public safety for Albertans such as improved border security and bail reform.
- And be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the Lieutenant Governor in Council to consider the following responses to the federal firearms seizure initiative:
- (a) take all reasonable steps to ensure that neither the government nor any provincial entity as defined in the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act participates in the implementation or enforcement of the federal firearms seizure initiative;
 - (b) use all legal means necessary to oppose the implementation or enforcement of the federal firearms seizure initiative in Alberta, including by refusing to provide any resources or assistance to the federal government as it seeks to implement its federal firearms seizure initiative in Alberta;
 - (c) direct the Attorney General to regularly review directives issued to the Alberta Crown prosecution service relating to the prosecution of offences for possession of firearms and the right of all Albertans to use reasonable force to defend themselves in their own home and to revise such protocols from time to time as the Attorney General deems appropriate;
 - (d) direct the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services to issue guidance to Alberta law enforcement agencies that notwithstanding the federal firearms seizure initiative the government's priority continues to be a commitment to addressing ongoing public safety concerns, including serious and violent crime, human trafficking, gang violence, organized crime, and drug trafficking, and it is not a government priority to pursue offences for the continued possession of firearms prohibited through the federal firearms seizure initiative or for using reasonable force to defend oneself and others in one's home;
 - (e) direct the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services to take any necessary steps consistent with the law to prevent any municipal police force, regional police force, or contracted RCMP police force from assisting with or participating in the assault-style firearms compensation program;
 - (f) direct the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services to take any necessary steps consistent with the law to ensure that the right of all Albertans to use reasonable force to defend themselves and others in their own homes is respected;
 - (g) direct any member of Executive Council to take any necessary additional measures to oppose the federal firearms seizure initiative;
 - (h) take all reasonable steps to meaningfully address crime through measures that protect public safety without interfering with the rights of law-abiding Albertans.

4:20

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I rise today, again, to move Government Motion 17, which is designed to defend law-abiding firearms owners, uphold the rights of Albertans, and push back against deeply misguided and expensive federal policy.

Mr. Speaker, you'll recall in September of this year the federal government launched the pilot phase of its confiscation scheme. Immediately our government stated that we would not participate or enforce this federal gun grab because it is not about public safety. It's not about addressing crime, and it certainly isn't about targeting individuals who pose real threats to our communities. Instead, the federal policy focuses on people who have complied with the law at every single step, people who have undergone background checks, taken safety training, stored their firearms properly, and followed every regulation the federal government has ever required of them. These are hunters, farmers, ranchers, sport shooters, and collectors. These are the people who represent a long and proud tradition of responsible firearm ownership here in this great province.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot ignore the facts. Nearly all violent gun crime in Canada is committed with illegally acquired weapons. Criminal organizations are not stopping at the border to fill out

paperwork, they're not participating in buyback programs, and they're not surrendering their weapons because Ottawa tells them to. Illegal guns continue to flow across our porous borders, and the federal government's latest approach does nothing to stop that. Turning law-abiding citizens into targets of federal enforcement is not about public safety. It's a political strategy, and Albertans deserve better.

This motion is a clear expression of the government's commitment to protecting Albertans from federal actions that cause harm, undermine the public trust, and exceed Ottawa's constitutional authority. Under the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act this Legislature both has the right and the responsibility to stand up when federal policies are unconstitutional and damaging to the people of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, through the motion before this Assembly the Legislature will instruct provincial entities, including municipal police forces and the RCMP acting as Alberta's provincial police, to decline to enforce or to implement the federal gun seizure program within our province. We will instead want them to focus on what really matters: targeting the violent criminals, the serious offenders, and the illegal weapons-trafficking networks. Alberta's law enforcement officers need to be addressing people who pose true threats – gang members, drug traffickers, organized crime – not spending their time and their resources confiscating property from law-abiding citizens who have done everything right.

The motion affirms the principle that Albertans have the right to use reasonable force to defend themselves and their loved ones from intruders in their homes. We've said it time and again. A person's home is their sacred place, and in the worst case scenario, one that we hope no one ever wants to see, Albertans should feel confident that they will not be criminalized for protecting themselves or their loved ones inside their very homes. As the Attorney General of this great province I will continue reviewing and issuing directives to the Alberta Crown prosecution service to ensure that any charges related to legitimate home defence are simply not pursued when prosecution doesn't fall within the public interest.

The justice system needs to go back to protecting the victims and deterring the criminals. It is one of the most fundamental roles of government to ensure that laws are applied fairly, consistently, and with common sense. Albertans expect and certainly deserve a justice system that supports individuals who act responsibly, lawfully, and in defence of themselves or their loved ones.

The motion before us achieves several important things. It tells Albertans that their provincial government will stand up for them when federal policies simply go too far. It ensures that our law enforcement agencies remain focused on the real threats to public safety, not on enforcing Ottawa's expensive and ineffective political priorities. It strengthens public interest and public confidence that legitimate home defence will be respected and not criminalized. Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, it reminds Ottawa that Alberta will simply not fall in line when national policies fail to protect their communities.

The Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act was created for moments exactly like this. It recognizes that we have a unique culture, a unique history, and a unique relationship with firearms ownership that is rooted in ranching and farming, in collecting, and in outdoor recreation. It also acknowledges that Alberta has the authority to stand up for its citizens when federal actions cause harm or they overreach into provincial jurisdiction. This is about standing up for fairness. It's about protecting the rights of responsible Albertans, and it's about ensuring that provincial resources are directed where they're needed most, towards addressing violent criminals but not burdening or making criminals out of law-abiding citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve much better. Albertans expect us to defend their rights, their freedoms, and most importantly of all, I think, their ability to protect themselves and their families. With this motion we are doing precisely that. I urge all members to support this motion and to send a clear message that in Alberta the rights of responsible firearm owners will be respected and the safety of our communities and of our homes will be the top priority.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Minister of Justice has moved Government Motion 17. It's a debatable motion.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Out of everything that the Minister of Justice said, I think I can agree that Albertans deserve better. Albertans deserve much better than political theatrics. This motion doesn't accomplish much. Instead, it creates a lot of confusions, some of those really dangerous as well.

I will explain the disagreement that we have with this motion. First and foremost, you don't need to be a legal scholar, lawyer, or law professor to know that only courts can decide jurisdictional disputes and constitutional questions. That's not the role of the Legislature. In our system, in our Constitution, that division of power is pretty clear on what the executive branch of the government can do, what the legislative branch can do, and what the judiciary can do, and as far as I know, the role for deciding constitutional questions, deciding jurisdictional disputes: that's the role reserved for the courts in Canada.

4:30

The second thing. The Constitution also provides a clear division of power between provinces and the federal government in sections 91 and 92. Under that division of power, the federal government has exclusive jurisdiction over criminal law, and that jurisdiction includes registration, licensing, and classification of firearms. If this government believes that there is some confusion with respect to that jurisdiction and what's included in the criminal law jurisdiction and powers, it's certainly open to this government to take it up with the courts and settle those jurisdictional disputes with the federal government in a competent court of law. That's not the role of this Legislature, to pronounce on jurisdictional matters. This is offside.

The province can certainly claim property and civil rights aspects of the firearm, and that would include, I guess, things like restrictions on hunting, which zones firearms can be used in, the type of ammunition that can be used, their transportation, their retail in the province. All those things will fall squarely under the province's jurisdiction under property and civil rights. Municipalities, through provincial laws, can also regulate firearms somewhat through their zoning laws.

All those things, again, are somewhat in the provincial jurisdiction, but when it comes to registration, licensing, and classification, that's federal jurisdiction under criminal law power, and when this government talks about defending law-abiding firearm owners, they should be very clear that the law, as it stands now, requires law-abiding firearm owners to abide by the laws that are in the jurisdiction of the federal government when it comes to registration, licensing, and the classification of firearms. If the government is telling those Albertans otherwise, they are putting them in legal jeopardy, they're doing them a mass disservice, and that's not the role of a government. A responsible government will never put its citizens in legal jeopardy on such a serious, serious issue.

Then they talk about assault weapons and the ban on assault weapons. I think the UCP, as was mentioned in the speech here,

somehow wants Albertans to have those assault weapons, and we don't. We do not believe that assault weapons in any way, shape, or manner make our community safe, make our province safe. They said that the proliferation of guns is not about public safety.

Mr. Schow: What is an assault weapon?

Mr. Sabir: I will certainly explain what an assault weapon is. When we talk about assault weapons, we don't need to look further than to the south, to our neighbours, where assault weapons have become the leading cause of death among children and youth. That's facts, stats.

Mr. Schow: What's an assault weapon?

Mr. Sabir: These are children; these are youth, and in the United States of America, if the member didn't hear it correctly, the leading cause of deaths in children and youth is assault weapons. The leading cause of deaths in the United States when it comes to homicides is also assault weapons. The leading cause of deaths in the United States when it comes to suicide is also assault weapons. Gun injuries are also a leading public health concern in the United States.

Here we are that government disagrees with certain classifications and wants to have assault weapons in our streets, in our communities, and they claim that has nothing to do with public safety. It has everything to do with public safety. It has everything to do with public health. In the last three, four years we have seen gun crime go through the roof in our communities. If I just talk about northeast Calgary, I have gone to many funerals; I know many parents who have suffered as a result of gun violence in our communities.

When it comes to people's right to have weapons, the law-abiding firearm owners, certainly people, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the aisle respect Indigenous people's right to harvest. We respect Albertans' right to have firearms, to hunt, to defend their livestock. I have been hunting. Many members on this side of the aisle have hunted; their families do. I have talked to many of them, and all of them will agree . . .

An Hon. Member: What'd you shoot?

Mr. Sabir: I hope members on the other side agree as well.

. . . that to hunt, you don't need an assault-style weapon that may fire 100 or 200 rounds a minute. If you think you need that, you're not into hunting. There's got to be something different. I know that.

Saying that they are defending law-abiding firearm owners: I think nothing can be further from the truth because laws that are in place in relation to registration, classification of firearms are under the Criminal Code of Canada. I urge all Albertans not to take legal advice from this government. They don't have a good record when it comes to these matters, when it comes to the justice system. Two former ministers if not more got themselves in hot water for interfering in the justice system, sometimes over traffic police tickets and sometimes on different matters.

Here in this motion they are also trying to give Albertans some legal advice around section 34 and section 35 of the Criminal Code of Canada. Section 34 is about self-defence, and section 35 is about the defence of property. These are two Criminal Code provisions, fairly detailed provisions, and there is a long jurisprudence that is available for the interpretation of these provisions as well. There is a legal maxim that self-defence is a shield and not a sword. Here, through their remarks, through their statements here in this Chamber and outside this House, they are somehow telling Albertans that they have a right under section 34 or 35 that nobody else knows about.

4:40

There is a lot of jurisprudence that is very clear that self-defence is a shield. It's not a sword. You cannot just sit somewhere and plan self-defence. Self-defence is only justifiable for immediate prevention of harm, imminent harm. Other than that, I would urge Albertans to not take legal advice from this government. That's not how self-defence works. That's not how section 34 works. That's not how section 35 works.

I can point to a couple of cases as well that were in public discussion a fair bit, both involving Indigenous people. One is *R versus Stanley*. That was a 2018 case from Saskatchewan Queen's Bench and the other one was *R versus Bilodeau*. I strongly urge everyone to look at these cases. These cases will explain what self-defence is, what defence of property is.

Again I'm saying this. Whatever the government wants Albertans to believe with respect to these two provisions couldn't be further from the truth. It's wrong and it's dangerous. It may give Albertans a perception somehow that government is creating a new right for them that didn't exist before. Self-defence has been always there. Section 34 has been part of our Criminal Code for a long time. Section 35 is relatively new. But they should consult legal scholars, not take political advice that somehow government is creating a new right that didn't exist before. The way the government is interpreting it is very dangerous.

There are a few more things that I also want to talk about with respect to this motion. There are a lot of things in this. I may not be able to cover everything, but there is one provision that drew my attention, which is 2(c): "direct the Attorney General to regularly review directives issued to the Alberta Crown prosecution service." Here we go again. Cabinet is directing the Attorney General "to regularly review directives issued to the Alberta Crown prosecution service." I think, Mr. Speaker, cabinet cannot direct the Attorney General. That's wrong. That's offside. That's political interference. Cabinet input is only limited to advice. The Attorney General acts independently.

Here the UCP didn't learn anything from their previous interactions with Attorneys General, again putting it in writing that they are directing the Attorney General to review the prosecutorial guidelines. They didn't learn anything. In 2023 Justice Marguerite Trussler, then Ethics Commissioner, gave a decision where she found and noted that the Premier interfered in the justice system at that time when she tried to ask then Justice Minister Tyler Shandro to help Artur Pawlowski with his criminal charges. That's the decision of Marguerite Trussler.

After that, they promised Albertans that they will do better. Instead of doing better, now they are directing the Attorney General to issue guidelines that would help interpret sections 34 and 35 of the Criminal Code in a way that suits their political narrative, that suits their political need. Again, that is extremely dangerous, and no Albertan should take that advice from this government.

Then they're also directing the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services to issue guidance to law enforcement agencies. What does that really mean, issuing guidance to law enforcement? That's also political interference. The minister cannot direct or guide the law enforcement response. Again, this is interference. This is dangerous. Police should operate independently when it comes to core policing decisions, and when you are encouraging your minister to issue guidelines or direct response with relation to certain provisions of the Criminal Code, that's interference in core policing decisions. That should be offside. No Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services should do that. They should leave police as an independent body.

A couple of things were also mentioned about public safety. In the last six years the government's own stats show that violent crime has gone up, crime in rural communities has gone up, crime in urban centres has gone up, and there are reasons for that trend. The reason for that is the policy choices this government made, the policy choices that have left Albertans unemployed, that have resulted in youth unemployment being the highest, that have hindered Albertan access to health care. Policy choices of this government that have hindered access to housing. Policy choices of this government that have resulted in Alberta's per-student funding at the lowest in the entire country.

These are the things that research shows over and over are the social determinants of crime, social determinants of justice. They cannot police themselves out of this situation. If they're serious about public safety, they will have to focus on employment, on youth employment, on access to health care, on access to mental health supports, on access to housing, and on funding education properly. That's the advice we are getting from the experts. Bringing forward motions like this does not help Albertans with public safety.

I think this motion is nothing but just political theatre for this government to please their base. This motion is exceeding this Legislature's, I guess, role. Our role is not to declare federal laws unconstitutional. If the government has issue with any federal law, they should take it up with the court and not drag it in this Legislature for political point scoring. If they think that the federal government is exceeding their constitutional authority, again, they should take it up with the court. They should not give legal advice to Albertans on section 34 or 35, self-defence or defence of property. That is dangerous. And they should not interfere in Attorney General independence or police independence.

I urge the government to reflect on this and retract this motion.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of Government Motion 17, another sovereignty within a united Canada motion. It's important to note that we have now done a number of sovereignty motions in this Legislature, all of which have been voted down by the members opposite. The problem that I have with that is that Bill 1, the first bill that the Premier introduced when she became the Premier of the province, was the sovereignty within a united Canada act. The purpose of this bill was to give us this kind of opportunity to defend Alberta's best interests against intrusion from Ottawa. This was something that the Premier laid out as her number one mandate when she ran for leader of the United Conservative Party. She has continued to fulfill that mandate since becoming Premier, and I applaud her for defending Alberta rigorously.

4:50

Now, Mr. Speaker, what's disappointing in this instance is that the members opposite continue to fail to defend Alberta. Albertans should not be surprised; this is par for the course. This is regular business for the members opposite. What's really disappointing is that this is how they acted when they were in government, when they were subservient to the federal Liberals and their boss Jagmeet Singh and Tom Mulcair when he was leader. You know, we reflect back on what I would call the triple black swan event. Triple black swan event: a term that I have taken from former Minister of Finance Travis Toews. Travis, wherever you are, I hope you're doing well.

Mr. Speaker, the triple black swan event of the Leader of the Opposition as mayor at Chamber in Calgary, Rachel Notley as Premier, and of course Justin Trudeau as Prime Minister in Ottawa

did zero for Alberta. They drove jobs away. They incentivized people to leave the province. I'll get to the point in a moment. This was a dark time for Alberta. Flash forward a number of years. Flash forward to 2019: a historic mandate win by Jason Kenney, Premier at the time; now our Premier now – I won't use her name in the Chamber – continuing on building this conservative movement in Alberta, defending the province.

What I'm getting at here is that the federal government has decided to impose an arbitrary ban on guns in Canada. Now, when the Deputy Opposition House Leader was speaking, the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall – maybe the mics picked it up; I made a point of saying – after he repeated "assault-style weapons," I said, "What is an assault-style weapon?" He proceeded to cite examples of things that have happened in the United States with so-called assault-style weapons, but at no point was the member able to define what an assault-style weapon is because, Mr. Speaker, there isn't a definition for an assault-style weapon.

I can tell you that the member verged on finding a definition by citing a rifle that can shoot between 100 and 200 rounds in a minute. That, of course, if the member knows anything about firearms, would be an automatic weapon, which has already been banned for a number of years in Canada. If you own an automatic weapon, you have a special permit for that for things like gun shows and such. It's something I don't have. But I can tell you what I do have. I have a restricted and a nonrestricted possession and acquisition licence, a licence that I spent hours in a classroom taking a rigorous course to learn how to properly store, clean, transport, and maintain.

Mr. Speaker, to suggest that an assault-style weapon exists in Canada to the extent that it is causing a number of heinous crimes – I can tell you that those crimes are not being committed by law-abiding gun owners who have taken the possession and acquisition licence course. They can't get them because it's an illegal firearm. A rifle that could shoot 200 rounds in a minute: that's three rounds a second. With a semiautomatic rifle – like, no one has a trigger finger like that. That is crazy. The point I'm getting at is that if the member opposite, not to be disparaging, had an understanding of firearms as he does the law, he would know that what he's talking about is completely bananas. It's beyond logic.

The point of this motion, Mr. Speaker, that I really want to get to is this. The member talked about danger in Alberta. What's danger? There are dangerous circumstances in our province. It happens. It happens in every province, every country around the world, and people are concerned. They are fearful. They are fearful of what could happen if you're by yourself. Members of this Chamber know. We are away from home often, and our number one concern is our families. I can tell you without reservation that my number one concern is always my family, the health and well-being of my family, and I live in town. Could you imagine the fear, being a family on an acreage and at 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock, 1 o'clock in the morning two headlights start driving up your driveway and it's not someone in your family? That is fear, and we are outlining what we believe is self-defence.

Mr. Speaker, rural Alberta and urban Alberta need to feel safe in their homes, need to feel like the federal government has their best interests in mind. That's why this motion is here.

To another point: the use of law enforcement. We've already talked about the need to get to incidents as fast as possible. In Alberta, no matter where you live, when you pick up the phone and call 911, someone should be dispatched right away and get to you. We pay our taxes, and we expect a service in return. We expect to feel safe in our home, not that fear that I just referenced. If those police resources are being used to go and confiscate firearms from law-abiding possession and acquisition licence holding gun owners, how does that make any sense? We

are taking law enforcement officers away from their primary duty, which is keeping Albertans safe in their homes.

I don't have the statistic, and I'm not convinced that it exists – well, maybe it could exist. I shouldn't presuppose anything. But I would love to know the number of crimes that are committed with guns that were not smuggled into this country, that were properly stored, properly maintained, and likely stolen from a premises, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that I hear stories all the time – you watch the news – about ghost guns, guns that have been smuggled across the border. That's what we need to be addressing. That's where police resources should be going. They should be going to law enforcement cracking down on gangs and gun-related crimes carried out by firearm holders who don't have the proper education and licence to use them, who shouldn't even be anywhere near a firearm and who probably got them illegally.

Mr. Speaker, what's really important about this motion, in my opinion: there are a number of things to talk about here, but one is that the federal government has criminalized law-abiding gun owners. If the members opposite can't understand that, I would encourage them to go and get a possession and acquisition licence or just do the course for your own education and edification. I know a number of people in my constituency who can teach that course, and I'd be happy to share that information. It's actually a great course, even if you never buy a firearm. I invite all the members in this Chamber to come down to Cardston-Siksika, and if you're interested, we can do the course. I'll even do a refresher with the members, and then we can go shoot some targets, and they can understand what it's like to properly use a firearm in a controlled environment.

Mr. Sabir: What if I've already done it?

Mr. Schow: I would love to hear the stories about the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall and all the times that member has gone out shooting targets in a controlled environment. I'd love to hear it. Now, my belief is that the only member in the opposition benches that has any credibility in rural Alberta is the one from Edmonton-Manning. Any credibility.

Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you is that this motion is meant to make sure that police resources are put to the most important and efficient use, which is protecting Albertans, not spending their time criminalizing, going into homes and confiscating legally purchased, legally maintained firearms. The good people of Cardston-Siksika who own firearms and have a PAL are not criminals. The federal government has turned them into criminals, and that is not fair.

An Hon. Member: It's bad.

Mr. Schow: That is very bad. It's very bad, Mr. Speaker.

I'd ask the members opposite to look at this motion in whole, because it is a lengthy motion, but it is an important motion to define Alberta's place and respect Alberta's sovereignty within a united Canada. To that end, I'll take my seat, and I would encourage all members of this Assembly to support Government Motion 17.

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

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Government Motion 17, but I want to be abundantly clear. While I do support these initial steps, I don't believe this goes far enough. This federal gun buyback program is a colossal failure that must end immediately. It's time provincial Legislatures assume full legislative control over firearms within our borders.

5:00

Let me start with some hard facts that Ottawa doesn't want Canadians to hear about. The federal government has allocated over \$742 million to this buyback scheme. Three quarters of a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, and what do we have to show for it? A pilot project that has been ridiculed coast to coast over buying back a pathetic 22 firearms, a program so poorly conceived that even the Public Safety minister was caught on tape admitting that he would have handled it differently given the chance. That's also the same Public Safety minister who in the House of Commons couldn't explain or answer any questions on possession and acquisition licences or its restricted variants. He didn't even know what PALs or RPALs were.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't public safety policy. This is Liberal political theatre funded by hard-working taxpayers. The Canadian Coalition for Firearms Rights has called the program exactly what it is: a tremendous waste of money at a time when Canadians can least afford it. Saskatchewan's Firearms Commissioner has been even more direct, stating that spending billions of dollars "to target licensed gun owners will have no measurable impact" on the criminals using these firearms. These aren't partisan voices; these are the experts in the industry speaking truth to power.

That's what really exposes the federal government's hypocrisy on this. They're offering \$1,337 for an AR rifle that retails for \$2,710. They've banned 2,500 models of firearms based on an arbitrary criteria – what they look like, not what they do – while similar firearms are perfectly legal to still own. An example I'd give you of this is the .22 calibre GSG-16, banned strictly on the way it looks. One gun owner in Cape Breton said it perfectly: he'll take Ottawa's money and buy a nearly identical rifle that's not on the banned list. This isn't policy; this is absurdity. We don't need to go past the first iteration of that ban list, Mr. Speaker, that had Black Rifle Coffee Company products on it. A coffee company; again, absurdity.

I knew full well that the members opposite weren't going to support this motion, not because of factual basis but because it goes against their socialist and Marxist views of the world. In fact, in 1916 Lenin wrote the disarmament slogan, making their stance perfectly clear: "Disarmament is the ideal of socialism." The socialist oligarchy Liberals in Ottawa and the Marxist NDP across this country just don't want this. They need disarmament to push their socialist revolution through without opposition, abandoning the more than 374 licence holders here in Alberta, telling them they just don't care.

Let's talk about what this program really targets, law-abiding Albertans. Licensed firearms owners in this province are among the most vetted, most responsible citizens we have. They've passed background checks, they've completed safety courses, they've done everything right and by the book, yet Ottawa wants to treat them like criminals while illegal firearms pour across our broken federal borders. The shootings that happen in cities aren't being carried out by sport shooters or duck hunters; they're committed by gang members using illegally smuggled handguns.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, we have a border crisis, not a legal firearms crisis. We have an organized crime network trafficking drugs, weapons, and death into our communities, much to the joy of the soft-on-crime politicians of the NDP and Liberal parties who continually vote for these disgusting soft-on-crime policies. We have violent criminals being released on bail to reoffend multiple times, and what does Ottawa do? They go after hunters, farmers, Indigenous communities, and competitive sport shooters. This is worse than misguided. It's betrayal, betrayal of Canadians everywhere. Western Canada would not have been settled, harsh landscapes

tamed, and frontiers explored without responsible firearms owners.

Let me address the constitutional reality that Ottawa continues to ignore. Section 92 of the Constitution Act of 1867 is crystal clear: provinces have exclusive jurisdiction over property and civil rights within their borders. Firearms ownership is a fundamental matter of property rights, and property rights fall squarely within provincial jurisdiction. Alberta has already demonstrated our capacity to regulate firearms responsibility. We've established the Chief Firearms Officer of Alberta. We passed the Firearms Act of Alberta. We implemented regulation requiring ministerial approval before municipalities can participate in federal confiscation programs. We've taken control of prosecution under the Firearms Act. We've issued directives to make clear that prosecuting law-abiding firearms owners defending their families or possessing firearms that Ottawa arbitrarily has banned is not in the public's best interest.

Here's my position, Mr. Speaker. I don't apologize for being blunt on this. This buyback program should be scrapped entirely, not reformed, not improved; ended, full stop. The Canadian firearms program should be ended immediately and all regulating and legislative powers and responsibilities transferred to each province. Repeal every single gun law order in council and regulation change that happened under the Liberals' time in power that was used to strip away personal property rights under their mindless approach to firearms.

More than that, it's time for Ottawa to transfer complete legislative authority for firearms to the provinces, where it belongs. Section 92 gives us that power, the Constitution supports that power, the evidence demands that, and Albertans deserve it. We know our communities better than the bureaucrats in Ottawa. We understand the realities of rural Alberta. We recognize that the rifle that the rancher uses to protect livestock from predators is not a weapon of the criminals; we know that the shotgun an Indigenous hunter uses to feed their family is not a threat to public safety; and we know that the firearms a competitive sport shooter uses at the range are a tool of sport, not an instrument of violence.

If Ottawa actually cared about public safety, that three-quarters of a billion dollars would go to border security to stop illegal weapons from entering Canada. It would go to bail reform to keep violent offenders behind bars. It would go to gang enforcement units in our cities, where the real gun violence is happening. Instead, they're spending it on a program that the Canadian Coalition for Firearms Rights correctly identified as nothing more than confiscating sport rifles from civilians, a program that after five years hasn't even properly been rolled out.

The Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation has praised their provincial government for standing up to this federal overreach, just as we're doing here today. They recognize what we know is fact. This isn't about safety. It's about control. It's about a federal government that thinks it knows better than the provinces, better than rural communities, better than the people who actually understand firearms and the responsible culture surrounding them.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has always been a province that defends property rights, respects responsible firearms ownership, and trusts law-abiding citizens. This motion reinforces those values. It tells Ottawa in unmistakable terms that we will not assist in the confiscation of legally obtained property from our citizens. We will not divert our law enforcement resources to participate in a socialist and Marxist political theatre campaign. We will not stand by while reasonable gun owners are criminalized.

Beyond this motion, I'm calling on this government to go even further. Let's lead the national conversation around transferring firearms jurisdiction to the provinces, where it constitutionally belongs. Let's build a coalition with Ontario and Saskatchewan, with other provinces who recognize what this overreach is. Let's take the fight all the way, if necessary, because protecting property rights, constitutional jurisdiction, and the voice of rural Alberta matter.

The federal government has had its chance. They've wasted billions on a program that doesn't work. They've ignored the border crisis while targeting law-abiding citizens. They've trampled on provincial jurisdiction while accomplishing nothing for public safety. It's time for Alberta to say enough is enough. I urge every member of this Assembly to support this motion, support farmers, support our hunters, our sport shooters, support responsible firearms owners across this province, support the constitutional divide of power, support property rights, and, most importantly, support common sense over political pandering.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to ensuring that law-abiding Albertans have the right to keep, use, acquire their firearms. This motion starts a good commitment, but I believe we must go further still, ending this buyback program entirely. Bring firearms jurisdiction home to where it should belong, at each of the Legislatures of the provinces across this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I encourage everybody to support this motion.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other speakers?

Seeing none, the Minister of Justice to close debate. That is waived.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 17 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:10 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Chapman	Hoffman
Batten	Dach	Ip
Brar, Gurinder	Ellingson	Sabir
Brar, Gurtej	Eremenko	Wright, P.
Ceci		

Totals:	For – 45	Against – 13
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[Government Motion 17 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

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

Bill 10

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to request that the votes on Bill 10's clauses be severed as follows: sections 1 and 2 and 4 to be voted on as block A and sections 3 and 5 and 6 to be voted on as block B.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall for your request.

The past practice of this committee has been to allow a member to make a request to the chair of Committee of the Whole that the clauses of a bill be severed into blocks for the purposes of voting after debate on the bill has concluded. In accordance with the member's request the clauses of Bill 10 will be severed into the following two voting blocks, on which members will vote once debate on the bill at Committee of the Whole has concluded. Block A will be pertinent to sections 1, 2, and 4; block B, sections 3, 5 and 6. For the clarity of all members, we will continue to debate all clauses of Bill 10 together, but when there are no further members wishing to speak to the bill, the votes will be put separately as explained. Thank you.

Any members wishing to provide comment at this time? The Member for Calgary-North East.

5:30

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. What is our responsibility as elected officials? Number one, heckling; number two, thumping the desks; number three, debating points of order. But there is another moral responsibility, and that is designing the laws that make our communities, our province, and our world inclusive, where people can come together as one, where we celebrate diversity, and where we see humankind as one. On this side of the House we not only preach; we genuinely believe in it.

That is why I rise to introduce an amendment to Bill 10. I move that Bill 10, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2) be amended by striking out sections 3 and 6.

The Deputy Chair: Member, you may proceed. This will be referred to as amendment A1 for the record. We will refer to this amendment as A1.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This province is built by people who left their own homes on the other side of the oceans and call this province their home. This country, this province, and our communities have been built not by just the sweat of immigrants but also by the blood of immigrants. Immigrants have faced racism in the past. Immigrants have been treated as second-class citizens in the past. Immigrants have been seen as others, aliens, and foreigners in the past.

We cannot erase the history, Mr. Chair, but we can reflect on it, learn from it, and make sure it doesn't repeat. We can make this province welcoming for everyone, but for this government dead

children are red tape; noncitizens are red tape; diversity, equity, and inclusion are red tape. This government isn't just cutting red tape; it is wrapping blue tape around every service Albertans rely on.

Our province faces very big challenges, and there are big questions in front of us. The biggest one is: how do we make this province more welcoming? When I talk to my constituents, they tell me that this society they live in has been handcuffed by racism. They find that this government has made it difficult for them to free themselves from these handcuffs of racism. We must empower our people, our communities, and everyone in this province so that they can free themselves from these handcuffs, and we can do that in three simple ways.

The first one is by striking out section 3 from Bill 10. The government needs to stop governing based on their ideology and start governing by listening to what experts, constituents, and stakeholders tell us. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association is raising the red flag on section 3. It says that the Alberta government's plan to add citizenship status to drivers' licenses poses a serious threat to equality rights, privacy, and civil liberties.

I have a report from the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published in 2018, that highlights racial discrimination in the context of laws, policies, and practices concerning citizenship, nationality, and immigration. It argues that when citizenship status becomes a formal requirement or marker, it disproportionately impacts racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. The report notes that such policies can limit access to housing, limit access to social services, employment, and education.

Then they did the follow-up report in 2021 and 2020 on digital immigration status practices. It documented how modern immigration status verification, identity documentation requirements, and digital technologies for immigration control disproportionately impact migrants, refugees, and stateless individuals, often in ways that exacerbate racism and xenophobia.

The analysis shows that these policies can foster institutional discrimination, social exclusion, and reinforce stereotypes that migrants or noncitizens are outsiders, less deserving, or untrustworthy. Research also indicates that citizenship-based discrimination can intersect with race, ethnicity, religion, language, accent, and other factors, meaning that even lawful permanent residents, refugees, or long-term migrants could be subject to similar prejudice as undocumented people if policies or IDs mark nationality.

The second thing we can do is to strike out section 6. This is a barrier to health care. Until now Albertans did not have to pay for health care. Under this section Albertans will have to pay to renew their driver's licences, which means this government has added more barriers to health care. This blue tape is getting thicker and thicker every day, Mr. Chair. Health care is a right, not a commodity. Health care is not for sale, not for the UCP, not for Sam Mraiche, not for anyone. It must be available to everyone, everywhere, every time.

Third, we can respect diversity, equity, and inclusion. I spoke about this in detail yesterday, and I ask all members to stand up for our diversity, equity, and inclusion. I have a serious problem with the UCP, Mr. Chair. Today the Premier clearly said in question period that students with English as a second language are the problem. I am appalled by this comment. I came as a foreign student. Finding the right train to get to my school was a thing to learn for me. Getting off at the right station – and if I missed that station, figuring out how to come back – was a thing to learn for me. Submitting the assignments online, understanding the concepts of plagiarism, bibliography, and making a resumé were things to learn for me.

English is not my first language. It is not even my second language. It is my third language. I did not know many things when I came here, but what I knew was that I was not the problem. I want to tell this Premier that a student with the last name Mohammed sitting in a library trying to learn English is not the problem. The real problem is this UCP government and its austerity measures that have dismantled our education system. The real problem is not the foreign worker with the turban on his head who just cracked his ankle working in unsafe conditions; it is this government which has dismantled our public health care system. The real problem is not the skinny brown girl with a backpack on her back trying to go door to door handing out resumés, finding a job. The real problem is this UCP government which has created the highest unemployment rate in the country. Now this government wants to open the floodgates for discrimination against these people.

Mr. Chair, we can build a better province, we can build a better Canada, and we can build a better world. I'm reminded of the words of Rabindranath Tagore when he says, "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high . . . Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake." Let us take the first step in doing that. Let us vote for this amendment. Let us show our constituents that we believe in an Alberta that is welcoming for everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The minister of red tape reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak against the proposed amendment. The quality of these amendments is unbelievable. Basically, this says: be amended by striking out sections 3 and 6. I mean, could they have put any less thought into this amendment? Unfortunately, this is what we get from the members opposite, poorly thought-out amendments, and that's why I speak out against it.

While I would hope that all members would show up every day with the goal of making life better and more convenient for Albertans, these proposed amendments prove otherwise, and it's typical behaviour of the NDP. Their answer to everything is to wrap it in red tape. Well, this holds us back from making life easier and more convenient for Albertans, and this is not surprising. When your worldview comes from the faculty lounges of expensive American campuses rather than the lived experience of Alberta families, your ideas tend to look a lot like this proposed amendment: pointless, not well thought out, and disconnected from the needs of the people that we serve, Mr. Speaker.

5:40

One of the actions we can all take right now to make life better for Albertans is to put citizenship markers and health care numbers on drivers' licences and IDs. Mr. Speaker, there's a couple of reasons to do this. The most important reason is that Albertans asked for it, and it's going to make it more convenient. People are tired of disintegrating health care cards in the wallet.

Now, I have to ask this question, and it's going to be rhetorical, Mr. Speaker, through you to the members. I was really intrigued by their comments of discrimination, and I can't get my head around the fact that 67 jurisdictions already do this and that somehow it's not discriminatory when they do it, but it's only discriminatory when Alberta does it. Do you see the hypocrisy from the self-deprecating left? They hate everything that is Albertan. They don't want to bring convenience to Alberta; they want to have more red tape.

The quality of this amendment is frankly deplorable, and I urge every member of this House to vote against this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to provide comment?

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:42 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

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

Totals:	For – 15	Against – 42
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 10.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 10. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any opposed? Please say no. That is carried and so ordered.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, it would appear that the clock is about to strike 6, so I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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For inquiries contact:

Editor

Alberta Hansard

3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 St

EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E7

Telephone: 780.427.1875

E-mail: AlbertaHansard@assembly.ab.ca