



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, February 24, 2026

Day 25

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)  
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)  
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## Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Progressive Tory: 1

Independent: 1

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R.J. Sigurdson	Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
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Dan Williams	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Rick Wilson	Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
Muhammad Yaseen	Associate Minister of Multiculturalism

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Chantelle de Jonge	Parliamentary Secretary for Affordability and Utilities
Nolan Dyck	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous and Rural Policing
Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridor Development
Chelsae Petrovic	Parliamentary Secretary for Health Workforce Engagement
Jason Stephan	Parliamentary Secretary for Constitutional Affairs
Ron Wiebe	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (North)
Justin Wright	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (South)
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

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

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

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Batten  
Getson  
Haji  
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Lundy  
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### **Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

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

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### **Standing Committee on Private Bills**

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

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Getson  
Gray  
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### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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Cyr  
de Jonge  
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### **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

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Al-Guneid  
Armstrong-Homeniuk  
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Cyr  
Ip  
Petrovic  
Rowswell  
Yao

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

[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 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.

### Statement by the Speaker

#### Incident at Tumbler Ridge Secondary School

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, let us pause for a moment of reflection as it is with heavy hearts we continue to mourn with the community of Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia. We hold in our thoughts the victims, their loved ones, and all who are burdened by the grief of unexpected and unimaginable loss. We lift up the first responders, teachers, health care workers, and all those who face this tragedy together. May they find solace in the support of their communities and in the compassion of the people from across our country.

In these moments of profound sorrow may we be reminded of our shared responsibility to care for one another, to uphold the dignity of every person, and to work toward a future where all communities can know safety and hope. May wisdom guide us and compassion ground us as we carry out our duties today. Please remain standing for a moment of silence as we grieve with the community of Tumbler Ridge.

Hon. members, it is the first sitting day of the week. We will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Michael Peters. I invite all to participate in the official language of their choice.

#### Hon. Members:

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

### Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

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

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, today we are honoured to celebrate the Lunar New Year in the rotunda with members of our Chinese

community. Joining us today in the Speaker's gallery is the consul general of the People's Republic of China, Liying Zhao. Sitting with Consul General Zhao are community representatives from across Alberta: Ms Lily Wang, Mr. Roger Qian, Ms Mei Hung, Mr. Rick Man. I would ask that they all please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** We start with the Minister of Children and Family Services.

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and all members of the Assembly two very special introductions. The first, Bryan Goehringer with Wood's Homes, celebrating 100 years of helping vulnerable children here in our province, and a second school brood from Spruce Grove, Broxton park school. I enjoyed chatting with them yesterday, and it's a very special school to me as my boys went there. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute delight to rise and introduce to you and through you a group of phenomenal grade 6 students who attend Dovercourt school. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

**Mr. Haji:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly grade 6 students from St. Anne Catholic elementary school and their teacher Veronica den Otter. I ask all of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods it's my honour, through you to the members of the Assembly, to introduce 32 students from St. Elizabeth Catholic school and their teacher Michaela Mann. I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you the mayor of Barrie, Ontario, Mr. Alex Nuttall, and his chief of staff, Andre Jmourko. They are visiting Alberta to learn more about the important work our government is doing to save lives through the Alberta recovery model. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Airdrie-Cochrane.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you I'd like to introduce to the House a 22-year veteran of Canada's Armed Forces armoured division, Master Corporal (Retired) Bonnie Critchley. Please rise and receive the warm welcome and gratitude of this House.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to recognize two distinguished guests of the Ukrainian community in the gallery today, Lydia Migus, president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, Alberta Provincial Council, and Dmytro Petrushchak, president of the UCC Edmonton. I invite all members of the Assembly to join me in welcoming these folks today. Thank you. Could you please rise?

**The Speaker:** Grande Prairie.

**Mr. Dyck:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to the entire Assembly two excellent leaders from across Alberta who are also members of the Public Security Indigenous Advisory Committee, Earl Thiessen and Teddy Manywounds. They are both working very hard to enhance public safety across First Nations and Métis communities across Alberta. I ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to introduce a few of my constituents and wonderful advocates and activists calling themselves the mourners. They are Gerry Hofs, Susanne Goshko, and Tami Smith. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-South West.

**Mr. Ip:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Mr. Han Dong Che, president of the Calgary Chinese Dongbei Association, and his wife, Sarah Meng. Please rise, both of you, and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Calgary-Beddington.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you, representing the Calgary Indochina association, Joe Zhu. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Are there more introductions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

1:40

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd love to introduce my wonderful social work student. She's a master's student at the University of Calgary. Carmela Tigulo, please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

## Members' Statements

### Support for Immigrants

**Member Batten:** Mr. Speaker, from all over this world refugees from war-torn countries come to Alberta. We don't ask them what skills they arrive with. We don't ask them how much money they have in their bank accounts. We don't ask them if they purchase private health insurance before they arrive. We just help them because that's what we do as Albertans and as Canadians.

Four years ago Russia launched an all-out invasion in Ukraine. When this happened, we welcomed refugees from Ukraine into our country as we condemned this needless violence. We welcomed them to our communities right here in Alberta, large and small, where they found a new home. Thousands of Albertans and millions of Canadians have Ukrainian heritage, myself included. Ukrainian culture has become part of our identity as Albertans.

In welcoming people during their most dire time of need, like Ukrainian refugees, we become stronger as a province and as a country. We should not be targeting newcomers to Alberta like Ukrainians and turning against them and turning against our history as Albertans as a generous province. Every Albertan and every Canadian wants to see us extending a welcoming hand to people fleeing from violence to come here and to build something new and

to help make Alberta better. No one wants refugees weaponized as a distraction from the important work our government has like fixing our public health care system.

On the fourth anniversary of the invasion of Ukraine I call on all members to cherish our country and our province and to build a place that welcomes people in need, not pushes them away.

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

## Provincial Referendum

**Mr. Wright:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This fall Albertans will be asked important questions through a provincial referendum on immigration and constitutional reforms. It's a chance for people of this province to have their say on issues that affect our economy, our public service, and Alberta's future within a strong and united Canada.

Low oil prices combined with out-of-control federal immigration policies are together driving unsustainable budget deficits not just here but across the country. Many Albertans have real and legitimate grievances with the policies of the federal government. We all know that Alberta is growing at an extraordinary pace. People from across the country and around the world are choosing our province because of our opportunity, affordability, and quality of life. This brings real pressures. Classrooms are more crowded, emergency rooms are busier, and the demand on public services is increasing faster than our provincial revenues can sustain. At the same time, Albertans continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of the national burden. We are contributing more to Confederation than we're receiving back while having limited control over decisions that directly affect our province.

The upcoming referendum is about thoughtful debate. It's about giving Albertans a direct voice on how provincial growth is managed, how provincial services are funded, and how Alberta can strengthen its constitutional and fiscal footing within Canada. These are serious questions, and they deserve democratic legitimacy. Our government believes that the best decisions are made when citizens are trusted with the facts and invited into the conversation. A referendum does exactly that. It's respecting Albertans' judgments and affirms that people should help shape the policies that affect their daily lives.

This fall Albertans will have the opportunity to speak clearly and decisively. Our job as legislators is to listen and to act on the mandate of responsibility, confidence, and respect of democracy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

## Black History Month

**Member Hoyle:** Happy Black History Month. This is a time to celebrate the legacy, resilience, and extraordinary contributions of Black Albertans. It's also a time to speak honestly about what's happening to Black communities in Alberta. Many are feeling the impacts of this UCP government's policies. Programs meant to address systemic barriers are being scaled back. Conversations about racism are dismissive and dismissed, and increasingly we're hearing rhetoric around immigration from the members opposite that frames newcomers not as contributors but as burdens.

Black history is Alberta history. From early Black settlers who built up prairie communities, from Black railway porters who organized labour rights to Caribbean oil workers who built up Alberta's natural gas sector, we have shaped this province in profound ways. Today Black leaders are breaking barriers in boardrooms, courtrooms, hospitals, universities, and in this very Legislature. Black entrepreneurs are driving innovation. Black

artists are shaping culture. Black educators are mentoring the next generation. Black youth are excelling in academics, athletics, and community leadership.

These achievements are evidence of talent and determination that have always been present, but celebration and recognition without commitment isn't enough. We must ensure that policies do not roll back progress. At a time when Alberta faces labour shortages, we should be attracting talent, not creating an environment that makes people question whether they are valued. The future of this province depends on whether Black and racialized folks believe and see that they belong. All Albertans deserve a government that is ready to pave the way for the collective success of our province, and Alberta's New Democrats are ready to do just that.

#### Fourth Anniversary of Russian Invasion of Ukraine

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Mr. Speaker, February 24 marks four years since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine and continues to be the day that reshaped many people that now call Alberta home. Over the four years Ukrainians have shown remarkable strength, defending their communities, culture, and democracy with courage that has inspired people all around the world. Ukrainian resilience has become a symbol of hope at a time when global conflicts are growing and aggression increasing.

In Alberta we've seen this resilience up close. Approximately 65,000 Ukrainian evacuees have arrived in our province since the war began, seeking safety, stability, and the chance to rebuild. They came with uncertainty but also with determination and an incredible will to move forward. Alberta responded the way that it does in times of crisis. Communities opened their doors. Albertans have stepped up, and their generosity has made an enormous difference in people's lives and reflects the best of who Alberta is. I've heard many stories from evacuees. Their journeys have been marked by loss, fear, and sudden change, but they also speak with gratitude for the welcome they received here and with pride in the contributions they're now making to our province.

Mr. Speaker, the war is not over. The suffering has not ended. We must continue to stand with Ukraine to support humanitarian efforts and to speak out against the unprovoked and devastating attack on Ukraine. Our support cannot fade. Alberta stands with Ukraine. Canada stands with Ukraine.

Mr. Speaker, in honour of the lives lost, the families displaced, and the extraordinary courage of Ukrainian people, I respectfully ask that all members of the Assembly join me in a moment of silence.

Slava Ukraini.

#### Alberta Separatism

**Member Gurinder Brar:** Not a single UCP MLA signed the pledge. Not a single UCP MLA denounced separation. Not a single UCP MLA dared to say clearly that Canada is our home.

Albertans are seeing longer wait times in hospitals. Albertans are seeing their kids studying in overcrowded classrooms. Albertans are seeing their hopes slipping away while costs keep rising. No one wants this government to focus on referenda; Albertans want this government to focus on health care. No one called for this government to blame immigrants for every problem; Albertans expect this government to make life more affordable. No one is asking for a separatist government; Albertans are asking it to stand up for one united Canada.

The UCP is playing with separatism like gambling with our home, as if Alberta is theirs to risk. Albertans cannot live when the house is lost. Communities cannot grow on broken bets, and

Alberta cannot build its future on political gambling. We need leaders who will protect our home, make it stronger, and treat everyone equally.

1:50

Under an Alberta NDP government we will build schools and denounce separatism. We will build hospitals and denounce separatism. We will build a more inclusive Alberta and denounce separatism. The UCP government flirts with separation and gambles our fate. Albertans need care and schools, not hate. We believe in unity, steady and strong, to build a province where all belong.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, it's 1:50, and just before we go to Oral Question Period, I thought you would all be interested in the fact that I was fortunate enough to be able to host the Speakers a couple of weeks ago from all across Canada, every province and territory. I learned that several of them have one, two, or three points of order in a whole six- or eight-week session. I say that in hopes that the hon. members here might use that as some inspiration. [interjections]

Order. I'm not liking the way this is starting.

**An Hon. Member:** You started it.

**The Speaker:** I did start it, and I was hoping you would finish it better than we started this session.

That's information for you to do with as you please, but I think we all know what I hope we'll do with that information.

#### Oral Question Period

**The Speaker:** The Leader of the Official Opposition has question 1.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ramadan Mubarak.

#### Fatality Inquiry into Grey Nuns Emergency Room Death

**Mr. Nenshi:** On December 22 a young father, Prashant Sreekumar, died in the waiting room at the Grey Nuns hospital. He was 44 years old. He had waited in that waiting room for more than eight hours. The minister was shocked; he was upset. He promised a fatality inquiry so this kind of thing wouldn't happen again. Two months later no fatality inquiry has been scheduled. Why has he broken his promise to Mr. Sreekumar and to all Albertans to not schedule this fatality inquiry?

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

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of our entire caucus, our condolences go out to the family of Mr. Sreekumar. One of the things that we were looking at: we had two independent medical officers take a look at the circumstances around the incident that occurred that day. Because of some irregularities, that's the reason why the health minister actually took an unprecedented step and asked for a fatality inquiry, knowing that if it went through the process of waiting to get to a fatality review board, it would delay it. We wanted to make sure that that began right away, and we are looking forward to the findings.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Well, we're looking forward to the findings, too, as are all Albertans, but in order to get some findings, you actually have to schedule the inquiry. This government, of course, is scared of public inquiries, but no family and no Albertan should be left

without answers here. Without these answers we can't fix the system; we can't make it better. Let me quote the minister: I need to fully understand the circumstances around Mr. Sreekumar's death, and I still have questions that need to be answered. But we have no answers. Why won't the government today schedule that fatality inquiry?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're in agreement with the opposition. We all want to get to the bottom of this. This is the reason why, again, the health minister took the unprecedented step of saying that we were going to have a fatality inquiry. This is going to be public, transparent, led by a justice. They will present a report to the Minister of Justice outlining recommendations. We have the same shared goal of making sure that something like this doesn't happen again.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Well, the Premier changes her mind on lots of things, but I'm thrilled to hear her change her mind on actually liking a public, transparent inquiry.

Look, this is not an isolated incident. There were at least six other deaths in similar circumstances in the same time period as Mr. Sreekumar. But instead of fixing this problem, the government has hired 11 CEOs, fired some of them, padded contracts to their buddies instead of actually fixing the problem. Where are the triage physicians, where are the solutions, and can the Premier answer this question without blaming immigrants?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will just also mention that my health minister has advised me that the fatality inquiry cannot commence until all of the inquiries are done. The chief medical examiner has to do their work, and once that is complete, we'll be able to move forward with scheduling the judge and have a full public inquiry. We want to get to the bottom of it as much as anyone else.

I can tell you that my four ministers who each have a piece of the health care system under the new refocusing: we meet weekly. This is very much on our minds about how we're going to improve the health care system, from emergency rooms to the patient experience to surgeries to attaching people to family doctors.

**The Speaker:** The second set of questions. The Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Six years in power and the health care system has gotten incredibly worse.

### Alberta Separatism

**Mr. Nenshi:** That said, Mr. Speaker, I love Alberta. I love Canada. Those are easy things to say, and I would love to challenge every MLA in this House to say the same thing, maybe to sign a pledge to say that. The pledge isn't a trap. It simply says, "I'm a proud Albertan; I'm a proud Canadian; I oppose separatism," and my constituents will know where I stand. In a few hours all of my colleagues signed it. None of the UCP did. Will the Premier sign that pledge today?

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

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The system has gotten dramatically better. We have increased the number of physicians by 2,096. We have increased the number of registered nurses by

11,737. We've increased the number of paramedics as well as LPNs as well as health care aides. So I think that the member opposite is incorrect.

**An Hon. Member:** Point of order.

**Ms Smith:** We have a policy as a government that we support a sovereign Alberta within a united Canada. It was the first bill we put into the Legislature. That is our policy as a government, Mr. Speaker. We have signed on to that. We stood in the Legislature in support of it. That is the position of this caucus.

**Mr. Nenshi:** That word salad, of course, is completely meaningless. It was meaningless when the Parti Québécois used it, that the Premier cribbed it from, and it's meaningless today.

This is the easiest thing in the world: I love Canada; I'm not a separatist. Why can't any of them simply say that? Mr. Speaker, I can send over a copy of the pledge with the pages if the Premier wants to sign it right now. It simply says that she's proud to be Canadian. Why is the Premier having so much trouble? Can she just say those two sentences, that she's proud to be Canadian and she opposes separatism?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to be Canadian, and I want every Albertan to feel exactly the same way. Sadly, after 10 years of damaging policy by his buddy Justin Trudeau, supported by their federal leader in the NDP, they crushed our economy with terrible policies that drove investment out of our province, drove people out of our province, and ensured that we were not going to get oil and gas production increased. We are now in the process of repairing that relationship with the federal government with a memorandum of understanding, and I'm looking forward to giving Albertans hope again.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Yet more meaningless word salad. Thankfully, it's Ramadan, and I don't gotta eat it.

The vast majority of Albertans are proud Canadians, but this word salad doesn't help them feel any better. The minister of tourism can't even get the lines straight; neither can the Premier. Yesterday she said that she wants an independent, sovereign Alberta within a united Canada, so at this point we are left to wonder where they really stand.

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

**Mr. Nenshi:** Albertans want this government to denounce separatism. Since they won't do that, I'll ask a simple question. Does the Premier believe it is possible to be a single person within the confines of your marriage?

**An Hon. Member:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** One or two points of order were called at 1:59. Oh, three points of order. Nice work, folks.

The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds to me like he's talking about the provincial NDP being in the confines of an unhappy marriage with their federal NDP counterparts. I'm quite interested in knowing from the opposition leader whether he supports his new prospective leader Avi Lewis in saying that there should be no oil and gas development. I wonder if he supports the position of the previous Leader of the Opposition, who opposed the Northern Gateway pipeline, who opposed the Keystone XL

pipeline. We're trying to restart both of those projects with the help of the federal government through a historic MOU. That's what's going to give Albertans hope again. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Let's only hear the speaker.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Well, thank you to the Premier once again for giving the NDP government credit for getting TMX built.

## 2:00 Government Policies and Poverty

**Mr. Nenshi:** On a different topic, Mr. Speaker, it was very, very cold in Calgary last Saturday, yet 4,000 of my neighbours stood in line so that the volunteers of Guru Nanak's Free Kitchen could get them something to eat. In a province as wealthy as this one, so many people are falling into poverty, so many people are struggling to make ends meet. Premier: why?

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we've had 600,000 people arrive in Alberta in the last five years. The average cost of providing services is \$15,000 per person. That's \$9 billion and is part of the reason why we have taken the approach that we want to make sure that we are attracting people who can fit into our economy, who come with a good-paying job so that they aren't having to use food banks, so that they do not have unaffordable rent, so that they can afford to have groceries. We've got to get back to the kind of normal immigration policy we had for 40 years.

**Mr. Nenshi:** The gall of being able to blame people living in poverty on immigrants, Mr. Speaker: that's what we just heard from the Premier. It's disgusting. In a time when food bank usage has increased by 134 per cent since the UCP took office – that includes years of low population growth and years of high population growth – the only common thing is the UCP being in office. A third of those food bank users are children. Why are so many Albertans unable to afford food under this UCP?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have had many, many stories of international students living out of their cars and using food banks. We've had many, many stories of asylum seekers who are literally driven down to our navigation centres when they arrive. That is not the appropriate place and way to support newcomers. The way you support newcomers is you make sure that you have the supports in place, and that . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Let's just hear one person at a time. Go ahead.

**Ms Smith:** . . . you're not overwhelming the system with too many people coming at once so that you can't afford . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Add five seconds on. Premier, go ahead.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you.

. . . to pay for those vital social programs. That's why we've got to have a reset, Mr. Speaker, and that's what we're asking Albertans to vote on in the October referendum.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Well, I'm excited, Mr. Speaker. In our first question period we got the Premier's greatest hits. She blamed Trudeau, she blamed Rachel Notley, and now her latest: she's blaming immigrants for everything, even for their own poverty.

The affordability crisis is hitting every single Albertan, but those people standing in line in the bitter cold are being hit even harder than everyone else, and I've never heard a single member of this

government mention the word poverty. The New Democrats cut child poverty in half, and under the UCP it is skyrocketing. Premier, what is her plan to address . . .

**The Speaker:** Order. Time is up. Well, that will be a friendly reminder.

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it's giving Albertans the first crack at new jobs. It's giving our youth the first crack at new jobs because we know that when somebody has a well-paying job, they're able to support themselves and their families and their communities. The biggest indicator of poverty is if you don't have work, and that is the reason, even though we have a powerful economy that is able to generate more jobs than anywhere else in the country, we still have a limit to how many newcomers we are able to support when they arrive. That's why we want to make sure that we have a conversation about this and a vote on it in the fall.

## Children's Pain Medication Purchase

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, all Albertans know that our health care in this province is in crisis. Instead of working to clear the backlogs in emergency rooms, the UCP wastes money over and over and over again cleaning up the Premier's bad decisions. We learned last week that the UCP spent over \$1.2 million for – get this – storing and then destroying the useless Turkish Tylenol this Premier chose against advice to import. Will the Premier finally admit that it was a shockingly expensive mistake when she directed her government to make that purchase?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of hospitals.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've already discussed how the procurement in this case was not properly executed, which unfortunately resulted in products that had to be destroyed earlier this week. We have completely reformed the procurement and contracting process. It has been removed from AHS and moved to the Health Shared Services organization. We've brought in industry-leading experts to align our contracting and procurement practices with the best jurisdictions around the world, and we are embarking on transparent, public, and fair procurement processes.

**Ms Gray:** Under this government's politician-led procurement process, the government misspent \$70 million buying Turkish Tylenol. Only \$20 million worth was ever delivered. It arrived weeks after the crisis was averted, most of it has been sitting in warehouses ever since; the purchase was done through Sam Mraiche, who is at the heart of several UCP scandals; and the purchase was made against the advice of experts. How does the government now justify \$1.2 million to store and destroy something they never should have bought?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Hospital and Surgical Services.

**Mr. Jones:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As outlined in my previous answer, we have taken the procurement and contracting process out of AHS, where there were some irregularities. We did not have proper due diligence or management or even board-level sign-off on procurement, which did result in suboptimal procurement outcomes. As is the case with all medications that expire and are no longer useful, we do destroy them, and we do have processes in place to reduce ordering of extra medications that we won't ultimately use.

**Ms Gray:** The government sat on this medicine for three years and let it expire instead of donating it like they said they would. The

decision cost Albertans another \$1.2 million in storage and disposal fees on top of the \$70 million for the purchase, \$50 million of which was never delivered, millions that could have been spent in ERs, where Albertans face dangerous wait times for urgent medical care. This was a politician-led procurement. It didn't have the diligence. It didn't have the scrutiny because the Premier and this government wanted it. How will they do better?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of this refocusing we have taken the contracting and procurement function out of AHS into the new Health Shared Services organization, and we've brought in experts to update protocols and practices so that they are aligned with the best jurisdictions in the world, so that they do proper due diligence and they have proper sign-off. This is an unfortunate circumstance, but it's a circumstance the government is committed to learning from, and I'm pleased to report that half of that medication was donated to countries in need, including Ukraine and then to a number of countries in Africa.

**Mr. Haji:** Mr. Speaker, this government continues to prove its incompetency and fiscal mismanagement. They sole-sourced a \$70 million contract for Turkish Tylenol through a ministerial order, paid up front, yet only received one-third of those bottles of children's pain medication. Last week we learned this medication was quietly destroyed, wasting another \$1.2 million in storage and disposal costs. At a time when the health care system is in crisis, why is this government wasting millions instead of investing in front-line workers?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we are investing in health care workers and health care infrastructure. For example, we've added 3,000 physicians over the last five years. That's a 25 per cent increase. We've added 12,000 registered nurses, again a 25 per cent increase. We've added 500 nurse practitioners, that's about an 80 per cent increase; 8,500 LPNs, a 74 per cent increase; and 10,000 health care aides, another 20 to 25 per cent increase. We are investing in the health workforce and in health capital projects, which I'll be pleased to talk about in my next answer.

**Mr. Haji:** Given that the Premier informed this House last fall that countries had been identified to receive the unused Turkish Tylenol and given that the government was aware of the expiry dates, which meant that they could not even give it away before it expired, and given that the medication was destroyed during the Christmas break after wasting another \$1.2 million in storage and disposal, why did the Premier tell the House that the government would be donating the medication? Will that decision to destroy it be blamed on AHS or Justin Trudeau again?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we did donate half of the medication on hand to countries like Ukraine and countries across Africa, and we made every effort to donate the other half. As I touched on in my last answer, in addition to investing heavily in workforce, we're also investing in acute-care capacity. We've announced new bed towers at the Grey Nuns and Misericordia hospitals in Edmonton, and another large bed tower at the South Health Campus in Calgary. This is, of course, in addition to the Red Deer regional hospital expansion and the new stand-alone Stollery, which I know Edmonton is excited about.

2:10

**Mr. Haji:** Given that \$50 million in taxpayers' money still remains outstanding from this infamous sole-source contract and given that the Premier confirmed last week on a radio show, and I quote, "AHS is now working on getting their \$50 million back, and I'm watching with interest," but given that government had two years to get this money back and it still hasn't, will the Premier stop watching the ongoing corruption and mismanagement, stop watching the health care system in crisis, stop blaming newcomers, and take responsibility and inform the House when the \$50 million will be given back to . . .

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. I'll just remind everybody that when I stand up, you've got to stop talking.

The hon. member.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is our expectation across government that all of our agencies and corporations and service deliverers will obtain the products and services that they order to the quality and quantity ordered. When that is not the case, there are provisions in contract to seek remedy or to work with the provider. Ultimately, if those are unsuccessful, there's always the option to go through the court. This is an AHS procurement, and AHS is going through those steps. Again, it's our expectation that they do so.

**The Speaker:** In the last question, where no preambles were allowed, we didn't have any. What a great example.

Airdrie-East will continue that, I'm sure.

### Provincial Referendum

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Next Panel heard from thousands of Albertans at 10 in-person town halls this past summer and fall. The two biggest issues that the panel identified were immigration and constitutional reforms. Last week the Premier announced that Albertans will have a say and cast their votes in a provincial referendum this fall that impacts our economy, our public services, and our province's future. Can the Minister of Justice explain why it's so critical that Albertans have a direct say on these issues that directly impact our lives?

**The Speaker:** Right away the Member for Airdrie-East went right ahead with preambles, but I know the member is going to do better next time.

**Mr. Amery:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it's because the people of Alberta are the only ones that should make decisions about the future of Alberta. I'm proud to be part of this government that is giving Albertans the opportunity to weigh in on such important questions. These questions are important. They give Albertans a voice, and the months leading up to the referendum will sincerely give Albertans the opportunity to debate and to talk about these issues and come to a decision about how to provide us with our future mandate. Simply put, we're trusting Albertans to make decisions about how we move forward.

**Ms Pitt:** On my supplemental to my question, Mr. Speaker, given that low oil prices combined with out-of-control federal immigration policies are driving unsustainable budget deficits here in Alberta and across the country and given that sustainable immigration and welcoming newcomers has always been an important part of Alberta's history, can the Minister of Justice please explain how the immigration policies of the federal government have put pressures on

our social support systems, which is a real reality, and Alberta's possible path forward?

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

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that Justin Trudeau's disastrous open-border policies have caused unprecedented strain on our social services and programs. In the last five years alone Alberta's population has grown by more than 600,000 people. Now, sustainable immigration has always been a cornerstone of Alberta, but this is the promise that immigrants have always had with the province of Alberta: you come here, you work hard, you grow a family, and you're prosperous. That isn't the case with the disastrous policies of our federal government.

**The Speaker:** Airdrie-East.

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans have legitimate grievances with the policies of the federal government and they want to see our province respected, unlike members of the NDP, and given that constitutional changes are vital to advance Alberta's sovereignty within a united Canada, can the Minister of Justice please outline why it's necessary to ask Albertans these questions to strengthen our constitutional and fiscal position within Canada?

**The Speaker:** The keeper of the Great Seal of Alberta.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're asking important constitutional questions in this referendum as there are reforms needed to make Alberta stronger within a united Canada. We recognize that Albertans have legitimate concerns with policies of the federal government, and we know that they would like to see more provincial autonomy respected. Again, we're absolutely confident in the judgment of Albertans on these issues. Unlike the NDP, we trust that Albertans know what's best for Alberta.

### Emergency Medical Services

**Ms Hoffman:** On December 22 a 44-year-old father of three waited eight hours in the emergency department with severe chest pains. He died in that emergency room. Albertans saw what happened, and they were appalled. After hearing nothing from the government for two weeks, emergency doctors called for a state of emergency. The minister responsible for hospitals took 24 days to speak publicly about Mr. Sreekumar's death, and when he did, he said that there's no one person running the health care system. So to the Premier: if the minister of hospitals isn't in charge, who is?

**The Speaker:** The minister of hospitals.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, our sympathies go to the family and friends of the man who lost his life in the Grey Nuns that day. In fact, what I said is that no single person runs a \$28 billion complex integrated health system, and the former minister of health knows that very well.

**Ms Hoffman:** Oh, I did. I ran it.

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, months in advance of respiratory virus season we made the investments necessary to respond to the increased patient volumes that we would be seeing. We stood up new beds. We added workforce. We did all the things that Alberta does every year in advance of respiratory virus season, and that's why we got through it.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, your question was listened to. Maybe when you're getting your answer, you'll listen to that. Go ahead.

**Ms Hoffman:** Given that the UCP government fired the CEO and the board, given that the UCP government cancelled construction of the south Edmonton hospital, which would have opened this year, given that the UCP government has paid hundreds of millions of dollars in severance instead of putting that money into more doctors, nurses, and hospital rooms, it's clear who's responsible, Mr. Speaker. It's the UCP government. So will the UCP government finally listen to the doctors and call a state of emergency?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite is aware, we have the tools and authority to respond to the increased pressures in our hospitals already. For example, we've seen respiratory virus hospitalizations drop by 70 per cent – 70 – since late December. Emergency in-patients are down by over 50 per cent. Our ICU utilization has dropped from 100 per cent to just over 80. Our emergency department utilization is at 81 per cent, down from 100 per cent. The system is under pressure, but throwing around that the system is collapsed or is in crisis is dangerous. [interjections] People might not seek care, and she knows better.

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Ms Hoffman:** Given that the minister promised action by February 1 with new triage doctors and emergency rooms but he's hired none and given that tens of thousands of Albertans have written the Premier and the government calling on them to declare a state of emergency, given that health care workers are beyond burnt out and the minister just said that it's not an emergency, is the government seriously going to say that this is not an emergency today in this Legislature? Albertans know the truth. It is.

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of hospitals.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've shared, we've seen hospitalizations from respiratory viruses drop by over 70 per cent. We've seen reduced traffic in our emergency departments, which is fantastic. On the triage liaison physician we did have that role approved and budgeted. We allocated roughly \$20 million over the next two years for these positions at nine sites. Currently the AMA ED section has recommended some changes to the compensation and compensation structure, which we are working through through the appropriate tables.

Thank you.

### Oil Prices and Provincial Fiscal Deficit

**Member Ellingson:** The Premier and the Minister of Finance have been signalling for weeks that they can't get a handle on the budget even though this government has been in power for more than six years. They blame the low price of oil, they blame newcomers, but they never blame themselves even though they're really bad at managing the books. The reality is that this UCP government is banking on the highest oil royalties this province has ever received. To the Minister of Finance: why is it so hard to get off the royalty roller coaster and balance the books?

2:20

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate getting a fiscal question from the members opposite. It's been a while, and I know they probably have a lot to say about deficits. They may be the local experts in them. I would say this. We're committed to weathering as a province through the highs and lows of oil, as we always have been. We're also committed to making sure we meet the needs and

requirements of Alberta today. We're going to continue to build the schools, we're going to continue to add the front-line services, and we're going to do the right thing when we're in surplus and be fiscally disciplined at all times.

**Member Ellingson:** Given that this government has wasted tens of millions purchasing, then storing, then destroying Turkish Tylenol that never should have been purchased and given that this government paid out billions in private surgical contracts that Justice Wyant said were bloated and given that this government also coincidentally and unnecessarily spent nearly \$1 million buying a parking lot also associated with the corrupt care scandal, how can the Finance minister look Albertans in the eyes and say he is a fiscal conservative when he oversees the government wasting billions in contracts to their friends?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta is applauded for having the best fiscal transparency of any province in the country. We beat every province every year. We have the strictest reporting requirements. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.  
Go ahead, Minister.

**Mr. Horner:** We lay it all out for everyone to see. We need to continue to do the right thing: invest in health care, education, the social safety net. I think it's a little rich because I hear from the members opposite every day that we need to fund everything more and more and more. To come back and say: what are you doing, looking at the big picture? We're doing a good job. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.  
I'll recognize you right away here. Just trying to make sure everybody can hear you. The hon. member.

**Member Ellingson:** Thank you, Speaker. Given that this government and the Premier have talked about getting off the royalty roller coaster and given that that talk is just talk, with this government increasing its reliance on royalties as a revenue stream instead of diversifying the economy and the books, given that this is the first time in decades that the government of Alberta has become more reliant on royalties and more vulnerable to the price of oil, will the minister apologize to Albertans for this government's horrible fiscal management, and will he get us off the royalty roller coaster?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, we do have a plan to get Alberta off the royalty roller coaster. It involves the heritage savings trust fund. We're leaving their retained earnings in the fund. We have a plan to grow it out to 2050, where it can be very impactful year to year for Albertans. I would remind everyone also that this is the government that's paid off \$15 billion in debt. Show me another jurisdiction anywhere that in a time of surplus has gone back and said: no, we're going to pay it down; \$13.3 billion in one year alone. That's what it's about: managing the surpluses to weather the deficits while having a plan for the future.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for – I've got Livingstone-Macleod, and that's not who's on their feet. If there's an issue, send me a note, but I've got Livingstone-Macleod here.  
Go ahead.

### Highway Safety

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My region was devastated by the tragic loss of three junior hockey players killed near Stavely in southern Alberta. Families, teammates, and communities are

grieving the lives that are cut short far too soon. Albertans are voicing their concerns for residents who depend on these roads every day. Can the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors share what actions the government plans to take to improve safety at these intersections to help prevent future tragedies?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of transportation.

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost, our hearts are with the families, teammates, and communities who are grieving during this unimaginable loss. No words can ease that pain, but what we can do is act as a government. That is why we've established a \$13 million traffic safety fund, which municipalities can access to improve high-risk intersections and roadways with measures like better signage, signal timing, lighting, and road redesign. Safety is not a slogan; it's an investment and enforcement and engineering, and this government is delivering on all three.

**The Speaker:** Livingstone-Macleod.

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that an 18-year-old lost his life on highway 519 this past summer after a semi crossed into oncoming traffic and further given that Albertans expect professional drivers of heavy trucks to be properly trained and held to the highest standards, what steps is the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors taking to identify, monitor, and remove unsafe professional drivers from Alberta's highways?

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

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While Alberta is leading the country in strengthening our commercial driver training and enforcement, we're cracking down on the bad actors in the industry. Just last year alone we actually shut down five fraudulent truck training schools. We conducted 470 audits, we did 149 investigations, we issued 184 penalties, and we shut down 13 unsafe trucking companies and issued over \$100,000 in penalties. We are removing the unsafe truckers off our roads to make sure Alberta highways are as safe as they can be. That's what accountability looks like.

**The Speaker:** Livingstone-Macleod.

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given the growing traffic and industrial pressures along the highway 2A corridor in Foothills county, concerns about safety, access, and long-term planning are urgent and given that Foothills county is exploring a jurisdictional swap with the province, can the same minister update this Assembly on the status of negotiations, progress, and anticipated next steps for this vital regional transportation file?

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

**Mr. Dreeshen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government has a track record of investing in rural Alberta, and I'm looking forward to continuing on with other projects in Foothills county. We will be working with them in the coming days and weeks.

But, Mr. Speaker, this is budget week. There is lots of good news in the budget, but you know who hasn't been having a lot of good news recently? The NDP leader. First it was Gil McGowan. Then it was Max Fawcett. They're all questioning his leadership. I guess it's really not easy being orange.

### Indigenous Treaty Rights

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Mr. Speaker, treaties are constitutionally protected relationships that establish peace and shared land use for as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the rivers flow. The Supreme Court of Canada has been clear that treaty obligations bind the Crown and limit provincial authority. When a government signals that treaty can be disregarded for political aims, it destabilizes the Constitution itself. Does the Premier accept that treaties are binding law and not optional for political inconveniences?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Thank you for the question. I've had some engagement sessions with Treaty 6 and Treaty 8 and reaffirmed that the Constitution is the highest law of the land, and there is no policy conversation or legislation that will ever supersede the constitutionally entrenched rights in section 35, Mr. Speaker.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Mr. Speaker, given that treaties were entered into to prevent conflict and ensure peace, Canadian history shows that when governments breach treaty and deny Indigenous consent, breakdown of the relationship follows, just like what happened at Oka, Gustafsen Lake, and Ipperwash. Given that these events were not accidents – they were results of governments abandoning lawful processes – will the Premier acknowledge that undermining treaties are threats and that threats of separatism risk repeating these historical failures rather than uplifting and advancing reconciliation?

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Mr. Speaker, the Constitution is the highest law in Canada, and section 35 of the Constitution recognizes and affirms existing Aboriginal and treaty rights and provides constitutional protection for these rights. Any debate about Alberta's future must take place within the framework of the Constitution, including the protections guaranteed to Indigenous peoples. Alberta's focus remains on constructive and respectful engagement with Indigenous leaders.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Mr. Speaker, given that there is no unilateral right to succession and constitutional change cannot override treaty rights – First Nations peoples are rights holders, not afterthoughts – and given that the leaders, the chiefs of confederacy of treaty 6, 7, and 8 nations have clearly rejected separatist proposals, will the Premier admit that any attempt to assert authority over treaty lands through a referendum is unconstitutional, will invite national resistance, and is a complete waste of taxpayers' time through province-wide litigation?

2:30

**Mrs. Sawhney:** Mr. Speaker, public conversations about sovereignty have raised questions about what these debates mean for Indigenous communities. The Alberta government's position is clear. These discussions do not change or diminish existing Aboriginal and treaty rights or the Crown's obligations to First Nations.

### Critical Minerals Development

**Mr. Yao:** Mr. Speaker, Canada has a resource-based economy. Without our oil, our natural gas, coal, and other important resources, our nation might very well have a third-world economy. In Alberta alone there is evidence of many critical elements that could contribute to Canada's economy. These elements have never been more important than they are today as the world evolves and the role becomes vital across numerous industries and the products that they create. Can the Minister of Energy and Minerals please

explain the opportunity Alberta has in regard to the development and advancement of critical minerals?

**Mr. Jean:** Mr. Speaker, it's true that our oil sands sector has shown the world what is possible through innovation. We can do exactly the same thing for our critical mineral sector. We have created an investment-friendly environment here in Alberta, one of the best in North America. We have the skilled labour and know-how to get things done. We have some of the lowest cost of living and the highest paycheques in North America right there in northern Alberta. While the No Development Party continues to drag us down and turn us backwards, we truly stand up for Albertans and make sure things get better for them.

**Mr. Yao:** Given that titanium is an amazing metal that resists corrosion and is extremely strong despite its minimal weight and we cannot understate the importance of its biocompatibility and given that thanks to titanium, my ankle can support my weight and my vertebrae aren't pinching and severing my spinal nerves, and further given that Alberta has an abundant supply of resources like these at our disposal and generations of expertise gained from our mining sector as demonstrated by our oil sands, to the same minister: what are Alberta's competitive advantages in this sector, and what is our government doing to capitalize on these opportunities?

**Mr. Jean:** What a great question from the hard-working member, Mr. Speaker. It's true that we here in Alberta have been Canada's economic engine for the past 50 years because of our oil and gas. But we're so well positioned to drive Canada's economy well into the future. We have some of the largest deposits in the world of lithium, vanadium, cobalt, uranium, rare earth, and titanium. These resources are essential to everyday life, and they make cars, computers, appliances, buses, planes, watches, just about everything. We do have the ability to access these critical minerals right here and do it to the highest standard in the world.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that Alberta has a distinct culture of innovation and adaption, including inventing technologies that are unique to our industries here, and given that these technologies that were hypothesized only a few decades ago have now been proven and other technologies continue to be invented and further given that as chair of the oil sands mine water committee technologies continue to be identified that can contribute to cleaning the tailings ponds, to the Minister of Energy and Minerals: besides traditional mines to access these resources, are there any technological breakthroughs that we should be aware of?

**Mr. Jean:** Mr. Speaker, there are good ways to use water and there are bad ways. Now, instead of investing in water and the tailings ponds, the former mayor of Calgary invested in a blue ring that sits on the highway. We're investing in knowledge and the ability to use our tailings ponds to help the world. To extract lithium from the brine of oil wells is exactly the technology that we can use in northern Alberta with the tailings ponds. Instead of releasing these toxins into the world we're going to actually be able to take things out of them that are going to help the world and compete with China, making Alberta a central cornerstone for critical minerals.

### Affordability Measures

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans have tasked all of us in this House with focusing on the things that matter to them. My

constituents tell me they want an Alberta in Canada, good-paying jobs, an affordable life, stable and reliable health care, and an education system that sets up the next generation for whatever they set their mind to. To the Premier: why is the UCP government so focused on the wrong priorities and extremist ideas instead of focusing on these things like the extreme cost pressures facing Albertans?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question. The Premier is absolutely focused on the things that matter most to Albertans. It's why she spent the last several years touring the province, putting together panels, listening to what Albertans want, and what they want is a strong and free Alberta. They want one that can attract investment from around the world and can continue to be the leader of economic opportunity here within Canada. We are going in that direction. It creates jobs. It creates opportunity. It pays for education. It pays for health care and frankly pays the bills of the rest of the country.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans want to pay their own bills and this government is not giving them that opportunity and given that grocery prices for a family of four have jumped \$1,000 in the last year alone with the price of beef tripling and further given the Premier and cabinet jet-set across the world and into the United States on the taxpayer's dime while Albertans are paying triple to put Alberta beef on their dining room tables, to the minister of affordability: why has the UCP forced Albertans to pay for the Premier's luxury trips to Abu Dhabi rather than having roast beef for their families on their table?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of affordability.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members opposite. I'm proud to be part of a government that puts Albertans first, and we work on affordability every single day. That's why we fight so hard against all the taxes that the federal Liberal government with their friends the NDP across the aisle have put upon Canadians across this fine country from coast to coast. We work every day to reduce those costs, like driving down the cost of electricity nearly 68 per cent from its peak. That's why we work on investing in pipelines to save Albertans money right across the province so they can get access to the heat and power that they need no matter where they live.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that was a master class in deflection if I've ever heard one.

Given that when I speak with the good folks of Edmonton-West Heday, it's not just the cost of food but also their utility bills that have been climbing, and given these cost pressures come at a time when nearly every Albertan says life needs to be more affordable, to the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: when will the UCP wake up and realize they should be focused on reducing the out-of-control utility fees Albertans are paying just to keep their lights and their heat on?

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad the NDP is finally catching up. That's exactly what we did last year when we saved Calgarians \$32 million because of out-of-control fees that the NDP allowed to happen. We have been working on that, and that's why we're seeing some of the lowest costs for electricity generation in the history of Alberta. You know what's costing Albertans money

in their utilities? Transmission costs. And where are those transmission costs from? The failed policies of the NDP layering billions and billions of dollars upon Albertans for 50- and 60-year contracts, but we're working on that, too.

### Government Priorities

**Member Irwin:** Over the past few months I've spent my days talking to Albertans in all corners of this province. I've asked them: what are your priorities? What do you want to see from your provincial government? Overwhelmingly they've been clear: addressing the crisis in health care, supporting public education, and acting on the skyrocketing costs of living. So why instead of making positive change, instead of bringing us together and fighting for better, why is this Premier spending time and money attacking immigrants and all that it means to be proud Canadians?

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, what a disgusting thing to say. Suggesting that the Premier is attacking immigrants might be the lowest of the low kinds of comments to be made in this Chamber. We recognize that there are pressures on social services and infrastructure in this province that need to be dealt with, and there are a number of things that we can do, but that also includes making sure that immigration into Alberta is done with an economic focus, ensuring that we have the resource to support newcomers coming here. [interjection] We have gaps in the labour that need to be addressed with those who are coming here from out of country and out of province. That's how we're listening. We're going to get this right. We're not going to take advice from the NDP. [interjection]

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

**Mr. Williams:** Oh, point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point of order called.

**Member Irwin:** Given that this Premier claims she wants to give Albertans hope through her appalling referendum questions, yet true hope comes from uplifting the diverse people who make our province great, not further dividing us by attacking yet another marginalized group, and given this Premier is justifying her referendum questions by saying that she wants Albertans to decide, we must ask: if she really wants Albertans to decide, then why doesn't she call an election?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear that the member opposite is comfortable with her level of understanding of this issue. But what I can say, Mr. Speaker: on this side of the House we understand the issue of immigration and the negative effects that unmanaged immigration can have on our province. We've seen over 600,000 people come. [interjection]

2:40

**The Speaker:** Order.  
Go ahead, Minister.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the outburst from the members opposite, who are clearly unhinged, because they don't have any touch with the reality on what Albertans want. On this side of the House we're going to react appropriately and make sure our province stays on track.

**Member Irwin:** Given that hundreds of thousands of Albertans have been clear on where they stand when it comes to being proud

Canadians – in fact, over 400,000 signed the Forever Canadian petition, far beyond the number of signatures needed – and given that the latest polling even shows that the majority of Albertans agree and they want Alberta to remain within Canada yet we've still not seen this Premier or any of her MLAs denounce harmful separatist rhetoric, let's ask once more. Will the Premier today say that she rejects separatism and state unequivocally that she's a proud . . .

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. You're out of time. Member, when I stand up, you have to stop talking.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not anywhere in the yelling there did I hear anything that remotely resembled a question, but what I am happy to do is – oh, I see that my time is expiring. Well, what I can say is that on this side of the House we are listening to Albertans, listening to the things that matter most to them, and what they want is a job, an opportunity to support their family, put food on the table, pay for sports fees, and keep their kids educated. We're taking measured steps to make sure we're supporting those, supporting the people here, and I can tell you that we're getting it right. We're not going to leave it to the NDP.

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

### Members' Statements

*(continued)*

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has a member's statement.

#### Ramadan

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is home to people of many faiths, cultures, traditions, and talents. Among them is a vibrant Muslim community that has been part of this province since the late 1800s. In fact, the first mosque in Canada, the historic Al Rashid mosque, was built in Edmonton in 1938, a testament to the deep roots of Muslim Albertans in this province.

Starting last week, Muslim Albertans started observing the holy month of Ramadan by fasting from dawn until sunset, abstaining from food, drinks, and physical needs, and by offering special prayers. Fasting is a profound act of self-discipline, devotion, spiritual reflection, and renewal.

Mr. Speaker, Ramadan also calls upon us to reflect on our shared humanity. It reminds us of our responsibility to care for the vulnerable, support the sick and elderly, uplift those in need, and be compassionate neighbours. It teaches generosity, humility, service, and social justice, values that strengthen not only communities of faith but our province as a whole.

At a time when voices of division and anti-immigrant rhetoric are growing louder, I encourage all members of the Legislature to reach out to their Muslim neighbours and learn about the rich cultures and faith traditions that help shape our diverse province. Through understanding and connection we can confront Islamophobia, xenophobia, and the othering of our neighbours, realities that far too many Muslim Albertans are familiar with and continue to face.

With that, Ramadan Mubarak to all those observing here in Alberta and beyond. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Notices of Motions

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 29, sponsored by myself, which reads as follows:

be it resolved that when further consideration of Government Motion 28 is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the motion, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the motion shall be put forthwith.

I also wish to give oral notice of Government Motion 30, sponsored by the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, which reads as follows:

be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

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

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30 I'm rising to give oral notice that at the appropriate time later this afternoon I will be making arguments that:

be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the crisis in Alberta's emergency departments and hospitals resulting in preventable deaths and dangerously overcrowded emergency departments.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

### Introduction of Bills

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

#### Bill 15

#### Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce Bill 15, the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

Mr. Speaker, the government has been very clear from day one. Albertans deserve to feel safe in their own homes. Bill 15 is about continuing to deliver on that promise. It's about the high standards, augmenting and supporting all law enforcement.

I do hereby move first reading of the Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** Any tablings? The hon. minister of children's services.

**Mr. Turton:** Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite copies of the final report from the child, youth, and family enhancement review committee. I also just want to thank the outstanding Member for Camrose for her work chairing this committee.

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

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table just two of the hundreds of e-mails that we've all received in the last couple of days calling on the UCP's use of referendum questions and asking

this UCP government to stop distracting and focus on the issues that matter.

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

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of an article entitled St. Albert Food Bank Usage Increased by 4 Per Cent in 2025. This was February 5, 2026.

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

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to submit five copies of Chief Kelsey Jacko's official speech at the Assembly of First Nations annual national resource forum where he talks about the impacts on his homelands from significant cumulative impacts from what's happening on his homelands.

Thank you.

### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Minister LaGrange, Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services, pursuant to the Health Professions Act Alberta College of Paramedics 2024-25 annual report, College of Alberta Psychologists 2024-25 annual report, College of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta 2024-25 annual report, College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta 2024-25 annual report, College of Chiropractors of Alberta 2024-25 annual report, College of Alberta Denturists 2024 annual report, Alberta College of Dental Hygienists 2024 annual report, College of Alberta Dental Assistants 2024-25 annual report.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Turton, Minister of Children and Family Services, pursuant to the Protection Against Family Violence Act Family Violence Death Review Committee 2024-25 annual report.

**The Speaker:** Okay, folks. We are at points of order, unfortunately. The first point of order, I think it was at 1:58, called by the Government House Leader, if I have it . . .

2:50

**Mr. Schow:** Withdraw.

**The Speaker:** Withdrawn.

Did the Opposition House Leader have a point of order at the same time?

**Ms Gray:** Mr. Speaker, I will withdraw.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Thank you.

**An Hon. Member:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** Careful. Is it something pertinent to say? Okay. Thank you.

The next point of order was at quite a bit later, I think. If I have it right, Madam Clerk: 2:39 p.m., and that was from the Government House Leader. Withdrawn? No?

### Point of Order Imputing Motives

**Mr. Schow:** No, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to hold on to this point of order. I do believe my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs called this point of order actually while I was speaking. The point of order in question, without the benefit of the Blues: while I was answering a question on Alberta's immigration coming from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I believe that member said – oh, rather

no. The member was speaking. I apologize, Mr. Speaker. The member was speaking at this time, asking a question of the government about immigration. The member said, with my unofficial record, that the Premier is spending time and money attacking immigrants.

Now I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). This is not without precedent. This has been called out of order. On Wednesday evening of July 3, 2019, Speaker Cooper at the time – I hope he's doing well – called out of order and asked for a withdrawal and apology when a member said: "attacking ordinary Albertans." Mr. Speaker, I know there may be loose ways to use the word "attacking," but I think it creates violent imagery, particularly among immigrants in Alberta, something that they should not be subjected to. I don't think that's suggesting the government or any member of the government, but in this instance the question was specifically referencing the Premier, an individual, was attacking immigrants. With the benefit of the Blues I hope that maybe you have the same record as I do, and if you do, I would suggest that this is a point of order.

**The Speaker:** The Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise in disagreement. I don't believe that this is a point of order. In this place we've had many, many discussions around the terminology and the use of "you" specifically when making reference to the Premier of our province, someone who, with her government-funded pool of money, recently spent time to advertise to all Albertans in a state of the union address, putting herself front and centre as the spokesperson for a suite of referendum questions that have made so many members of our community feel vulnerable, feel harmed, and it seems to have a material increase in the number of hateful comments we see in our world and in our society. When the Premier of our province goes on a televised address and specifically targets a group of people through a number of referendum questions and through that language and rhetoric – being able to call that out in the Alberta Legislature is incredibly important.

Now, the use of the terminology "you" has been a matter of debate here, Mr. Speaker, but on April 11, 2024, *Hansard* page 1035, some distinguishing clarification between talking about someone who is the Premier or working in the Premier's role was absolutely made. I believe calling a spade a spade is really important in this place, and in this case I do not believe there was a point of order. I believe we do need to be able to talk about what this government is doing, the actions that they are taking, and the impact that it has on Albertans. I look forward to your ruling.

**The Speaker:** Well, the Blues say that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said: "why is [the] Premier spending time and money attacking immigrants . . .?" Accusing a member of the House of attacking anybody is clearly out of order. There are two apologies here, one from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and the other one from the Member for Lethbridge-West. I don't care what he said. When you say it so loud that you try to drown out the Speaker, it's out of order, so there are two apologies coming here. Let's get them going, please.

**Member Miyashiro:** I apologize.

**Ms Gray:** On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I will apologize and withdraw.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Thank you. That concludes that.

### Request for Emergency Debate

**The Speaker:** We are at Orders of the Day. Standing Order 30; we're not at Orders of the Day. I was wrong. We are at Standing

Order 30, introduced by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. You have the floor.

### Emergency Medical Services

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I gave oral notice, and I'll give this to the pages as quickly as possible so as to not eat into too much of my five minutes. Just to begin with, I'd like to speak to the matter of urgency. I am grateful to have had the opportunity that we have here today to be able to bring this up on the floor of our . . .

**The Speaker:** You're not on a time limit here. I will point out that the only thing you're allowed to talk to is urgency, so carry on, please. There's no time limit, but you have to talk to urgency.

**Ms Hoffman:** Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to have this opportunity on the floor of the Legislature to speak to urgency on this important matter of debate regarding a life or death situation in emergency rooms. This is the first opportunity we've had to convene the Legislature since Mr. Sreekumar passed away. He was a 44-year-old father of three, and he died in the emergency department after waiting nearly eight hours. Doctors have been raising alarms, and finally, after the government failed to respond for 17 days, emergency room doctors publicly urged the government to call a state of emergency.

We know that Mr. Sreekumar's tragic death, because of the family recording it and sharing it publicly – it was very clear that in his final moments the emergency department was overcapacity and under-resourced. I've spoken with the father at the funeral, a man rooted in his faith, and when I said that no parent should have to bury their child, he assured me that in his faith he accepts that his son died on the day he was supposed to.

But it was not the way he was supposed to have died. The way he did was unthinkable, Mr. Speaker. I think about Mr. Sreekumar often. I think about the staff who were there that day, who probably think about him . . .

**The Speaker:** You actually just need to talk about why it needs to be addressed today and put all other business aside. It's the only thing that you could talk about right now.

**Ms Hoffman:** Let me speak to past precedent that's been reached on this matter and why it is urgent, Mr. Speaker. First, I'll start with *Beauchesne's* 390, which states that the motion for emergency debate must meet the urgency standard. That is "when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the House do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and the public interest demands that [such] take place immediately." With that definition around urgency, I will say that nothing on this Order Paper allows us to speak to this specific situation or the emergency care that we are receiving.

When this matter was brought forward, not this specific matter but when emergency room conditions were brought forward previously, for example, there's one specific ruling that I'll highlight right now. It was from October 25, 2010, and it was under Speaker Kowalski at that time and he ruled accordingly. Here's what the motion was: matters of imminent health risk and safety to Albertans regarding emergency room conditions. It was actually the member for Airdrie who spoke specifically to why it was a matter of urgency that I want to reinforce as well because they still stand today. He said:

I just wanted to on behalf of my colleagues say that I don't think that we could honestly have a more urgent matter before this

House. Truly, we are dealing with a matter of life and death . . . the emergency care system, is on the verge of collapse.

And the member went on to quote Dr. Parks, who is the person who again now is raising alarm systems around this exact same situation. He goes on to say:

incredible situations that have occurred in our emergency rooms: people having heart attacks and dying while waiting for care, receiving very distressing exams in public places, very private examinations in public places. This is serious stuff.

Mr. Speaker, I'll remind all members that the member for Airdrie is now the chief of staff to the Premier. I think that there is very strong past precedent from that one ruling, but there was also a second one.

In February 2012 health care workers walked out. There was a motion to have an emergency debate on that same matter. Again Speaker Kowalski deemed that to be a matter of urgent public importance. I will just say that those two were past precedent on the Speaker ruling that it was a matter of public interest and an urgent issue.

Then there were a number of times where there was unanimous consent in the Assembly: March of 2020 when we debated in this place the COVID-19 pandemic; March of 2013, the suspension of medevac flights; February of 2012, the Health Quality Council report; March of 2011, the health system crisis; November of 2010, regarding the state of EMS. So there is significant past precedent that this type of debate is not only allowed in this place, but it is essential to the proper functioning of this place, Mr. Speaker. I will say that when it comes to matters of public importance, I'm sure you, like all of the MLAs on this side of the House, have heard many people raising health care and their confidence or lack thereof in the emergency departments in their riding, which are of provincial responsibility, as one of their number one issues when it comes to things that we should be dealing this session.

Again, there is no opportunity on the Order Paper for us to debate this as an Assembly; therefore, I urge you, Mr. Speaker, to take those past precedents as well as our provincial responsibility into consideration as we prepare for this afternoon. Thank you very much. I hope I have made my case.

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of hospitals.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by acknowledging clearly . . .

**The Speaker:** Just to be fair, I'm going to start off with the same caution. You are only allowed to address whether this has to be addressed fast enough that we would set aside the other business today.

3:00

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will do.

I want to begin by acknowledging clearly and honestly that the pressures on Alberta's health care system are real. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, page 698, says, "The Speaker determines whether the matter is related to a genuine emergency and could not be brought before the House within a reasonable time by other means." I want to put a few different points on the record as to why, though an incredibly important topic of debate, it does not require us today to adjourn the ordinary business to discuss. Our population is growing, aging, and patients are presenting to our hospitals more complex than ever. For decades acute-care capacity and continuing care capacity have not kept pace with our incredible population growth. This certainly contributed to a difficult respiratory virus season. Patients, families, and front-line

staff felt the strain, and Alberta was not alone. Provinces across Canada faced similar pressures.

But, Mr. Speaker, we did not walk into this season unprepared. In fact, we proactively planned months in advance to ensure our health system was resourced for increased patient volumes. In October we dedicated over 300 hospital beds across Alberta . . .

**The Speaker:** Yep. You kind of need to talk about whether, like, this has to be addressed today or not. I mean, I'm sure that you're about to relay government activities that you think are wonderful, but we need to stick to whether this has to be addressed right now or not.

**Mr. Jones:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that the numbers and the data will speak to whether or not this is a crisis that requires immediate adjournment of the daily activities to discuss.

Since peak, in late December, of respiratory virus season we are down 70 per cent in respiratory virus hospitalizations – 70 per cent – from almost 1,000 to 270. Our emergency in-patients are down 50 per cent. Those are the ones bottlenecking our emergency departments. Our ICU utilization has dropped from 100 per cent in late December to around 80 per cent. Our emergency department utilization also has dropped from 100 per cent in December to 80 per cent today. The number of non-ICU beds available for Albertans to access care has more than doubled since late December. Mr. Speaker, a debate in the Legislature will not address health care pressures. The things which we are doing every day – adding workforce, adding acute-care capacity, adding continuing care capacity – will.

I would also note, on page 700 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, that

emergency debate provisions cannot be used to debate “items which, in a regular legislative program of the House of Commons and regular legislative consideration, can come before the House by way of amendments to existing statutes, or in any case will come before it in other ways.”

I note that members have the opportunity to ask questions in the House and, in fact, did so today, debate upcoming health legislation, which they will. And I note that I've been asked for my department to appear for six hours through the estimates process, where they can also ask questions on health resourcing and policy.

Mr. Speaker, what will support our health care system? Co-ordination, investment, workforce expansion, and that's what we're doing. So I would, you know, encourage the members opposite to contribute to the tangible progress made in health care, and this is not a crisis that necessitates adjourning of the ordinary daily Routine today.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Well, hon. members, I think there seems to be agreement on both sides that the current situation with respect to timely access to care in emergency departments is without doubt a very serious situation and surely of concern to all Albertans. As pointed out, I'd say, by both sides, the topic has been widely reported in the media over the last few months. The mover of the standing order did this. This is the first day of the spring session, so I think the hon. member can say with great confidence that the request has been made at the earliest possible opportunity. Listening to the arguments here this afternoon, again, there's no question that members on both sides of the House share significant concerns.

In assessing whether a Standing Order 30 is in order, I must determine if the matter is a genuine emergency that merits setting aside our regular business for consideration today. One of the considerations in making that determination is whether there'll be other opportunities to debate the matter outlined in the request, as stated by the mover of the motion. This is the first day of the spring session. I think, as the hon. minister pointed out, there will be other opportunities over the coming weeks to discuss numerous issues of importance to Albertans, including this issue. Once the budget is

proposed later in the week, there'll certainly be a long debate on that. In fact, I think this matter was actually raised at least once today in Oral Question Period if my memory serves me correctly. It's an important issue. It's one of the most important issues, but it occurs to me that there are opportunities scheduled already coming up where this issue can be discussed in the very near future.

I don't think that the SO 30 – no one is saying that the issue isn't severely important. It is, but I believe this House will be discussing this issue in the near future, whether we go ahead with the Standing Order 30 or not. Consequently, the request for leave is not in order, and the question will not be put.

The hon. Opposition House Leader.

#### Point of Clarification

**Ms Gray:** Only under 13(2), Mr. Speaker. Specifically looking at the past precedent when Standing Order 30 debates have been granted by the Speaker, because of the crisis of health care, knowing that emergency room doctors have asked for a state of emergency and the other urgent items that the member has spoken to, the situation is in crisis, and there is no time for us to have a debate with the government although the minister did enter into debate in his arguments. We would love to hear more. Under 13(2) I am surprised by your ruling based on all the previous health emergency debates that have happened in this place. That was one of the reasons why we brought it forward as we did.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Yeah. That's a great question. I would say to you that if this question – the House wasn't sitting in late December or early January. If it was, then probably this would have been granted. But the fact is that, as the minister pointed out, there's already action being actively taken, as is illustrated by the reduction in wait times and one thing and another. So the fact that there's already action and the fact that there will be other opportunities coming up in the near future – I think your question is fair, but the leave will not be granted today for the reasons that I've tried to explain.

### Orders of the Day

#### Government Motions

##### Committee Membership Changes

27. Mr. Schow moved:
- Be it resolved that the membership of the Assembly's committees be replaced as follows:
- (a) on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices that Mr. Wright replace Ms de Jonge as deputy chair, that Mr. Wright replace Ms de Jonge, and that Mrs. Sawyer replace Ms Lovely;
  - (b) on the Standing Committee on Private Bills that Ms Lovely replace Mrs. Sawyer;
  - (c) on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts that Mr. Cyr replace Mr. Rowswell; and
  - (d) on the Standing Committee on Members' Services that Mr. Rowswell replace Mr. Wright.

**The Speaker:** This is a debatable motion. Does anybody care to speak to it? The hon. Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Official Opposition has no concerns with Government Motion 27. I have no further comments to add.

[Government Motion 27 carried]

### Amendments to Standing Orders

28. Mr. Schow moved:

A. Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, effective October 30, 2025, be amended as follows:

(a) Standing Order 3(1) is amended by striking out “Thursday: 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.” and substituting “Thursday: 10:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.”;

(b) Standing Order 4 is amended as follows:

(i) in suborder (1)(b) by striking out “or Thursday”;

(ii) in suborder (1.1) by adding “Except on Thursday,” before “The Assembly shall not meet”;

(iii) in suborder (2) by striking out “4:30 p.m. on Thursday” and substituting “2:30 p.m. on Thursday”;

(iv) by striking out suborder (2.1) and substituting the following:

(2.1) When there is a morning sitting on Tuesday or Wednesday, at noon the Speaker adjourns the Assembly until 1:30 p.m.

(c) Standing Order 7 is amended

(i) by striking out suborders (1) to (1.2) and substituting the following:

Daily routine

7(1) The daily routine business in the Assembly shall commence at 1:30 p.m., except on Thursday, when the daily routine business shall commence at 10:00 a.m.

(1.1) The daily routine is as follows:

O Canada (First sitting day of each week)

Indigenous Acknowledgement (First sitting day of each week)

Royal Anthem (Thursday)

Introduction of Visitors

Introduction of Guests

Ministerial Statements

Oral Question Period

Members’ Statements

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Presenting Petitions

Notices of Motions

Introduction of Bills

Tabling Returns and Reports

Tablings to the Clerk

Deferred Divisions (Thursday)

(1.2) The Assembly shall proceed to Oral Question Period immediately, and any outstanding matters taken up prior to

the calling of Orders of the Day, at the earliest of the following:

(a) on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 1:50 p.m.;

(b) on Thursday, 10:20 a.m.;

(c) at the time all other items in the daily routine are concluded.

(ii) by striking out suborders (7) and (8) and substituting the following:

(6) Oral Question Period shall not exceed 50 minutes.

(7) The items in the daily routine, except in respect of Deferred Divisions, are deemed to be concluded as follows:

(a) on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, at 3:00 p.m.;

(b) on Thursday, at 11:30 a.m.

(8) Unless notice is provided under suborder (9), the Speaker shall notify the Assembly when the items in the daily routine have been concluded under suborder (7).

(9) The Government House Leader, or a member of the Executive Council or the Deputy Government House Leader on the Government House Leader’s behalf, may provide notice to the Assembly that the daily routine will continue beyond the applicable time set out in suborder (7) if notice is provided on that day

(a) on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, before 3:00 p.m., or

(b) on Thursday, before 11:30 a.m.

(d) Standing Order 8 is amended

(i) in suborder (1) by striking out “Written Questions” and “Motions for Returns”,

(ii) in suborder (2) by striking out “On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons” and substituting “On Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons, and on Thursday”, and

(iii) in suborder (2.1) by striking out “afternoon”;

(e) Standing Order 15(2) is struck out and the following is substituted:

(2) A Member wishing to raise a question of privilege shall give written notice containing a brief statement of the question to the Speaker and, if practicable, to each person whose conduct may be called into question, as follows:

(a) on a day other than Thursday, at least 2 hours before the opening of the afternoon sitting;

(b) on Thursday, at least one and a half hours before the opening of the sitting.

(2.1) Before Orders of the Day are called, the Member shall call attention to the alleged breach of privilege for which notice has been provided in accordance with suborder (2) and

- give a brief statement of the nature of the matter addressed in the complaint.
- (f) Standing Order 18(1) is amended by striking out clause (1);
- (g) Standing Order 21 is struck out and the following is substituted:  
 Programming motion  
 21(1) For the purpose of this Standing Order, “stage” includes consideration of a Bill  
 (a) at second reading,  
 (b) in Committee of the Whole, and  
 (c) at third reading.  
 (2) Subject to suborders (3) and (4), a member of the Executive Council may, on at least one day’s notice, propose a programming motion that allots a specified number of hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings on a Government motion or Government Bill.  
 (3) A programming motion with respect to a Government motion may only be moved if  
 (a) the Government motion has already been debated in the Assembly, and  
 (b) the amount of time allotted for debate is not less than one hour.  
 (4) A programming motion with respect to a Government Bill may only be moved if  
 (a) the second reading of the Government Bill has been completed, or at least 2 hours of debate have taken place on second reading consideration of that Bill during the current session, and  
 (b) the amount of time allotted for debate at each stage is not less than one hour.  
 (5) Except as provided in suborder (7), a programming motion made under suborder (2) is not subject to debate or amendment.  
 (6) For greater certainty, a programming motion  
 (a) may relate to more than one item of business standing on the Order Paper, and  
 (b) may allocate time for multiple stages of a Government Bill.  
 (7) Debate on a programming motion shall not exceed 1 hour, and no Member may speak for more than 5 minutes.  
 (8) When a time allotted for consideration under the programming motion expires, the Speaker or Chair shall immediately put every question necessary to dispose of that item of business without further debate or amendment.
- (h) Standing Order 29(3) is amended by striking out “; written questions, motions for returns”;
- (i) Standing Order 30 is amended  
 (i) by striking out suborder (1) and substituting the following:  
 Urgent public importance  
 30(1) Subject to suborder (1.1), after the daily routine and before the Orders of the Day, any Member may request leave to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance when written notice has been given to the Speaker at least 2 hours prior to the afternoon sitting of the Assembly, except on Thursday, when written notice must be given at least one and a half hours prior to the sitting of the Assembly.
- (ii) by adding the following after suborder (1):  
 (1.1) Only one request under suborder (1) may be made in a sitting day by each of the following:  
 (a) up to one member of the Government caucus;  
 (b) up to one member of the Official Opposition caucus;  
 (c) up to one member of each other party or group in opposition;  
 (d) each Independent Member.
- (iii) by striking out suborder (4) and substituting the following:  
 (4) If any Member objects to the question “shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed?”, the Speaker shall request those Members who support the motion to rise in their places and, if at least 15 Members support the request, the debate proceeds and the Speaker shall call on the Member who requested leave.
- (j) Standing Order 32 is amended as follows:  
 (i) in suborder (2)  
 (a) by striking out “When a division is called” and substituting “Subject to suborders (3) and (3.1), when a division is called”, and  
 (b) by striking out “15-minute interval” and substituting “10-minute interval”;  
 (ii) in suborder (3) by striking out “one minute” and substituting “3 minutes”;  
 (iii) by adding the following after suborder (3):  
 (3.1) If a division is called on a vote on a Government motion or during any stage of consideration of a Government Bill in respect of which a resolution has been passed under Standing Order 21, the interval between division bells on all divisions required to dispose of that matter shall be 3 minutes, including any vote required at the expiry of the time allotted for the item of business or any vote on concurrence in a report from the Committee of the Whole.
- (k) Standing Order 32.1(3) is struck out and the following is substituted:  
 (3) If a division is deferred, the Clerk shall conduct the division when “Deferred Divisions” is called during the daily routine on the next Thursday that follows the day on which notice is provided.
- (l) Standing Order 34 is struck out and the following is substituted:  
 Written Questions  
 34(1) Subject to suborder (2), a Member may place a written question on the Order Paper

- asking for information from members of the Executive Council relating to public affairs.
- (2) A Member may not have more than 3 written questions on the Order Paper at any one time.
- (3) A written question is not debatable.
- (4) Written questions shall stand and retain their places on the Order Paper, except those that are due under suborder (5).
- (5) A member of the Executive Council shall provide a response to a written question in accordance with suborder (6) within 15 sitting days after the day the written question first appears on the Order Paper.
- (6) When a written question becomes due under suborder (5), the Government House Leader shall give notice to the Assembly that
- (a) the Government will provide a written response to the whole or to part of the question,
  - (b) the Government will provide a written response to the whole or to part of the question in the form of a return,
  - (c) no response will be provided, or
  - (d) no response will be provided at this time.
- (7) If the Government House Leader states that a written response will be provided under suborder (6)(a) or (b), that statement is deemed to be an order of the Assembly, and the response shall be tabled by a member of the Executive Council within 30 sitting days after the day on which the statement is made.
- (8) If the Government House Leader states under suborder (6)(c) that no response will be provided, the written question shall be removed from the Order Paper.
- (9) If the Government House Leader states under suborder (6)(d) that no response will be provided at this time, the written question shall remain on the Order Paper and shall become due again for a response under suborder (6) 20 sitting days after the day on which the statement is made.
- (10) A Member may withdraw the Member's own written question at any time by providing written notice to the Clerk.
- (11) The Clerk shall record in the Votes and Proceedings the disposition of a written question under suborders (6) to (10).
- (m) Standing Order 36 is struck out.
- (n) Standing Order 37(2)(a) is struck out and the following is substituted:
- (a) responses to written questions, including a response in the form of a return, ordered by the Assembly for distribution to the Member who asked the question, and
- (o) Standing Order 38(1) is struck out and the following is substituted:
- Tablings to the Clerk
- 38(1) Documents may be tabled by providing the required number of copies to the Clerk
- (a) on any day the Assembly sits other than Thursday, by 11:00 a.m., or
  - (b) on Thursday, by 8:30 a.m.
- (p) Standing Order 42 is amended
- (i) in suborder (1.1) by striking out "A Member may make a request" and substituting "Subject to suborder (3), a Member may make a request", and
  - (ii) in suborder (1.2) by striking out "Immediately after a request is made under suborder (1.1)" and substituting "Immediately after a request is made by a Member", and
  - (iii) by adding the following after suborder (2):
    - (3) Only one request under suborder (1) may be made in a sitting day by each of the following:
      - (a) up to one member of the Government caucus;
      - (b) up to one member of the Official Opposition caucus;
      - (c) up to one member of each other party or group in opposition;
      - (d) each Independent Member.
- (q) Standing Order 45 is struck out and the following is substituted:
- Motions and orders
- 45(1) A motion that is defeated shall be removed from the Order Paper.
- (2) A motion may, by order made without debate, be allowed to stand and retain its place on the Order Paper.
- (3) A motion that is not dealt with or ordered to stand shall retain its place on the Order Paper.
- (4) A motion other than a Government motion or public Bill and order other than a Government Bill and order not proceeded with when called shall be dropped and placed on the Order Paper for the next sitting day after those items of the same class at a similar stage, unless the Assembly, by order without debate, allows it to stand and retain its place on the Order Paper.
- (r) Standing Order 50 is amended
- (a) in suborder (1) by striking out "returns or papers, but all papers and returns ordered" and substituting "responses or returns in response to written questions, but all responses or returns", and
  - (b) in suborder (2) by striking out "for returns or papers" and substituting "responses or returns in response to written questions";
- (s) Standing Order 52.01(1) is amended by striking out clauses (a) to (c) and substituting the following:
- (a) the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future is mandated to consider areas related to Advanced Education; Agriculture and Irrigation; Arts, Culture and Status of Women; Infrastructure; Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration; Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction; Technology and Innovation; Tourism and Sport;
  - (b) the Standing Committee on Families and Communities is mandated to consider areas related to Assisted Living and Social Services; Children and Family Services; Education and

Childcare; Hospital and Surgical Health Services; Justice; Mental Health and Addiction; Primary and Preventative Health Services; Public Safety and Emergency Services;

(c) the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship is mandated to consider areas related to Affordability and Utilities; Energy and Minerals; Environment and Protected Areas; Forestry and Parks; Indigenous Relations; Municipal Affairs; Transportation and Economic Corridors; Treasury Board and Finance.

- (t) Standing Order 59.01(5)(a)(iv) is struck out;
- (u) Standing Order 64(1)(b) is amended by striking out “4:30 p.m. on Thursday” and substituting “2:30 p.m. on Thursday”.

B. Be it further resolved that each Written Question and Motion for Return standing on the Order Paper on the day this provision comes into force

- (a) shall continue to stand and be considered in accordance with the Standing Orders as they read immediately before this provision comes into force, except as set out in clause (b), and
- (b) shall be due for consideration under Standing Order 34 120 sitting days after the day this provision comes into force.

C. Be it further resolved that this motion come into force as follows:

- (a) in paragraph A, clauses (d)(i), (f), (g), (h), (j), (l), (m), (n), (q), (r) and (s), and paragraph B, on passage;
- (b) in paragraph A, clauses (a), (b), (c), (d)(ii) and (iii), (e), (i), (k), (o), (p), (t) and (u), on March 16, 2026.

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to move Government Motion 28 on the Order Paper. It is a lengthy motion, and I will outline what it intends to do without having to read it all verbatim if that pleases the chair.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Go ahead.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you. Just for clarification’s sake, Mr. Speaker, you don’t need me to read the entire motion; I can just debate the motion? Members have the opportunity of the Order Paper to read it. It is a lengthy motion.

3:10

**The Speaker:** You need to read it out. Sorry, Government House Leader.

**Mr. Schow:** Oh, heavens.

**The Speaker:** If it’s important enough to do, it’s important enough to say.

**Mr. Schow:** Well said, Mr. Speaker. I could not have said it better myself.

Okay. This is going to take a minute. How long do I have, Mr. Speaker?

**The Speaker:** Until you finish reading the motion.

**Mr. Schow:** Gotcha. Okay.  
Buckle up, everybody.

**Ms Gray:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** Yes.

**Ms Gray:** You know what, Mr. Speaker? I withdraw my point of order, but while I have the floor, may I seek unanimous consent to not have the Government House Leader read the entire changes? I’m worried he’s going to run out of time to motivate. May I make that motion?

[Unanimous consent granted]

**The Speaker:** You’re off the hook.

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, nobody has a monopoly on good ideas, and I’ve got to tell you: full credit to the Opposition House Leader. Much appreciated. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, as well. What I would say is that you have relieved me. That is a lot to read, but the only person who had it worse than me was the one who had to write it all.

Anyways, let’s move on. How much time do I have left, Mr. Speaker?

**The Speaker:** Ten minutes.

**Mr. Schow:** Ten minutes. All right. Let’s rock and roll.

Mr. Speaker, this is a lengthy motion, as I mentioned, as I was beginning to read, and I will outline what it intends to do without reading it any more; rather, get to the meat and potatoes of this motion. It is of utmost importance that members in the Assembly have ample opportunity to engage in debate on legislation and represent their constituents. It’s what we do, and the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly outline the rules that surround the debate and the various mechanisms through which members are enabled to raise their constituents’ concerns. For this reason it is important to maintain a slate of rules that provide direction without being too prescriptive. That is what this motion seeks to do. While the motion itself deals with amendments in numerical order, I will outline these amendments by grouping them into six main changes.

3:20

First, a housekeeping amendment is made to the titles of ministries in Standing Order 52.01(1) as well as their LPC assignments.

Second, amendments are made to standing orders 30 and 42 to limit motions under this standing order to one per recognized caucus or independent member per day. These motions are intended to create the opportunity for emergency debate. Unfortunately, we have seen them being misused as a delay tactic with as many as 30 of these motions being proposed in a single day. Mr. Speaker, there are lots of important things happening in this province on a daily basis. I can’t imagine that there are 30 emergencies, but here we are. While we want to ensure the opportunity for debating pressing issues, we want to ensure that motives behind those motions are genuine so that actual emergencies can be debated without this motion being used as a method to delay opportunities for truly constructive debate.

Third, amendments are made on Thursday’s sitting times. The Assembly will meet at 10 a.m. until 2:30 p.m.; Oral Question Period will occur from 10:20 a.m. to 11:10 a.m.; Orders of the Day will begin at 11:30 a.m. These changes would add an additional one and a half hours of debate each Thursday while also allowing MLAs to return to their constituencies sooner each week, getting us home safer and to our families, significant others, constituents, friends, and all those who welcome us. Both facets improve the quintessential aspects of an MLA’s work.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Fourth, amendments are made to the division bell process. The interval of standing division bells is decreased to 10 minutes while the interval of the short bell is increased to three minutes. Additionally, when a division bell is called or at the expiry of a consideration of a program stage or motion – I'll touch on that program motion in a moment – it is automatically a shortened division. We have seen divisions take up incredible amounts of time, Mr. Speaker, with MLAs simply waiting to vote rather than discussing the issues at hand. By shortening the standard division, we hope to create more valuable debate time. However, the current short division interval has occasionally caused issue, which is why the amendment would increase it to three minutes.

Fifth, amendments are made to Written Questions and Motions for Returns in the process. As it stands the process is an intricate one, and we hope to simplify and expedite the process while still providing the opportunity for MLAs to receive written answers to written questions. Members may have up to three written questions on the Order Paper at any one time. Once they have appeared on the Order Paper, they will be dealt with within 15 sitting days.

To, quote, deal with a written question, the Government House Leader, myself, will rise during Notices of Motions and indicate that one of the following applies. Either the government will provide a written response to the whole or to part of the question, or the government will provide a written response to the whole or part of the question in the form of a return. No response will be provided or no response will be provided at this time. Responses must be provided within 30 sitting days after it is indicated that a response will in fact be provided. If it is indicated that a response will not be provided at the current time, the written question will be due again within 20 sitting days, Mr. Speaker.

Members are welcome to remove their written questions from the Order Paper any time should they want to replace them with new ones. This amendment process will allow expedited proceedings on written questions, allowing more to be dealt with than under the current system. By proceeding more quickly through the process, the opportunity to debate private members' bills is increased while still ensuring that members are able to take advantage of written questions. Written questions currently on the Order Paper will be dealt with under the current process in order to respect the manner in which they are opposed. However, their deadline that will be dealt with is increased to 120 days.

Sixth and finally, amendments are made under Standing Order 21, removing the time allocation process and substituting a programming motion process. A programming motion may be proposed to limit consideration of multiple bill stages or government motions at a time, not less than one hour, similar to time allocation motions that we currently have. However, a program motion requires a bill to have received two hours of consideration in second reading or to have passed the second reading before it may be programmed. When proposed, a program motion is debated for up to one hour before a vote is called.

In essence, this process allows for much more debate than the current time allocation process should it be used. The minimum amount of consideration a bill can receive in the time allocation process is a little over three hours if second reading, Committee of the Whole, and third reading are all time allocated. Under the program motion process, that would be increased to five hours. Additionally, the motions themselves are considered for a whole 50 minutes longer than time allocation motions. In total, the process would increase debate from a little over three hours to almost six hours, a significant increase in debate, Mr. Speaker.

That, I believe, is what summarizes these changes, a significant increase of debate. Most of these changes directly or indirectly allow for a significant increase in debate time in the House, which is absolutely vital to our duties of representing our constituents. I hope that the whole House sees the rationale behind these amendments and could support the notion of increasing the amount of debate in this House. I encourage all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of these standing order changes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

Are there any others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Leader of His Majesty's Official Opposition.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in opposition to this motion for a number of reasons. You know, I'm still new here. This is only my second session. I have a real respect for the history of this place and for how this place works. I also have an understanding that you don't always have to be a slave to history; you can look at how to do things better, how to do things smarter, but we should be doing so in the spirit of making democracy work better, not making democracy work worse.

My concern with this, Mr. Speaker – and I'll leave it to my House leader to go into some of the details on some of our concerns with these changes. My biggest concern is that this all feels so reactive. It feels like a reaction directly to our fall session, to things that the government didn't like in the fall session, but I'll remind you that our fall session was also extraordinary. We had four uses – the first four pre-emptive uses in Alberta history – of the notwithstanding clause, and this opposition felt the need to stand up and talk about why that was wrong. For us now to have those opportunities taken away is a direct attack on democracy and how it works.

Now, let's remember that when the UCP were first elected in 2019, one of the first things the Premier at the time did was hand out earplugs to his front bench so that they didn't have to listen to the opposition. It was a shocking thing to do, and it showed an incredible disrespect for democracy. I know I talk a lot, Mr. Speaker. I know I have taken my full time allocation, and I believe in the fall I may have made the longest speech in the Legislature in decades, but it's part of democracy. We were all elected to speak for and represent our constituents.

The history of this place has been that standing order changes are made by consensus, not by majority. Our side had very little opportunity to talk about these changes, to discuss how we could make them work better, to discuss our common interests in helping Albertans see important issues being debated in their House and their Chamber every single day. Because of that, we cannot help but understand that this is a government that wants to ram through more, that wants to ram through legislation without debate, without conversation in the House. Certainly, they have a majority. They're going to win every vote. But certainly also the parliamentary system requires an opportunity for the opposition to oppose, and these changes, I'm sorry to say, take away much of that.

Now, we're going to be reasonable here. There are certainly things we can discuss. There are certainly things we can negotiate. In fact, I'll suggest to the House leader that the changes to Thursdays make a lot of sense, but they're going to actually make it very difficult for people who follow question period. A simple suggestion that we would have is just switch the order of the day on Thursday, so that question period happens at the end instead of at the beginning. These are the kinds of things that we're absolutely willing to have conversations with this government on, but we require a willing dance partner, Mr. Speaker. We require the government to really show in good faith that they're doing this to

make the business of the people better, not just to shut up their opponents and not just to erode democracy.

Should we get those assurances, should we get the willingness to compromise with my House leader, we'll certainly be more willing to not stand in opposition. But as it stands right now, this feels like something that is designed to end debate in the House, and it's a further erosion of democracy, as we've seen so many times under this government. So I beg to oppose.

3:30

**The Acting Speaker:** Any others wishing to speak? I'll recognize the Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much. I rise, as my leader did, in opposition to Government Motion 28 and these standing order changes. Mr. Speaker, I had hoped that on our first day back in the Alberta Legislature we would, as a legislative body with 87 elected MLAs, be focused on some of the issues that are the most important to Albertans, specifically health care given the crisis in our health care system and the emergency debate proposal that we put forward. Instead, the government argued strenuously that the best thing that this Chamber could do is to return to the business of the day and not have an emergency debate. The minister for hospitals suggested that treating health care as that emergency or urgent issue was unnecessary today because of the important business of the day.

So here we are, and our business of the day is changing the standing orders to limit the Official Opposition's ability to engage in debate as well as independent members, members of the third party, and to do so in a way that is counter to many parliamentary best practices and traditions, done by the majority government imposing its will rather than coming forward with a consensus package of changes that all members can agree to.

Now, throughout the history of our Legislature, other Legislatures as well, the House of Commons, and so on, the change mechanism for standing orders is always best done when it is unanimous or when there is a consensus agreement, when the government brings forward the change options and we have an opportunity to weigh in and to talk about the pros and cons. Unfortunately, given that this is something that my caucus and I oppose, we do not have the consensus necessary to move forward at this time, Mr. Speaker.

It's very, very frustrating, because democracy is more than elections and democracy is more than a referendum. For Alberta to truly remain strong and free, this place needs to tend towards real, urgent debate, like the one that was unfortunately not had here earlier on health care. The members here must be able to speak to all bills brought before us without cumbersome restrictions on debate time.

Now, interestingly, Mr. Speaker, time allocation as a concept was not something brought into original standing orders through consensus. That was a majority government giving themselves a power to be able to restrict and limit debate. But once that happened here in the Alberta Legislature, over the last many, many years, we have seen this government use time allocation more than any other government. In fact, more than 50 per cent of the time that it's been used in the history of our Legislature has been by this government.

I see the change to the programming motion as a trend in that direction. I believe strongly that for the Alberta Legislature to function, we need to be able to debate the real issues. I don't think that Albertans believe that this government, having scheduled itself for 54 days of business in the legislative sitting in 2026, needs to further restrict the time that we spend in this place. Simply put, the government doesn't do the work that the people want. And when

the government does come here to pass a massive deficit budget loaded with bad contracts for political insiders and friends or to pass flawed legislation, we know they don't want to hear the opposition to it. These changes send a clear message to Albertans that the UCP doesn't want to hear from you. It's the standing order equivalent to earplugs, which the UCP used early after coming into power. It's a thin-skinned government that likes to throw assorted groups under the bus but can't be told that they are causing the problems within our province.

Within these changes there are a number of things. I will talk about some of the most egregious because we have limited time for each speaker, but specifically on Written Questions and Motions for Returns I'm extremely concerned that the government is taking one of the few private members' mechanisms that we have and essentially allowing there to be no debate. Currently in the system if a written question or a motion for return is rejected, there's an opportunity to debate in this place, and that appears to be changing in the standing order changes that we are seeing going forward. That's extremely concerning.

The programming motion allowing the government to essentially time allocate multiple bills at once: I'm concerned about how that could be used. Now, I would note, Mr. Speaker, that the programming motion is borrowed from other Legislatures and Parliaments. It will be up to this UCP government to show how they choose to use that, how much time for debate they are prepared to give to the Official Opposition, the largest Official Opposition in Alberta's history. And you might think, after a general election and the voters of Alberta sending a clear signal that a strong opposition to this government is necessary, that 38 of the seats would lead to more debate, more democracy, more engagement, and instead we have seen the opposite. I think it's very, very telling.

The limits on emergency debates. Limiting to one per caucus or independent member each day is, honestly, not going to be a huge impact to the Official Opposition. The Government House Leader referred to multiple emergency debates being issued on a single day. It was an unprecedented day, Mr. Speaker, the day that Bill 2 was introduced. The notwithstanding clause applied to teachers to restrict their right to collectively bargain. When unprecedented things are being done by the government, an unprecedented reaction from the Official Opposition is exactly what you can expect. In this case the government, on the day that that happened, used a standing order that I understand we do not have a record of being used in *Hansard* any time before and was used to circumvent the Official Opposition's attempt to bring forward an emergency debate. I said that it was an interesting change that they are making to the standing orders because I know that the Official Opposition brought forward 30 emergency debates – the Government House Leader knew that as well – in part of our effort to oppose Bill 2. Albertans never saw that because they circumvented it anyway. So to change the standing orders for that purpose is surprising.

I agree with my leader that the change on Thursdays – my main concern is that it may be disenfranchising to Albertans who tune in to watch question period and realize that it's already happened earlier in the day. I think keeping question period at the same time on the four sitting days makes democracy more accessible and should be something that should be considered as part of this package of standing order changes.

We are prepared to show up and to debate any time, any day, but unfortunately working with a government that is not collaborative, a government that has consistently used time allocation to ram through controversial bills that curtail Albertans' constitutional and Charter rights more than any other government and now gives us standing order changes that give themselves, essentially, a hyped up version of time allocation – and to be really clear, Mr. Speaker,

this government put up their minister of hospitals to say that we should not have an emergency debate on health care, something that is at crisis levels and something I hear from constituents about consistently. That we could not set aside the business of the day to have that debate because of these pressing issues, and then they bring forward changes to the standing orders and how the functioning of this place works, is deeply disappointing to me but also emblematic of this government. I am not shocked. My House team, my caucus knows that we talked about – even though, since we last sat, all of the things that have happened in health care and even though the government likes to say they have much to say about health care and positive things, they won't engage in a debate with us in this place.

3:40

So I am definitely opposed to the changes that are put forth in Government Motion 28. I think these wide-reaching changes to the standing orders by a majority government, that fundamentally change the amount of time we will have on certain things, that take away private members' power through Written Questions and Motions for Returns, are a really unfortunate way for us to start in the spring sitting. I will be voting against Government Motion 28 and the changes to the standing orders that have been put forward this way. I think that it's making the job of the Official Opposition harder as we move forward, and I certainly think that instead of fixing the crisis that they've created in health care, the crisis in affordability that many Albertans are challenged with, the UCP want to change the rules of our Legislature to make sure that they can fast-track their agenda, that doesn't match what Albertans need and are looking for.

Those are my comments on Government Motion 28. I will be opposing. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Ms Ganley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods has laid out our position, I think, on this very well, but I did want to touch on just a few pieces of the standing order changes. I think, for me, probably the biggest part of this is the change with respect to the programming motion, that allows time allocation on multiple bills simultaneously. This government loves to yell: oh, well, other governments have used time allocation. Yes, but, like, not ever on this scale. It's literally orders of magnitude more, in terms of its use by this government to limit debate, than any previous government in history, Conservative, NDP, or otherwise. So that is a really, really big deal.

This government began the last session by putting through an act in one day. It was unprecedented. It has never happened before. They used a series of procedural motions that have not been used in this place before, and they used them because they are not proud of their work. They are embarrassed by their actions, and they should be. They forced that through in one day, and now they're taking steps to limit how much we could even object to that. For five minutes, Mr. Speaker – five minutes – we got to argue against time allocation in each one of those stages. That is, I don't think, a great, onerous requirement on the government, to have to listen for five minutes to why it is that they're cutting off.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to make it clear here that it's not about us; it's about our constituents. They write into us. They have opinions. They deserve time to read a bill, have an opinion about it, write to their MLA, and have their concerns voiced in this place. That is the point of representative democracy, and that is exactly what this government is trying to circumvent.

Mr. Speaker, they say they are bringing these in to make things more orderly because we had to sit for so long last time. It was six weeks. I mean, really, apparently this government considers doing their jobs a deep inconvenience to their lives. Six weeks: it's nothing. And they brought in a bill because, again, they hadn't done their jobs. They hadn't gotten it drafted. They introduced it the Thursday before that last week, so that bill was before the House for three days. That's how long we got to debate it. Not even. Two and a half days, basically. And that was a bill that slanted the playing field in favour of a separatist referendum that took rights away from other Albertans trying to have their referendum heard, that gave the Minister of Justice immunity from behaving unethically, and much, much more.

I don't want to belabour this point, but, Mr. Speaker, this is a government that fundamentally are trying to hide their actions from the public because they are embarrassed of their behaviour, as well they should be, and they want to limit debate. They want to have absolute power. They don't want to have to hear from the legislative branch. They don't want to have to hear from the judicial branch. They feel that they should get to rule as queens, and that is totally inappropriate. Checks and balances exist in our system for a reason.

The written questions limits one of the few tools available to the opposition to have actual information. Why? This government doesn't want the public to have information because a public that is educated and informed on their actions will not support them, so they feel the need to cut that off.

The changes to question period timing, Mr. Speaker – viewing of the Legislature had declined in Alberta over time until the last session, when more people watched the Legislature than ever have in history because the public is interested. They are interested because they know that what this government is doing – attacking the legislative branch, attacking the judicial branch, trying to centralize all of the power in the hands of one woman – is absolutely egregious, and that is why they are watching. They know that the trampling of rights is egregious, so they watched because they care about teachers and they wanted to stand up for them. So the government will move the timing of question period to make it harder for them.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I mean, these changes have multiple problems that are very indicative of a government embarrassed of its work. But the fact that we are debating these standing order changes, which is the most procedural thing one could possibly imagine, the most inside baseball thing, happens as a result of this government rejecting the opportunity for us to debate health care, a health care system that is in crisis – the minister's response was absurd. Absurd. No one who lives in this province could possibly believe that health care has gotten better under the UCP. Literally no one who lives here thinks that that is a thing, but he can just stand up and fly in the face of the public because, apparently, they aren't reading the e-mails from their constituents, like we do, that say how they have been impacted, how they have been hurt, the wait times they are experiencing, or they are not listening to emergency room physicians talking about what five or six preventable deaths – Mr. Speaker, those are lives that were ended, and this government thinks that it is more important for them to trample democracy, to take power away from the legislative branch, away from the judicial branch to centralize it so they can privilege their friends and help the separatists than it is to talk about that, which is top of mind for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, that is the reason I oppose this most, because this government does not care what the people of this province think. It does not care about their experience or making their lives better. All they care about is centralizing power in their own hands, and it is shameful.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for Edmonton-North West.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, my colleagues – our leader, our House leader, and whip – have put up some very strong arguments as to why we have chosen to oppose Government Motion 28. I came back to this legislative session, after many months being off, excited to debate the issues of the day like I never really have before. I've been travelling around the province extensively, and on every corner of this province there is a health care crisis in the province of Alberta. People are not being able to access the care that they need on an emergency level or for cancer or for heart attacks. The gentleman that died in the Grey Nuns after eight hours – there were six more of those same cases in the subsequent weeks here in the province. And we know that in order to make a coherent plan towards this, we need to come back to this Legislature and debate this very issue here today. Instead, what we have before us is, number one, for this emergency debate to be defeated and then spend the afternoon talking about changes to the standing orders.

Well, I cannot, Mr. Speaker, think of a bigger waste of time considering the gravity of the situation that Albertans are dealing with every single day. People will go to an emergency room – you don't know what you've got till it's gone. People will go to the emergency room in a smaller town somewhere with a heart attack, someone presenting with asthma or something, and lo and behold, not just the emergency department is shut down, but the whole hospital is shut down. People are just starting to see the gravity and the breadth of the situation, and it stinks, quite frankly.

3:50

Any changes to the standing orders will do nothing to address those issues that all of us need to do right now. That's our responsibility, that's why we've been called into this Legislature and elected, and that's why people will be elected out of office, too. This government should listen to the practical ways by which we can make this Chamber and the debate in this Chamber function better, not just for the government but for the opposition as well because I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that governments will become opposition, and this government will be the opposition after the next election. So we're doing them a favour. You know, we can help you to make the standing orders work in a useful way, in a practical way so that we can have timely, urgent, and thorough debates on the issues that matter most to Albertans.

I was looking at a couple of these. I'm not going to go on. We've had lots of good discussions about this, but there are a couple of pieces in here, practical ideas that work both for the government and for the opposition, whatever you happen to be at that point in time, the first one being the amount of time that you need once a standing vote is called in this House and how much time we have in between. We can have 15 minutes, and then we have the one-minute bells. That usually adds up to more time because of the procedures that happen in between.

Now, I've been around long enough. I can remember when we had this bell in this Chamber and then we had the Annex. When they moved MLAs' offices from the Annex – the Annex doesn't exist anymore, right? – we moved further away and added another five minutes so that people could get into the Chamber to vote. That was agreed to unanimously by consensus and by practical thought by every single MLA in the Chamber. It made sense. It's a bit longer. Make the time longer. People can get to the Legislature to do their job to vote. So I would suggest, again, that the changes to the 10 minutes or so forth impedes the ability of an MLA to do their job. I'm not going to run, you know, unless I can wear sneakers in here. I don't think the Speaker would let me do that. On a very practical level we must not impede the ability of MLAs to be able

to do their job by not being able to get into the Chamber because there's not enough time, number one.

The second one is something that is just plain as the nose on our face and as plain as the schedule 48 hours from now, which is that we do different things in this Chamber at different times. If we were starting at 10:30, let's say, on Thursdays – what's happening this Thursday? It seems to me that we have the budget. We have the budget indeed. So we have to make sure that we are accommodating for special circumstances like the budget or whatever it is, throne speech or whatever, so that we're not having a time schedule that doesn't fit that thing. You can do it, but it's not easy. If you change it, you'd have to go through, you know, quite an extensive procedure to make that change in order to allow for another change of the time besides what you're asking for us to do here today.

Those are just two little details that I wanted to bring forward. The larger issue has much more gravity, Mr. Speaker, and that is that we are not dealing with the issues of the day that Albertans need right now. You walk out of here and you get sick: good luck. There are many hospitals in Edmonton. Not all of the procedures that you may need are in the hospital that you end up going to because of the shortage of funding, because of the shortage of professionals, because of this UCP government driving professionals out of the profession. People throw up their hands and they quit or they move somewhere else or they take another job. I have many health care professionals in my family. I know exactly what's going on. We need to deal with that now. There's no question. It's a question of health. It's a question of security and safety and peace of mind. It plays into the economy because if people get sick and they can't get better, then that affects everything, including the economy.

Mr. Speaker, we can do better. We can do much better. Certainly, we are here to help, and we're here to help regardless. We're in the opposition now; maybe we'll be in the government later. We want to make sure that this place runs the way it should.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Dr. Metz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against the proposed changes in the standing orders. I specifically will speak to removing the ability to debate written questions. Written questions are an opportunity for MLAs to ask the government for information that is important to their constituents; indeed, questions that are important to all Albertans. Often written questions are a bit complex, and they're not necessarily things that we would expect a minister to be able to pull up and give us precise answers to. They often need data associated with them. The government needs to get background information from their ministries to answer a lot of these questions. They're important questions. They're important things that Albertans need to know.

At this time the government can choose not to answer a written question, but then they have to be willing to debate the question openly in the Legislature. This standing order change will allow them to simply decline to answer and then that's the end of it. Albertans get no answers. Of course, we currently don't really get answers anyway a lot of the time, but at least we can hear what the government has to say about this. They can make their excuses.

Well, I'm not surprised by this change in the standing orders. This government has followed a long history of removing transparency. They removed the ability of the chief medical officer of health to report to the public. The government removed the requirement of the Health Quality Council of Alberta to report publicly. Instead, this world-renowned agency now is only allowed to report to cabinet, and their annual reports disappear. This

standing order change is totally consistent with hiding information. Now, what information do you hide? You hide things when you're failing. If you're successful, you're not going to hide that. It would be great to have dashboards showing wait times going down, showing more people getting access to family doctors, but if that is not the direction you're going, then you want to hide it, and taking away the ability to even debate written questions is just one more step down this pathway.

This government has removed most reporting dashboards in the health system from not only the view of the public but also health care workers and even leaders in the health system that used to be able to watch progress of things. Now they have to ask for that data to be sent to them. Removing dashboards takes away the opportunity to show progress, just like being able to answer written questions takes away the opportunity to show successes and failures and find out where we're going. I imagine a written question that looks positive for the government may get answered, but if there's anything to hide, we're not going to get an answer and we have no opportunity to debate it.

Clearly, things are going in the wrong direction. Every Albertan knows that. People can see that. We don't even need dashboards because they're going so badly. But we keep hearing promises, and it would be nice to see that there is some uptick that some things are getting better. Removing the requirement to answer or debate written questions is just another step towards hiding information and a step against democracy. It's a step towards secrecy.

4:00

Of course, this government has found many other ways to hide information. Another one is to change the metrics. If we ask a written question, we could be very specific about the definition of a specific metric because they're changing. Indeed, some of our questions might be to help us understand some of the changes.

I'll give an example. What did overcapacity in our hospital system use to mean? It used to represent the percentage of patients in a hospital that were in unfunded beds. Often those were the people that were in a hallway, in a closet at the end of a hallway. Maybe they were in a tub room or a storage room. Those were all overcapacity beds. They were the people who lost privacy, who had no bathroom, who had to use a rigged-up call bell, who were exposed to the noise and traffic of a hallway 24 hours a day.

We know that efficient health care systems operate at about 85 per cent occupancy and that we have been experiencing over a hundred per cent occupancy more and more, and it is now the norm. Written questions would allow us to get more of this information. What's changed now is that the definition of overcapacity has now changed, and it's now the over overcapacity. All of those people who had a spot in a hallway, all of those beds that had hallway one, hallway two, et cetera: they're not even overcapacity anymore. So by changing the definition – and we can't ask them for the answer – what we end up with is: oh, we're overcapacity by 103 per cent. But that's over capacity the overcapacity. We're really running way over in the double digits.

We would like to be able to get this in writing, what this means, and be able to address this. A bed in a hallway with a sign on the wall is now normal according to this government. We would like to know what all of those numbers are. We can ask this in written questions to get data, and we can ask them if they don't want to give us that to explain it to us.

Issues such as this need to be debatable. There may be no format other than written questions where we can actually precisely answer these questions. I'm a geek. I want to know: well, what does this mean? How do you define this? This can all be included in a written question, but now they don't have to answer anything.

Albertans need to have clear answers that are not fudged and taken around and misused. You can do a lot of things with statistics, like: we're 103 per cent over capacity when really we're 120 per cent. This standing order change does not allow us to help constituents, to help Albertans get the answers that they need.

Second issue. I won't belabour it, but I don't think I can get from my office in 10 minutes to vote. That bars me from meeting with stakeholders in my office if I want to be able to vote. I am very strongly opposed to that aspect of this as well. Of course, I'd be open to changing offices. If you want to bring us over to this building, that would be fine. You might be able to shave a minute off if you let us wear comfortable footwear so that we can move quicker. There are a lot of rules, and when we follow them all, they just don't work. This standing order is bad.

Thank you very much.

**The Acting Speaker:** Any others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to speak against this motion, against these changes in the standing orders. We are witnessing the continued erosion of democracy under this UCP government. Standing orders, as was mentioned by my colleague, are important to regulate the proceedings in this place. They need to be fair. They need to be consistent. They are the orders of the House, and it would have been much better if the government had consulted and reached some consensus with the opposition and other independent members of this House to come up with standing orders that we can say are the standing orders of the House and not just the government using the majority to ram through the changes that suit their political needs or political agenda.

These changes are not about any good governance or efficiency. These changes are just built in as a tool for a government that is afraid of scrutiny, that is looking for every opportunity to shy away from accountability and wants to do business behind closed doors and in secrecy. I think as MLAs as part of the opposition our role is to hold this government to account, to be able to scrutinize the government program, government legislation, government policy, and be able to bring forward and represent the diverse voices, diverse interests, and dissenting voices that the government wants to ignore – that's our role – and be able to present alternatives in this House. What the government is doing with these changes is essentially legislating making these changes so that they will control the debate in the House and they will have more tools at their disposal to cut down the debate in this House and shut down everyone in this House.

Since 2019 the government has used time allocation motions 84 times, just in six years. That's 54 per cent of all time allocations in Alberta's history ever since this province joined the Confederation. Fifty-four per cent of the time the government used time allocation just in the last six years clearly shows that they do not like debate and they do not like democracy, because debate is fundamental and essential to the proper functioning of democracy. It's important to inform the electorate, to inform citizens. It's important for political accountability. It promotes civility and peaceful resolution. It encourages listening to diverse voices, diverse views, but essentially the government is shutting down that debate in this House through these programming motions.

As my colleague from Calgary-Varsity said, now it will be up to the Government House Leader to decide which question will be answered and which question will not be answered. That's, I guess, very heavy handed. Again, the government is trying to hide things, to make it difficult for MLAs to get information, and makes it difficult for Albertans to access information. They made changes

earlier to access to information bills which make it even more difficult for Albertans to get changes, and now they are giving that authority just to the Government House Leader to decide which information requests they will be entertaining and which they will not.

Moreover, I think the changes to Thursday: it's good that the government is willing to get up a bit early and get to work a bit early but changing question period timing – again, it was, I guess, a long-standing tradition that question period started at 1:30. Albertans and people who are watching are accustomed to that time and, again, there was no consultation, a proper, I guess, thought process why that was necessary to change the question period timing.

Insofar as changing the House business time starting at 10, that's completely fine with us. In fact, there is a standing order that allows this government to start House business earlier on Tuesday, earlier on Wednesday as well, but that never happened under this government's watch. They don't, I think, like to get up that early.

In short, I think these changes are pretty heavy handed. These changes just help government to ram through things without accountability. I urge all members of the House, in particular the private members and backbenchers on the UCP side, to think about these changes. It's possible that come next election they will be sitting on this side, and those things will bother them at that point. Instead they should come up with rules that are reasonable, that are fair, that are predictable, and that will be acceptable. It doesn't matter which side of the House you sit on because these are the standing orders of the House for orderly conduct of democracy in this House, so don't take them lightly. These are changes that will have implications for proceedings in this House and democracy in this province.

With that, I urge everyone to vote against these changes.

4:10

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

**Dr. Elmeligi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against Government Motion 28, the changes to the standing orders. In listening to my colleagues I've been reflecting a little bit about, like: why are we here? We're here because people voted us in, and we are the elected representatives of the people of Alberta. But, like, why does this House exist? Why does the Legislature exist? It exists to pass the laws of the land that serve the people of the land, and we're here as a government and as an opposition to have a fulsome debate around those laws and around those changes.

It is that action of debate, Mr. Speaker, that is really critical to the job that we do. It is why there is an opposition, because Albertans want there to be a fulsome discussion and conversation around the laws of the land and the changes to the land. So I think that that's a really important aspect of this. While engaging in debate sometimes in this House is, I would argue, questionable in its level of respect, most of the time I think we do have fairly respectful debate on some things, but that debate has to be able to happen. We need to allow time for that debate to happen, and these changes to the standing orders actually reduce that amount of time, which therefore reduces the credibility of this House to accurately and effectively represent all of the people in Alberta.

News flash, Mr. Speaker. A lot of the people in Alberta did not vote for the government. That's why we have the largest opposition in Alberta history, because a substantial number of Albertans voted for a different political party. Those Albertans also deserve a voice in how decisions are made in this House.

There are two particular changes to the standing orders that I find most problematic. First is this programming motion that allows time allocation for multiple bills at once. While this motion does

allow for a new one-hour programming motion debate, it does affect how we effectively and fulsomely debate each bill during each phase in the Legislature.

This government has shown issues with time allocation. As my colleague has stated, this government has used time allocation. More than half of all the times of time allocation in history have been applied by this UCP government. The government consistently uses time allocation to ram through controversial bills, as is evidenced by the fact that we have more time allocations as we get closer to the end of session. When the bills are bigger and more impactful and more controversial, we allocate them more so that we have even less time to debate the bills that are the most controversial and the most difficult for Albertans to digest. If these bills are so great, the government would not need to time allocate them all the time. It is the fact that they are problematic that more debate is required, Mr. Speaker.

It has been clear to me and to Albertans that this government does not want to allow for fulsome debate on bills. I find that really starts to undermine the foundation of why we are here, why this House exists, why we have been chosen by Albertans to do the job that we do. These changes to the standing orders further solidify that reluctance of debate by allowing the government to fast-track multiple bills at once.

Ironically, Mr. Speaker, even now the government has given notice to time allocate this motion, which talks about time allocations. Even with this motion they're like: well, we don't want to talk about that either. So we don't want to talk about time allocation. We don't want to talk about controversial bills. We don't want to talk about health care even though that is what Albertans are talking about right now. At the end of the day, I kind of have to ask myself: what do we want to talk about? Apparently, all we want to talk about is how great the government is.

I don't want to talk about that, Mr. Speaker. I want to do my job as an opposition MLA and hold this government accountable because that is what the people of Banff-Kananaskis have elected me to do, and these changes impede my ability to do that to the best that I can. When I go home and talk to the people in Banff-Kananaskis, I hear: please ask the government about health care. Ask the government about: why does the Banff hospital not have a CT machine?

Actually, the Canmore hospital has one, but it's only available from Monday to Friday, so heaven forbid you should fall down on the ski slopes on a Saturday. You'll actually have to get trucked all the way to Calgary to even have the imaging done to figure out what your injury is because this government can afford to fund the staff to run the CT scanner in Calgary on the weekends. Most people ski on Saturday. I don't know why that's news. I went skiing on a Saturday at Lake Louise, and it's busy. It's very busy. That is when people get hurt in the mountains, but if you get hurt in the mountains on a weekend, it's going to take you longer to get health care because the hospitals don't have the capacity and the equipment that they need to serve the people.

But we're not talking about that, Mr. Speaker. On our first day back in session after being off for several months, we had an opportunity to talk about the number one thing that is on top of mind for Albertans right now, and that was rejected so that we can debate standing orders, but that's also time allocated. So it's not a fulsome debate about anything. It's not talking about health care or affordability; it's talking about: can we limit debate more? I don't think that that's why Albertans have hired us.

I want to speak a little bit to the written questions and the motions for returns. These are one of the tools that MLAs can use to force a debate in the Legislature on issues that are important to their constituents. I'll remind you, Mr. Speaker. That is why we are here.

We are here to represent our constituents. This change to the standing orders is a reaction to the volume of questions and motions for returns on the Order Paper currently. That's not proactive governance. That's not governance that is thinking about the future and all MLAs that will stand in this House in the future. That's a government that's like: well, we don't really want to answer these questions, so we're just not going to, and we're going to find a way to not answer them because we'll just change the rules. Rather than actually answering the questions posed, providing the information that is being asked for, this government would rather just reject the questions outright without debate, without justification. That is not a government that fosters transparency and accountability. It is another example of a government that doesn't like being held accountable, so they just change the rules so they don't have to be.

This is similar to the changes that we saw with freedom of information and legislation that actually limits the ability of the public to ask the government questions also. Now the government can just not answer a FOIP request, or they can redact more of it than they were able to before. So if the opposition can't hold the government accountable and the public can't hold the government accountable, who's holding the government accountable? Nobody, Mr. Speaker. That's why they can just do whatever they want. They have a majority and they're reducing the mechanisms for anybody to hold them accountable to that. That is why these changes to the standing orders are so problematic. We're here to debate, and a big part of that debate is trying to hold the government accountable.

Again, if the government's decisions are so great and are truly serving Albertans, then they shouldn't have a problem standing up in this House and defending those decisions and providing the data that informs those decisions so that Albertans can have trust in their government. Right now Albertans don't have trust in the government, and a big part of it is because of the way this government has reduced our ability to effectively debate in this House.

Motions for returns and written questions are a tool for accountability, Mr. Speaker, and the changes to the standing orders don't allow us to exercise that tool.

4:20

It also provides, again, changes where the Government House Leader can choose to reject questions, which then drops them from the Order Paper and makes them completely undebatable. Not only does the government not have to answer the question or provide the data or provide any justification; there's no opportunity for us to even debate that response from the Government House Leader. No answers, no debate, no repercussions for simply rejecting written questions or motions for returns. All of those things are a critical part of what happens here in this House. This is why Albertans elected us.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that sometimes I feel like the government opposite is just not used to having an opposition. For many decades we didn't really have an opposition in Alberta, but we do now, and Albertans expect it to be treated as an opposition. A critical point of having an opposition is to have fair, equitable, and abundant debate, especially around things that are controversial, on things where most Albertans do not unanimously agree.

That's what we're here to do. That's why Albertans have elected us, and I can promise you right now, Mr. Speaker, on the very first day of spring session 2026, I will continue to fight vehemently for the people of Banff-Kananaskis, and I will debate all day long, all night long, every day of the week.

Thank you very much.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Ms Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise for the very first day of our spring session today and talk a little bit about why I am opposed to Government Motion 28. One of the reasons I am opposed to this motion is because it isn't just about some simple procedural changes that will help the Legislature function perhaps more efficiently and effectively. Instead, these changes to the standing orders on the whole signal a government that is willing to not only quiet the voices of Albertans as well as reduce their MLAs', their representatives', ability to do their job, the job, as my colleague so eloquently just expressed, that we were elected to do on behalf of them.

Not only that; as more than one of my colleagues have eloquently noted, irony of ironies, this government is willing to do this using time allocation. It's a little bit astonishing but, sadly, not surprising, so perhaps it's not astonishing at all, for this is how this government appears to operate. We've seen time and time again time allocations throughout the last number of years, time allocations that serve only the government's interest rather than the interests of the people we were elected to serve, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly wasn't in the interest of Albertans to use time allocation to diminish the voices of Albertans standing up against this government's use of the notwithstanding clause multiple times. It certainly wasn't in Albertans' interest to use time allocations to diminish the voices of Albertans struggling to access timely and appropriate health care for themselves and their family members. It certainly isn't in Albertans' interest to use time allocation to diminish the voices of Albertans when discussing and debating a motion which, sadly, includes time allocation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It is, as I used to say when I was a teacher, unfortunate. It's an unfortunate choice made by a government, and it does indeed seem to point to the slow erosion of democracy in this province. Madam Speaker, democracy is supposed to live in this House, but democracy cannot live here if everyone in this House is not able to do their job.

I have some real concerns. I have a general issue with omnibus bills, and while this is a motion, not a bill, it does have some of the same difficulties which present themselves in omnibus bills, Madam Speaker. Oftentimes, of course, they're used for expediency: we've run to the end, we need to get everything together in a nice, neat little package, wrap it up in a bow, and we just need to pass it all. But the trouble is that that never or rarely works, and any of us in Alberta who have ever been in a convention of any sort know that when an omnibus bill presents itself, there's usually at least one member in that audience that wants to pull a section of that bill out.

So why do an omnibus bill in the first place? Generally, Madam Speaker, the reason why governments will do omnibus bills and motions like this, where a whole bunch of things are included, is because they understand that that's a bit like a potpourri. There's a bit of stuff that's okay and might agree with you, but there's also some stuff that isn't okay, and you're going to have a massive allergic reaction to it over time. This is like a massive allergic reaction over time except it isn't over time because we don't have any time to debate it.

In this motion we have a series of changes, all of which fundamentally change how this Legislature operates. We've got the programming motion, a motion that permits the government to time allocate, as I've talked about an awful lot – I feel like I've said "time allocate" many, many times already – all at once rather than deal with each bill on its own merits and in its own time, allowing not only for debate but for the voices of Albertans, our constituents –

and, quite frankly, Madam Speaker, the constituents of all 87 members matter in this House. The constituents and their voices deserve to be heard in this House.

We have a portion of this motion that deals with scheduling changes. We have a portion that puts limits on emergency debates. The proposal now suggests limiting debate to one per caucus or independent member each day, and sadly with this government there are very real pressures that can present themselves concurrently. Quite frankly, there are times when that might and should change the order of events, just like today. We often hear from folks opposite how important the voices of Albertans are. Well, if Albertans' voices are that important, one wonders why we didn't hear an emergency debate on the ongoing crisis in health care.

We have changes to how motions for returns and written questions are handled, how they'll be presented, and how they might be debated. As I said earlier, Madam Speaker, while at first glance it seems like it's really just procedure that we're changing a little bit in terms of process to make things work more efficiently and effectively, the reality is that these changes are not just about effectiveness and efficiency; it's also about deflection, deflection from this work this government ought to be doing on behalf of all Albertans, those who voted for them as well as those who did not, those who are new to our province and those who have lived here for many years.

We are now talking about these motions rather than the ongoing and emerging crisis in health care. We're talking about these motions instead of the chronic underfunding of education. We're talking about these motions instead of an affordability crisis felt by far too many Albertans. We're talking about these motions instead of proclaiming loud and for everyone to hear that we shouldn't even be discussing separation at all. It shouldn't even be happening. We know that the very discussion of this has damaged our economy and that this House, all members, should be able to feel free to say, "I am not a separatist" without any word salad attached, Madam Speaker.

Motions for returns and written questions, Madam Speaker, often arise out of conversations with constituents, local stakeholders like representatives from local business associations, members of labour, those who represent workers, and others. They are about making it harder for all opposition members to do their collective job.

As I've mentioned, perhaps the most worrisome part to all of this is the fact that I do think it represents a very real, though slow and perhaps quiet, erosion of democracy. Rules can be changed and changed in a way that favours those who govern rather than the folks they govern on behalf of. Yet there seems to be a general unwillingness on the part of this UCP government to actually govern. We see examples of that everywhere, Madam Speaker, and not just within the confines of this motion here today. There are examples in the use of time allocation itself, 84 times since 2018 alone. That indeed does speak to a government that is actually unwilling to hear the voices of Albertans be represented and raised in this House. Twenty twenty-three, '24, '25: time allocation on many, many bills. I understand pressures, but this isn't about pressure.

We heard from the member opposite today that part of the reason for some of the parts of this motion are because some of the actions of members of the opposition are seen to be intrusive or obstructive, hindering the government's agenda, but, Madam Speaker, it's not obstructive to want to debate issues surrounding health care in this House, particularly when the government sets up legislation that is designed to open the door to privatization. It's not obstruction to want to centre the voices of Albertans. It's not obstruction to tell

the stories of our constituents, particularly when they can actually inform the work of the ministers opposite. And it's certainly not obstruction or malicious intent to stand up for the rights of Albertans when their government is taking them away. That is, in fact, the job that we are here to do.

For that and many other reasons I will not be voting in favour of this motion.

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

**Member Gurinder Brar:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. We have heard about movements against hunting: stop tiger hunting, stop lion hunting, stop elephant hunting. Have you heard about stop fishing? Why is that?

4:30

Let me visualize what fishing actually looks like. Imagine you're opening the door, walking into the room, and seeing your favourite dish hanging. You try to eat it, and the hook gets stuck in the upper side of your mouth and pulls you up. While you are being pulled up, you are unable to breathe. A sharp knife is waiting outside to peel off your skin. This is how cruel fishing is, Madam Speaker, yet nobody speaks against it. You know why? Because no one can hear the screams of that fish because fish do not have vocal cords.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, we as elected members are not just politicians. We are the vocal cords of the society, and this government motion is the chain that will strangle the vocal cords of this Assembly.

When I go out in the community, people tell me their issues. They tell me how desperately they need a new hospital in north Calgary. They tell me how desperately they need new schools in Calgary-North East. They tell me that the insurance costs, the utility bills, the tuition costs have skyrocketed under this UCP government. After this recent address of the Premier to the province they tell me that they are afraid of racism. They are afraid that they will be targeted just because of their skin colour. They tell me that being newcomers, being new immigrants, they don't feel as safe in Alberta as they used to.

They tell me these things because they know that I will raise these issues in the Assembly. They expect me to be their voice. In fact, Madam Speaker, it is my job to be their voice, and it is Canadian democracy that allows me to be their voice in this Assembly.

I know the members on the other side have serious problems following the rules, obeying the democratic decision-making, and being held accountable, but I want to remind this UCP government that the rules of the Assembly are not decorations on the shelf. They are the guardrails of democracy. When governments shorten debate, they don't just save time; they steal the voice of the people that elected all the members to be their voice.

This Assembly does not belong to a Premier, this Assembly does not belong to a cabinet, and it definitely does not belong to this separatist UCP government. This Assembly belongs to every worker in Calgary-North East finishing a night shift. This Assembly belongs to every newcomer filling forms in their second language. This Assembly belongs to every senior choosing between medicine and groceries. They have sent us here to be their voice and represent them and highlight the issues that matter to them, their families. When debate is cut, their stories are cut. When questions are limited, their struggles are silenced. And when democracy is rushed, justice is delayed.

To this government I say: do not fear debate. Do not fear the questions. Do not fear the people whose lives we shape in these Chambers because strong ideas must be debated, must be accepted, and must be implemented to make the lives better of the very people who

have sent us here. Madam Speaker, this government motion will limit the debate, will weaken the democracy, will handcuff the voice of the Official Opposition. In fact, not just for the Official Opposition but for all the private members it will make it harder to check government bills. It will make it harder to check the government actions.

The UCP doesn't want to respect the voice of the people. The UCP government doesn't want to respect the democratic institutions of our province with this government motion because they will be limiting the debate, and limiting debate means undermining the voice of the democracy itself. These changes tilt everything towards the few people in this government, in fact not even the entire government, and that is wrong. Albertans did not vote for any government so that they can bend the rules in their favour and their power remains unchecked. They didn't vote this government in for that. They have never voted for anyone keeping this in mind.

Current rules allow time allocation, and this government has used the time allocation motion like no other government in the history of this province. They have used the most time allocations in the history of the province, and now they want to limit the debate even further. Since 2019 they invoked time allocation more than 84 times, if I'm not wrong. This is 54 per cent of all time allocations in Alberta's history.

They used it to ram through bills. Who can forget Bill 2, that this government passed in just one day? It was not to make life better for Albertans. It was not to make life better for Alberta's kids, not for Alberta teachers. In fact, it sent the teachers back to the same overcrowded classrooms, underfunded classrooms, and complex classrooms, and that was the bill where this UCP government also used the notwithstanding clause for the first time in the history of this province. Yet this government needs more and more power every single day.

If we can't speak about the issues of the people in this Chamber, where else should the members go? Where else can they highlight the issues that our constituents face every single day? It's so unfortunate that this government doesn't allow the free speech of those people. It is so unfortunate that the government who talks about freedom wants to control the freedom of others to speak, to highlight their issues, to raise their concerns, to ask their questions, to hold this government accountable. Even the UCP backbenchers: like, I don't understand how they will face their own constituents. What will they say? That what they voted for in the Assembly is limiting their own voice?

Madam Speaker, we will oppose these changes not out of anger but out of love for this province and democracy; not for politics but for people. I promise the families of Calgary-North East that we will keep speaking, we will keep asking, and we will keep standing for what matters to them.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others on Government Motion 28?

Seeing none. [interjection] I will decide when the question is called, and it will be now.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 28 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:39 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy 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	Lunty	Stephan
Dreeshen	McDougall	Turton
Dyck	Nally	van Dijken
Ellis	Neudorf	Wiebe
Fir	Nicolaides	Williams
Getson	Nixon	Wilson
Glubish	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Hunter	Rowswell	Yao
Jean	Sawhney	Yaseen
Johnson		

Against the motion:

Batten	Ellingson	Ip
Brar, Gurinder	Elmeligi	Metz
Brar, Gurtej	Ganley	Sabir
Chapman	Gray	Sigurdson, L.
Deol	Guthrie	Wright, P.
Eggen		

Totals: For – 43 Against – 16

[Government Motion 28 carried]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's wonderful to see that the members' lungs have been exhausted and exhausted without the use of time allocation on that motion. With the time remaining I suggest we make the best of it. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until tomorrow, February 25, at 1:30 in the afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:57 p.m.]







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