Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 9, 2026

Day 28

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature
Second Session

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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC), Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:
United Conservative: 47 New Democrat: 38 Progressive Tory: 1 Independent: 1

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Calahoo Stonehouse
Cyr
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m. Monday, March 9, 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.

Hon. members, it being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Kalyna Brytan. 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: It is my honour to introduce to all members of the Assembly His Excellency Andrii Plakhotniuk, the ambassador of Ukraine to Canada. His Excellency has been the ambassador of Ukraine since September 2025 and is also the representative of Ukraine to the International Civil Aviation Organization. We met this morning and discussed the current situation in Ukraine and how as a country and province we can provide support to our Ukrainian friends and neighbours. His Excellency is joined in my gallery by Yuliya Ni, Roman Strashevskyi, and Marianna Kulava. I ask that you all please rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

Commonwealth Day

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed with introductions, I would like to recognize Commonwealth Day. Today the Assembly joins Legislatures across Canada and throughout the world in observing Commonwealth Day 2026. This year's theme, Unlocking Opportunities Together for a Prosperous Commonwealth, reflects the spirit of co-operation that lies at the heart of the Commonwealth parliamentary tradition. It reminds us that progress is strengthened when nations and their Legislatures work together to expand opportunity and uphold democratic values.

In his message for Commonwealth Day the King acknowledges the many pressures facing communities across the globe while highlighting the enduring spirit of the Commonwealth and the importance of open dialogue. His reflections speak directly to the democratic traditions upheld in Legislatures such as ours, where co-operation and respectful debate strengthen the institutions we serve. The Commonwealth's commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and mutual respect guides the work carried out in this Chamber each day. As members engage in debate and deliberations, you contribute to a tradition that links Alberta to a wider community of democratic institutions that spans the globe. As we mark Commonwealth Day, let us reflect on our shared parliamentary values and renew our commitment to building opportunity and prosperity through collaboration.

Members, copies of His Majesty's speech are on your desks along with the message from the Commonwealth secretary general.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, in recognition of Commonwealth Day I am pleased to introduce the Royal Commonwealth Society of Edmonton, a nonprofit society whose mandate includes improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens around the world, while especially focused on youth right here in Edmonton. The society was founded in 2005 during her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Alberta. Today they continue to champion civic engagement and youth empowerment. I would ask that they please rise as I call their names: President Ian Havin; treasurer Ian Olive; secretary and membership director Mary Hunt; and directors at large Lindy Havin, Lisa Olive, Larry Kathan, Joe Zasada. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Okay. School groups today, starting with Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mr. Guthrie: Oh, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you I'd like to introduce to the House students and teachers and parents from C.W. Perry school in Airdrie. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Rutherford, two schools, I think.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Oh, someone else is doing my schools.

I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the Tsuut'ina head chief, Chief Ellery Starlight; from Whitefish Nation, Proxy Chief Stephanie Jackson; Samson Cree Nation Chief Proxy Kurt Buffalo; and former president of Native Women's Association of Canada and advisory to Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations Marilyn Buffalo. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Grand Chief of Treaty 8 Trevor Mercredi; from Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation Chief Sheldon Sunshine; Chief Allan Adam of Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation; Councillor Ivan Harper from Onion Lake Cree Nation; from Siksika Nation Chief Samuel Crowfoot, Councillor Louise Doore, and Councillor Stephen Yellow Old Woman; cultural advisor Crystal Thompson Kootenay; EDA

member from Michel First Nation Ashley Allen. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you Alanna Hnatiw, the mayor of Sturgeon county; Deanna Stang, councillor from Sturgeon county; as well as their youth advisory council, who are joining us in the gallery today. If you could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Nenshi: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly former Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations Grand Chief Willie Littlechild, from Ermineskin Cree Nation Josh Littlechild, from Cold Lake First Nations Chief Kelsey Jacko, Isabella West, Yndes Grandbois, and Kim Warnke. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Rutherford.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to you and through you to welcome Duggan elementary school. Hello, Duggan elementary school. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

1:40

The Speaker: Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited to introduce Erin and Leonard Drolet. I'd ask that they rise while I introduce them. They've been married for 40 years. They have three sons, and they care deeply about public education and health care and protecting our mountains. Thank you for being here and for your service.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Please welcome James Anderson, the interim leader of the Green Party of Alberta. Please rise, James, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly from Piikani Nation, Proxy Chief Neil Sharp Adze; from the Blackfoot Confederacy, Blood Tribe Councillor Dorothy First Rider, elders Marilyn Buffalo and Bernadette Koluk; and member from Whitefish Nation, Laurie Buffalo; and from Tsuut'ina, Cheyenne Big Plume. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Samson Cree Nation councillors Elesha Buffalo, Frank Buffalo, Kurt Buffalo, Holly Johnson, Louise Ahsoapitisowo, Cletis Louis, Darryl Montour, Vincent Saddleback, Izaiah Swampy-Omeasoo, Armand Swampy, band administrators Dana Nepoose and Dean Louis, and any other guests attending from First Nations.

The Speaker: Are there other introductions? Please go ahead.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly Peter Schlack, who is a dedicated volunteer from Sherwood Park-Strathcona. If you could please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

International Women's Day

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we join people around the world in recognizing International Women's Day, which took place Sunday, March 8. Women have been part of the life and history of this Legislature from its earliest years.

Today I wish to highlight one trailblazer in particular, Edith B. Rogers, whose contributions 90 years ago helped open doors for generations who followed. As the fifth woman Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, elected to this Assembly February 7, 1936, Edith Rogers was first to second the address to the Lieutenant Governor following the Speech from the Throne. On March 11 she again made history when she stood in for the Deputy Speaker and chair of committees during Committee of the Whole consideration for estimates, another first for a woman MLA in this Chamber. These milestones remind us that women have long contributed to the strength and integrity of our democratic institutions.

Today the contributions of women in this Legislature continue to shape Alberta in countless ways. Their achievements are too numerous to count. Their impact is felt across every portfolio, committee, and constituency as well as through the work of the women serving as table officers, pages, and in many roles that support this Assembly.

In keeping with this year's theme, Give to Gain, we are reminded that progress comes when we invest in one another.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

School Construction and Modernization

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton is one of the fastest growing cities in the country, and our government is taking action to make sure families have the schools they need in the communities where they live. Through Budget 2026 Alberta's government is funding 10 new school projects in Edmonton, bringing the total number of public school projects under way in the city to 37. These projects include eight new schools and two new replacement schools supporting public, Catholic, and francophone education, and together they will create or modernize more than 8,400 student spaces for Edmonton students. These projects build on 27 previously announced projects already under way and reflect a clear focus on growing neighbourhoods across the city from the southwest to the north and from established communities to new developments.

With 40 new school projects approved in Budget 2026, there are now 161 active school construction projects under way in Alberta. This is part of a generational $8.6 billion investment to build and renovate more than 100 schools and create over 200,000 student spaces province-wide.

Over the past three years alone Alberta's school system has welcomed 80,000 new students, and our government is responding by accelerating construction where classroom pressures are greatest through the schools now program. Recent announcements confirm that Budget 2026 is also delivering major school investments in Calgary and rural Alberta, including 11 new schools in Calgary's fastest growing communities and 16 new school projects in smaller cities and rural areas. These projects are targeted to areas facing the greatest enrolment pressure and are moving forward through planning and design so that construction can begin as quickly as possible.

Together these announcements reinforce that Alberta's approach is province-wide, building public schools in large cities, growing suburbs, and rural communities alike to ensure students can learn closer to home no matter where they live. Mr. Speaker, this is about planning carefully, building efficiently, and delivering real results

for families. Budget 2026 is investing in what matters: modern classrooms, growing communities, and a strong public education system that keeps pace.

Alberta Separatism and First Nation Treaty Rights

Member Irwin: "As long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the river flows, we remain connected as neighbors and partners with all humans on this land." These powerful words from Chief Ellery Starlight evoke the language of the treaty agreements between First Nations and the Crown and remind us that governments in this country have obligations that cannot simply be tossed aside, but that is exactly what we are seeing happen with this separatist Premier and UCP government, and that is why in an unprecedented vote the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs of treaties 6, 7, and 8 announced that they have unanimously lost confidence in this government, noting that they "have no trust or confidence in the Government of Alberta and the . . . (UCP) due to their continued failure to meet Treaty-based constitutional and governance responsibilities."

Grand Chief Joey Pete says, "This UCP government has created conditions in Alberta that are unsafe for First Nations Peoples – promoting ignorance and intolerance along with its support for the separatist agenda is leading to outright racism." Chief Trevor Mercredi says that "the growing climate of division and separation is a direct result of [this government's failures] . . . Alberta deserves leadership grounded in accountability, stability, and respect for Treaty."

The Assembly of Treaty Chiefs has asked all Members of this Legislative Assembly "to officially and expeditiously declare in the Alberta Legislative Assembly, a Vote of Non-Confidence in this current government." Will the separatist UCP government members respect this call? Time will tell, but you've got our commitment that we, the Alberta NDP caucus, definitely will proudly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:48 p.m.

International Year of the Woman Farmer

Mrs. Sawyer: Mr. Speaker, in 2026 the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization has declared this year the International Year of the Woman Farmer. This allows us to honour something rural Alberta has always known: women have never been on the sidelines of agriculture.

As we celebrated International Women's Day yesterday, we were reminded that women have been leaders, builders, and partners from the beginning. Our history is grounded in women who pioneered alongside their spouses, women who seeded fields, tended livestock, managed households, and carried operations through droughts, harsh winters, and economic uncertainty. Whether or not their names appeared on the title, their labour and decisions built the foundation that rural Alberta stands on today.

I have been encouraged throughout my life in agriculture by both women and men who believed in working side by side for the good of the farm, the family, and the community. That spirit of partnership is part of what makes our rural way of life so strong. Mr. Speaker, across Alberta women are studying agribusiness, animal science, and environmental stewardship. They are returning to family farms and stepping into leadership roles. They are moving agriculture forward in meaningful ways.

Today, March 9, has personal significance. It's my daughter's birthday. She's a teacher in a rural school, a different path than the farm but still rooted in the values that hold rural Alberta together: community, service, and resilience.

Women across rural Alberta contribute in many ways, and all of those contributions strengthen the places we call home. This year reminds us that the story of Alberta agriculture is written by many hands. Women have been pioneers, partners, and leaders for generations, and today more young women are stepping forward to carry that legacy into the future. This International Year of the Woman Farmer is simply a chance to say thank you to the women who have always been here doing the work that feeds our families and sustains our community.

1:50 Oral Question Period

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

Indigenous Relations

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 26, the last day we were all together, something big happened, and I don't just mean the UCP deficit or my mom's 85th birthday. Something unprecedented happened. For the first time the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs made a declaration of nonconfidence in a provincial government in Alberta. This declaration has received not a single serious response from this government. The Premier has done interviews, podcasts, social media posts – you name it – and has said nothing about this. Why has the Premier ignored this declaration from the chiefs?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to see so many representatives from First Nations in the Assembly, many of whom I have met before because we have regular meetings of protocol with Treaty 6, with Treaty 7, with Treaty 8, with the G4, and also with the Blackfoot Confederacy. We're going to continue to have those meetings because we have areas of exclusive jurisdiction where we know we need to partner with nations. When we get together, we have ministers representing 10 or more different ministries, and we're going to continue to build on that relationship and make sure that we're addressing issues in our areas of jurisdiction.

Mr. Nenshi: To be clear, Mr. Speaker, the treaty chiefs have said and believe that this UCP government cannot responsibly and respectfully govern this province. They say that this conversation about separatism is leading to political instability and that the relationship is fundamentally broken. So what's the plan here? The Premier can't just talk about meetings and having more and more meetings when she has this declaration facing her. What is her plan to address this unprecedented statement that the relationship she is responsible for is irrevocably broken?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we need to be clear that sovereignty is not the same as separation. Sovereignty is the federal government respecting our areas of jurisdiction. We respect that section 35 is absolutely a section of the Constitution – that is the highest law of the land – but there are also other sections in the Constitution: section 92, section 92A, section 93, section 94, and section 95. Those are at issue. That's the relationship that we are trying to renegotiate with Ottawa to make sure that they stay in their lane on their areas of jurisdiction and allow us to stay in ours.

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier does love to talk about the Constitution, but she's putting forth a separation question that a judge has already ruled unconstitutional. Last week she said that she can make it constitutional. Now, how does that work? The judge has said that it's unconstitutional. It's time for the Premier to put her cards on the table. How is she going to square this circle? If section 35 matters, if treaty rights matter and the judge has ruled that the question violates section 35, how is she going to make this separatism question somehow constitutional?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not putting forward a citizen petition any more than the member opposite is putting forward a coal petition. These are petitions that have been launched by private citizens. There's a process; 120 days where they have to collect a certain number of signatures. What we are doing on this side is addressing the real grievances that Alberta has with the 10 years of mistreatment by Ottawa backed by that member's party in the coalition between the NDP and the Liberals. We are now undoing step-by-step-by-step every terrible policy that they passed, and we were pleased to announce one just on Friday that we were able to negotiate.

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

Mr. Nenshi: Well, the Premier is certainly correct that she is undoing step-by-step treaty rights and Alberta. The MOU she signed says that partnering with First Nations is critical to getting a pipeline built, but she's broken the relationship. A pipeline to the west coast could be stalled forever because this government has bungled the First Nations relationship so badly. How could the Premier mess this up so badly that the very MOU she signed is in jeopardy because of this declaration of nonconfidence?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only thing that potentially could be in jeopardy is the fact that NDP leaders continue to stand in the way of pipeline development and continue to advocate against oil and gas development. We have a Premier in British Columbia. I would like to know if the member opposite has even picked up the phone to call him to see why it is that he is advocating against a pipeline being built to the west coast. I would also like to ask the member opposite if he's given a call to Avi Lewis, who is soon going to be the member of their federal party, to ask him to stop talking down our oil and gas industry and to start supporting it. That is the biggest danger of getting pipelines built.

Mr. Nenshi: Last I heard, Mr. Speaker, Avi Lewis and David Eby didn't face a vote of nonconfidence by First Nations. Only this Premier did. Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Chief Allan Adam, who joins us here today, says that the broken relationship could stuck projects in the courts for 20 years. The only jobs this Premier creates are jobs for government lawyers. There is just no way to build a major project in this country. Prosperity for First Nations has to be part of getting stuff built. Will the Premier for once take responsibility for this broken relationship?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wish I could take responsibility for the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, but that was an idea brought forward to this government by Willie Littlechild, and my predecessor was the one who acted on it. And now we have $750 million worth of projects underwritten that will give $1.2 billion worth of long-term revenues to the nations who are involved in that. I was just told today that there are several other projects in the works. We have had so much take-up of that program that we raised it to a $3 billion loan guarantee. British Columbia is doing the same. Ottawa has a $10 billion program. I think that we are acting in the true spirit of economic reconciliation.

Mr. Nenshi: Yet for the first time in history the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs has declared nonconfidence in a provincial government. The Premier can talk as much as she wants about this, but this is the fundamental situation. This chip has fallen. The Premier's separatism misadventure, her pandering and her playing to both sides: she thinks she can manage the fallout. Clearly, she cannot. Will the Premier finally admit that her separatism misadventure is costing jobs, freezing investment, jeopardizing a better deal with Canada, and dividing Albertans against one another?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, they said the same thing when we came through with our Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act. Do you know what happened? It foundationally changed our relationship with the federal government. We have got the emissions cap gone, net-zero power regs gone. We have renegotiated on C-69 to once again restore our ability to approve major projects within our own environment. We are working through step-by-step-by-step to undo all of the damage caused by the Liberal-NDP coalition under the members opposite's buddy Justin Trudeau. That's what's going to restore confidence.

The Speaker: We'll now only hear from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Alberta Separatism and First Nation Treaty Rights

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Today we are honoured to have First Nations chiefs and councillors from treaties 6, 7, and 8 in our gallery from the territories. The numbered treaties are legally binding constitutional commitments that ensure peace, order, and mutual respect, yet this Premier continues to refuse to clearly denounce separatist rhetoric that openly questions the authority of our treaties. To the Premier: how does she justify remaining silent while movements that undermine constitutionally protected treaty rights gain legitimacy in this separatist Conservative party?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Building and maintaining relationships with First Nations leadership and communities continues to be a priority for Alberta's government. Alberta's government will continue to engage, to listen, and to work with Indigenous leadership on shared priorities. Progress happens through consistent respectful dialogue and a willingness to keep working together.

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

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Treaty is a nation-to-nation sacred covenant that predates this province and is recognized and affirmed by Canada's Constitution. First Nations leaders are here today because they are deeply concerned about the Premier's refusal to clearly reject separatist rhetoric that is placing our sacred agreements in grave danger. Silence from the Premier's office sends a message that treaty rights are negotiable, and they are not, so again to the Premier, and I mean this is for the Premier: why has she clearly not unequivocally rejected separation movements that undermine our treaties?

2:00

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government respects the treaty rights of First Nations as well as the established rights of the Inuit and Métis peoples, recognizing their importance now and for future generations. Any discussion about Alberta's future must take place within the framework of the Constitution, including the protections guaranteed to Indigenous peoples. The Constitution also provides a framework that guides our relationships with Indigenous partners and the work we do together on our shared priorities.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Treaty relationships were created so that peoples on these lands could live together in peace. When a Premier violates treaty repeatedly, she is violating and signalling that the honour of the Crown is negotiable, and it's not. Chiefs across this province have warned that this government's approach is eroding trust and our province's economic stability. To the Premier: does she recognize that failing to uphold treaty responsibility and obligations threatens not only the province of Alberta but indeed the whole Confederation of Canada?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government has been very clear. The Constitution is the highest law in Canada, and section 35 of the Constitution recognizes . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. I can't hear the question, and I can almost touch the one asking it.

Go ahead.

Mrs. Sawhney: Section 35 of the Constitution recognizes and affirms existing Aboriginal and treaty rights and provides constitutional protection of these rights. These protections guide and bind all levels of governments in Canada, and they remain firmly in place.

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, the unanimous vote by the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs is unprecedented. They said they hold no trust and no confidence in this UCP government

> due to their continued failure to meet Treaty-based constitutional and governance responsibilities. The UCP has acted repeatedly with a lack of critical understanding and respect for those responsibilities, demonstrating their inability to responsibly and respectfully govern the province of Alberta.

Why has the UCP government so utterly failed to do their jobs?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I've said this before in the House, but any public conversations about sovereignty have raised questions about what these debates mean for Indigenous communities. Alberta's government position is clear. These discussions do not change or diminish existing Aboriginal and treaty rights or the Crown's obligation to First Nations.

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, Xakiji Ellery Starlight of the Tsuut'ina Nation said that our treaties are in place as a covenant between the Crown and treaty nations "as long as the sun shines, grass grows, and the rivers flow." This relationship is fundamental to Canada. It cannot be tossed away in a simple yes or no vote of separatism like this government's Bill 54 allows. Will the minister explain to chiefs here today how a separatism referendum respects treaty given that these treaties are foundational to our province?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to upholding section 35, honouring treaty obligations, and ensuring that all actions comply fully with constitutional law. Above all, we value our relationships with Indigenous peoples and communities, and we are committed to listening to our partners and working collaboratively with our partners to support reconciliation.

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, as Treaty 8 Grand Chief Trevor Mercredi said, "The growing climate of division and separation is a direct result of [the UCP's] failure to respect Treaty Rights, constitutional obligations, and the foundational relationship between First Nations and the Crown." Ask any Indigenous person and they will tell you that hate has only increased due to this government's separatist agenda, so why won't a single member of the government denounce separatism as a first step to rebuilding this foundational relationship? Where is their courage?

The Speaker: Only the hon. minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to state once again that we included a clause in the Referendum Act via the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, to reaffirm that a government cannot implement the results of a referendum if doing so would contravene sections 1 to 35.1 of the Constitution Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Pancholi:

> "Alberta's argument is not just wrong, it is dishonourable. The Justice Minister cannot stand in the Legislative Assembly in May citing [his legislation] as a protection for Treaty rights and then send his lawyers into Court in November to make [an] . . . argument that [the same legislation] is not protection for Treaty rights. Reconciliation demands that governments do better than this."

That's from the Court of King's Bench decision that the separatism petition put forward by the Premier's friends contravenes treaty rights. Will the Justice minister admit that the UCP's choice to change the law to allow a separatism petition that contravenes treaty rights to go ahead is, in fact, dishonourable?

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:06.

The hon. Minister of Justice has the floor.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've said time and again in this Assembly that Alberta's government is absolutely committed . . .

Ms Hoffman: Dishonourable.

Mr. Amery: . . . to protecting and upholding and honouring the inherent rights of First Nations treaties in this province. Any and every single one of the referendum questions must be constitutional. It says so right in the act. That means that no question can breach the Constitution, and the reality is that we will honour treaties 6, 7, and 8 in this province. This is nonnegotiable.

The Speaker: Okay. We're going to try something new. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora will just apologize for calling another member not honourable. We aren't going to wait for the point of order. I heard it out loud. Let's just get it done.

Ms Gray: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully request that we be allowed to debate points of order because . . .

The Speaker: No. Not this one. I heard it. It's done. The hon. member will apologize and withdraw.

Ms Gray: She did not.

The Speaker: The hon. member will apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Sabir: She didn't call the member . . .

The Speaker: You have not been recognized. You will sit down.
The hon. member will apologize and withdraw.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member won't be recognized again, and you need to sit down because you haven't been recognized.
The hon. member will apologize and withdraw or won't be recognized again today.
Okay. Let's carry on.

Ms Pancholi: Given that Treaty 8 First Nations, Treaty Six confederacy, Athabasca Chipewyan, Samson Cree, Mikisew Cree, Sturgeon Lake, Piikani, Siksika, and Kainai nations all presented evidence to the court of how the UCP-supported separatist petition breaches the treaties that bind every single Albertan and given that the court agreed that separatism contravenes treaty rights by removing Canada as responsible for fulfilling its obligations without First Nation consent and by creating an international border to divide treaty territory, can the Minister of Indigenous Relations explain why she supported letting a separatism petition go forward that we know violates treaty rights?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, that is simply incorrect. The bill states specifically and unequivocally that any referendum question that offends sections 1 through 35.1 of the Constitution will simply not be allowed. The division is absolutely absurd. The act itself has a provision that describes the exact scenario that the member is posturing about. That will not happen. It is nonnegotiable. Treaty rights will be respected in this province.

Ms Pancholi: Given that a court has already said that the question is unconstitutional and given that the Premier said this weekend that her Justice minister might amend the separatist petition question before it goes to Albertans and given that this would be the first, second, third, fourth time in a year that the UCP will be directly intervening to keep separatism on the agenda in Alberta and given that if the UCP writes the referendum question, it would be confirmation that separatism was never really a so-called citizen initiative but actually a UCP government initiative and given that most Albertans already believe the Premier herself will vote in support of separatism, why won't the Premier just admit that the UCP is a separatist government? [interjections]

2:10

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Edmonton-Whitemud, that was twice that you kept talking after I stood up.

Mr. Amery: Once again, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the signatures have not even been submitted. We don't even know if there is going to be a sufficient number of signatures to trigger a referendum in this province. Referendums are a citizen-led initiative, but the reality is – I'm going to say it one more time for all of the Assembly and all of our guests in this Legislature – any question that violates the Constitution sections 1 through 35.1 . . . [interjection]

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Amery: . . . any question that deals with a matter that breaches treaty rights is nonnegotiable. It will not happen in this province.

The Speaker: All right. And to the minister, folks, you've got to stop talking when your time is up.
There was a point of order called at 2:11.
The next question belongs to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Education Funding

Mr. Lunty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is growing fast. Out-of-control federal immigration has brought in over 80,000 kids in Alberta schools in just three years. The federal Liberals have let too many people in in too short a time, leading to overcrowded schools. To the Minister of Education and Childcare: what is he doing to build more schools across the province and in rural Alberta?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, Budget '26 approves 40 additional projects to help expand capacity in our schools, bringing the total number of active projects in our province right now to 161. In addition, I know in the member's own constituency a number of projects are under way. Beaumont has two ongoing school projects, a new Catholic high school and a new public high school. In addition, as well in his community another project is under way in Leduc. These projects will add much-needed student spaces to help accommodate the influx of new individuals that we're seeing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lunty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that Alberta's population continues to grow and that it is important that Alberta's school-age children have the supports they need and further given that Ottawa's immigration policies will cost the education system over half a billion dollars each year, to the same minister: what is he doing to ensure these children have the supports they need to prosper in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government takes addressing the issue of classroom complexity incredibly seriously, which is why in Budget '23 we created the classroom complexity grant. It's why we also announced very recently an investment of $143 million to create 476 complexity teams in our most in-demand schools. It's also why Budget '26 includes $355 million in new spending to help address classroom complexity. Of course, we know that when the opposition was in power, they did absolutely nothing to address the issue of classroom complexity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lunty: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that we are building more schools in rural Alberta and across the province and given that we are seeing record investments into Alberta's education system and further given that we continue to build more schools than the NDP ever did, to the same minister: can he please compare the NDP's track record . . . [interjections] I'm not surprised they're embarrassed about their record. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
Member, start again.

Mr. Lunty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we are building more schools in rural Alberta and across the province and given that we are seeing record investments into Alberta's education system and further given that we continue to build more schools than the NDP ever did, to the same minister: can he please

compare the NDP's record on education to the UCP's record investments?

Mr. Nicolaides: I would be very happy to compare our record to the NDP's, and I'll do that, Mr. Speaker, by quoting the Leader of the Opposition directly when he stated on September 17, 2024, that the government is making a generational investment in schools. Furthermore, in comparison to the NDP's record when they were in government, they only approved 48 school projects. Our government has approved 77 projects. In addition, Budget '26 investments are 30 per cent higher than NDP operating budget.

The Speaker: I'm sure the minister appreciated all the help, but let's not offer any help to Calgary-Acadia because that's the only person we should hear from right now.

Indigenous Children in Care

Member Batten: Between 2024 and 2025 Alberta's Child and Youth Advocate reported that 60 children died while in care of the government, nearly 70 per cent of whom were Indigenous. That number has actually increased. Indigenous children remain overrepresented in care, and the Child and Youth Advocate remains deeply concerned. Despite repeated calls for action from advocates and communities nothing has changed. These horrific deaths of children continue. Mr. Speaker, why does this government continue to fail Indigenous children in care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for that question. We take extremely seriously the recommendations put forth by the OCYA. That's why we have met over 100 of those recommendations, because we know that those recommendations come from a place of wanting to care for kids. That's why every time one of those recommendations comes forward, my ministry takes those extremely seriously. We want to ensure that children in this province, especially Indigenous children that are within the system, are looked after, are cared for, and are supported.

Member Batten: Given that the minister just shared that they take it seriously but apparently not urgently given the zero actual actions and given that First Nation communities are losing whatever trust they had in this UCP government and given that the First Nation governments in Alberta like the Louis Bull Tribe are taking control of their own child welfare and dealing directly with the federal government under Bill C-92, bypassing this UCP government entirely, and given that such arrangements are becoming impossible if Alberta separates, why is this government more focused on separatism than working on solutions to protect Indigenous children in care?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta remains a leader right across Canada, working with Indigenous nations and transferring children's services over to the respective nations. As well, we work with DFNAs throughout the entire province to allow greater control for First Nations and their leadership to look after children. Coupled along with looking after the recommendations put forth by the OCYA, with over 100 recommendations being met and followed, the system is improving for Indigenous children here in the province.

Member Batten: Given that I'm not sure what that answer was and that that was incredibly disrespectful to everyone we have in the gallery today and given that chiefs from treaties 6, 7, and 8 are here today precisely because they no longer have trust or confidence in this government and given that First Nation communities are facing the loss of . . . [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Hon. member, take another 10 seconds so you can get your question out properly.

Member Batten: Given that the chiefs from treaties 6, 7, and 8 are here today precisely because they no longer have trust in this government and given that First Nation communities facing the loss of vulnerable children see the same reports year after year of more children dying in care of this province with no discernible actions to help foster resilience and stronger family supports, how can the First Nation families trust that this government will keep their children safe when it continues to show blatant disrespect for the treaties by . . .

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to that member for that question. Working with Indigenous leaders throughout the entire province is one of my highest priorities. We realize there are many Indigenous children in care, and that's something I take very seriously. That's why when we meet with Indigenous leaders, we get their feedback. We work with the delegated First Nations agencies throughout the entire province as well as with the First Nations throughout the entire province that have their IGBs. We realize that there's more that can be done, and that's why we continue to work with First Nations leadership and advocates about making the system better for children.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Indigenous Consultations on Health Care

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indigenous peoples in this province already face poorer health outcomes, low life expectancy, high infant mortality, high rates of chronic diseases, elevated suicide and injury, and greater burden of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, yet this government continues restructuring the health care system without meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities. Why haven't Indigenous partnerships been at the foundation of the health care system reform instead of having them left out as a second thought?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the member opposite needs to get his facts straight. We have been engaging. For the first time ever Indigenous communities were brought together under the modernizing Alberta's primary care system. It was an Indigenous stream. It was led by Indigenous leaders. It was actually Indigenous communities that put forward the recommendations that we are in fact implementing. It is unacceptable that there is a life expectancy discrepancy, and we're going to correct that . . .

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Haji: Given that the Modernizing Alberta's Primary Health Care System report was meant to improve access to culturally safe primary care yet many recommendations were completely ignored, given that this government has failed to implement a targeted recruitment and retention strategy for physicians serving Indigenous communities, how will this government ensure that Indigenous communities are not left with even worse access to care as a result of such a defunded and disintegrated public health care system that this government is working on?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, nothing could be further from the truth. I know the chiefs that are in the audience, which we've met with all of them, are actively searching for better health care for their people. In fact, for the first time ever my ministry has a whole division dedicated to Indigenous health. We've instituted Indigenous health navigators. We have an innovation fund. We are continuing to make improvements and strides, and we won't rest until that happens.

The Speaker: Minister, when I stand up, you've got to stop talking.

Mr. Haji: Given that Indigenous health leaders, whom we met just a week ago, have raised concerns about the lack of Indigenous health expertise in the new Indigenous health office within the minister's department, given that front-line roles such as elders and Indigenous patient licences have been cut, initiatives addressing infant mortality and chronic diseases have been discontinued, and mental health and addictions grants supporting community programs have been terminated, why is this government failing to invest in a comprehensive Indigenous-led primary health care system that meets the unique needs of Indigenous peoples of this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, inaccurate. In fact, we have continued to grow Indigenous engagement throughout all of the ministry. The ADM of that ministry is herself Indigenous, and she continues to make sure that they are well represented. We are working on an antiracism tool kit. We're adding health projects to the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. We're continuing to make sure that they have the ability to grow their workforce, and we're going to . . .

The Speaker: You've got to stop talking when I stand up. That's more times than enough.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Justice System Concerns

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Victims of crime rely on a justice system that is timely, transparent, and responsive. In some cases repeated adjournments have created uncertainty and emotional strain for those directly affected by the death of a loved one. These delays can stem from issues such as court capacity, resource pressures, or procedural backlogs but can also be used as delay tactics, as experienced by my constituents. Can the Minister of Justice please explain what this government is doing to improve the overall efficiency of our justice system to help victims move forward and bring families closure?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for that question. We're investing unprecedented amounts in Budget 2026 in our justice system to make sure that it runs efficiently, to make sure that the people in the courthouses remain safe, and to make sure that Albertans are heard. It's also why since June of 2023 we've made 42 judicial appointments, to increase capacity in our courts, have these processes move more quickly through the court system. Those are unprecedented numbers. Those investments and those appointments will ensure that Albertans get timely resolution to their matter as quickly as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that families of victims just like Christian often struggle to navigate prolonged court timelines and given that these repeated postponements create distress, making it harder for individuals and families to move forward, and further given that transparency and communication have meaningful impacts for victims, can the same minister please outline what supports are currently available to ensure victims are informed, supported, and kept up to date during the extended or repeated delays of court proceedings?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much again, Mr. Speaker. We've introduced the family justice strategy to begin with, and the purpose of that program is to keep as many matters out of the courtrooms as possible. We have family court mediators and family court navigators who are working directly with families to try to mediate and resolve disputes before they end up in the courtrooms. We also have a substantial increase this year of 11 and a half million dollars to court and justice services and the family court violence liaison program, which helps provide survivors with navigation services within our courts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that structural challenges in the courts can lead to delays and given that addressing these pressures is critical to maintaining trust in our courts and further given that this government is committed to a fair and efficient justice system, can the same minister please describe the steps this government is taking to increase our court capacity to reduce bottlenecks and ensure victims just like Christian are put first and offenders are dealt with appropriately so that families can move forward with the loss of a family member?

Mr. Amery: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of all the work that this government has done to support victims and make sure that criminals are held responsible and accountable for what is happening in our streets. It's why we got rid of the disastrous triage protocol program that put prosecutors in a difficult and precarious position. They are now to prosecute all viable files. We're also investing in our courthouses to ensure that videoconferencing exists all across our province. We are making sure that Albertans can access their courthouses no matter where they are.

Indigenous Health Outcomes

Member Eremenko: Mr. Speaker, by 2024 the average life expectancy at birth for Albertans was 81 years old. Also, by 2024 the average life expectancy at birth for First Nations people was 64. Seventeen fewer years on this Earth. Perhaps the minister will tell us that that, too, couldn't be further from the truth. How can we trust that a government with no confidence from treaty chiefs can

actually improve the lives of First Nations people living in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That, in fact, is true, and it is just a terrible tragedy that our Indigenous brothers and sisters have a shorter life expectancy. It's why we're working incredibly hard to make sure that we raise that bar, and part of raising that bar is making sure that they have the ability to have the programs that they need to address the issues within their communities, for example the Alberta Indigenous virtual care clinic, to make sure they have a really strong foundational primary care system.

Member Eremenko: Given that First Nations people have made many serious allegations of discrimination and bias in the health care system and given the results of such decisions can lead to dangerous if not fatal health and social consequences and given that the UCP government's Bill 13 now makes it illegal for professional associations to require cultural competency training, what will any of the health ministers do to close the 17-year gap in life expectancy when cultural competency training is illegal under this UCP government?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the member opposite, just for your information, in '26-27 alone we're going to spend an additional $1.8 million to develop an Indigenous cultural competency tool kit for health care providers. This is in conjunction also and on top of the antiracism tool kit. It also is, for the first time ever – I'd like to make you aware of the fact that we now have an Indigenous patient safety investigator and advocate role that never existed under the members . . .

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Eremenko: Given that the UCP government has stopped accepting applications for the Indigenous addiction and mental health fund and given that the program was designed for Indigenous communities to support opioid and addiction programs as well as culturally rooted mental health and wellness services and given that by 2022 First Nations people accounted for nearly a quarter of all opioid poisoning deaths despite only making up 3.4 per cent of the Alberta population, how can the province meaningfully address addictions, high suicide rates, and poor mental health outcomes for First Nations people when they do not have the confidence of treaty chiefs?

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

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much for the question. This was an important issue to me when I first started in this ministry. One of the very first things I did was I started what we call an Indigenous wisdom council, and we just met up in Bigstone Cree Nation. We braved the snowstorm and made it up there and back all right. It was a great meeting. I've got representatives from across the entire province, and we're working on how we can better interact with all of our Indigenous people to make sure that they get the proper care they need for addictions and mental health.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Emergency Services

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apartment building owners are required to maintain an exterior lockbox containing a master key so firefighters can quickly access the building during emergencies and safely evacuate residents. This system prevents delays and reduces the need for forced entry. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why do ambulance crews and police officers not have the same access to these prevention boxes when responding to urgent medical- or safety-related calls that also require timely entry?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the member. Under Alberta's fire code local authorities determine the construction, key, and location of lockboxes within their communities so that local fire services can access buildings during emergencies. Municipalities are responsible themselves for determining fire service needs in their communities, including operational decisions such as access systems. That said, Municipal Affairs is aware of the concern the member has raised about access for other emergency responders, and we're willing to review the latest edition of Alberta's fire and building codes. We will continue working with municipalities and the member . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.
The hon. member.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that a fire truck is automatically dispatched whenever an ambulance responds or when police may need to force entry to provide access and considering the significant cost and time efficiencies of deploying multiple emergency units when only one may be required, to the same minister: is it necessary to continue tying up entire emergency teams in situations where a single appropriately trained service could safely handle the call?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again through you to the member. Municipalities are responsible themselves for determining fire service needs, as I mentioned previously, within their local communities, including service levels, organization, and operational decisions such as dispatch, as the member from our benches mentioned. What our government can do is work closely with municipalities and public safety partners to ensure communities have the tools and information they need to make the right decisions locally to address the emergencies as they arise. Multiple examples of collaboration exist, including the Provincial Fire Liaison Committee, which I'm very happy that the previous minister set up before I arrived.

The Speaker: Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the same minister for that answer. With the provincial government facing fiscal pressures and municipalities experiencing increasing financial strain, it is increasingly important that we examine how emergency services are deployed. Albertans expect both effective service and responsible spending. To the Minister of Hospital and Surgical Health Services: could the province begin seeking efficiencies in our response measures that improve both outcomes in need while also respecting the taxpayers who are footing the bill?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost, we're modernizing emergency health services across the province so that we can provide better care to more people more quickly. That includes investing $40 million over two years through our emergency health services vehicle capital program to maintain and replace aging ambulances and other vehicles that have reached the end of their life. We've also increased the number of paramedics registered across the province to a record 9,385, which includes 1,547 emergency responders and about 4,500 primary care paramedics. With our new emergency health services primary provincial . . .

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

Indigenous Consultations on West Coast Pipeline Proposal

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, when Rachel Notley and the Alberta NDP government built the Trans Mountain pipeline with the federal government, increasing oil exports by 300 per cent, they did everything they could . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. We need to hear the question.
Go ahead.

Ms Al-Guneid: They did everything they could to build relationships based on trust and respect with Indigenous communities along the pipeline route. But this UCP government: they managed to achieve what no other government did, a unanimous vote of nonconfidence in the Alberta government by the First Nations chiefs. How does the Premier plan to get a new pipeline built when First Nations say that this UCP government is not accepted at the table?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to say that just this past weekend I was speaking to many Indigenous leaders in Alberta about the pipeline, and there is tremendous excitement about this project because we know we need to get our products to market . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
I talked to us about hearing the question. Now I'm going to talk to us about hearing the answer.
Go ahead, Minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: The conversations have been rooted around equity participation. What does that look like? What do the economics look like? I've also engaged with Treaty 8 and Treaty 6 just in mid January not too long ago and have received a lot of positive feedback.
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the chiefs are just right here and given that every major bill this UCP government has passed was pushed through without meaningful consultation with Indigenous communities, whether sweeping powers over interbasin water transfers, dismantling AHS in favour of a two-tier health care system, or pushing through Bill 54 to allow for a separatist referendum, this government keeps legislating first and consulting later, if at all. Why would any First Nation trust this government enough to partner on a new pipeline to B.C.?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I regularly meet with Indigenous leaders about the pipeline and other projects that are of interest, in particular the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, which has backstopped about $750 million in loan guarantees. We brought eight projects across the finish line. I get many, many questions from Indigenous leaders about how they can participate in some of these projects as well. I'm very satisfied that the government of Alberta is engaging appropriately on this pipeline project. We will continue to do so, and certainly we have received feedback from Indigenous leaders.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the chiefs absolutely have many questions, Mr. Speaker, and given that Grand Chief Mercredi said plainly, and I quote here, it is hard to have a seat at the same table with somebody when you don't trust them, when you have no confidence that they're going to take your issue seriously, end quote, and given that there are no shortcuts when it comes to the Crown obligations and the UCP government's obligations on the duty to consult, a simple question: when will the Premier clearly reject separation, respect treaty responsibilities, and stop putting Alberta's economic future at risk?

The Speaker: That was a great example of finishing right on time.
Minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me just say once again that I have an open-door policy to anyone who wants to engage with me or meet with me about any of our economic projects that we have on the horizon. When it comes to this pipeline project, I know that we have a rigorous agenda in place to make sure that engagement is happening to the extent that it's required. Please don't hesitate to come meet with me. Again, open-door policy.
Thank you very much.

Coal Development and First Nation Treaty Rights

Dr. Elmeligi: Treaty rights in Alberta involve inherent, constitutionally protected rights for First Nations to access, use, and protect water for fishing, hunting, trapping, and gathering, rights that are directly threatened by coal mining proposals on the eastern slopes. Fish in Crowsnest Lake already have dangerously high levels of selenium in their bodies from legacy coal mines, and people are now advised to limit consumption of fish from this lake. How is allowing the pollution of the eastern slopes' waters and destruction of its fish respectful of these constitutionally protected rights?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Our Constitution is the highest forum of the land, and this government is going to make sure that we enforce and respect that. But let's be clear. This Premier has made it very clear that water is to be our forefront opportunity at every level in coal. Now, we're going to be very careful with it because we know how important flora, fauna, the wildlife is, and the human nature of dealing with these things. We're going to protect water at every single course and make sure that that is our primary concern. [interjections]

2:40

The Speaker: Let's just hear the one asking the question, and then we'll just listen to the one answering the question, too.

Dr. Elmeligi: Given a cornerstone of honouring treaty rights comes from adequate and meaningful consultation with First Nations on development, given First Nations across Alberta have been raising concerns about coal mining impacts on communities and water supply for years, given Keepers of the Water condemned the expansion of the Vista coal mine, citing threats to Indigenous rights,

water quality, fragile ecosystems, and trout habitat, why has the minister chosen to ignore the needs of First Nations communities' access to clean and abundant water threatened by coal mining expansion and operations?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the NDP made a mess of coal when they invited billionaires to come into Alberta and deal with coal. We have taken steps to solve that, but let's be clear. Met coal is a very important thing. Met coal makes steel, steel that's necessary for pipelines, for water pipelines, for blue circles on the side of highways, and governments can make a decision either to support water infrastructure or blue circles. I know where we're going to stand. I know what the Leader of the Opposition did. He's for blue circles. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Dr. Elmeligi: Given the only steps this government is taking, Mr. Speaker, are magical ones that lead to a land where selenium doesn't end up in the water – that doesn't exist – given one of the principles of effective consultation is that it is done in good faith and that all impacted people have an opportunity to influence decision-making, given that consultation typically falls to proponents who literally buy the community's approval, given promised economic revenue does not often materialize for First Nations, why is the government not demanding more thorough, objective consultation, and why are they not standing up for First Nations' treaty rights to ensure their fair treatment by proponents?

The Speaker: Order.

Just the minister, and if we have trouble hearing, we'll give him more time. Go ahead.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we're always going to stand up for the highest law of the land, and that's the Constitution. Treaty rights are part of that, but let's be clear: we know where the NDP want to take us. They want to take us back to burning wood in caves. I understand that's where they are on their science, because they don't recognize what's happening today. Do you know that right now there is technology that is removing between 95 and 99 per cent of selenium from runoff? The technology is already being used in Elk valley in B.C., where they made a mess of it. We're not going to do that. We're going to keep water as number one, because water is life. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Hon. members, in about 30 seconds we will continue with the daily Routine.

Members' Statements
(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, the next member's statement belongs to the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Alberta Separatism and First Nation Treaty Rights

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an unprecedented time in Alberta's history. The Assembly of Treaty Chiefs, representing the three treaties that cover Alberta, treaties 6, 7, and 8, have passed a unanimous vote of no confidence in the government of Alberta. They have called on us to do the same as members of this Legislature.

Treaties 6, 7, and 8 are part of the constitutional fabric that holds our communities together, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. These treaties are the foundation of all of us living in this beautiful place that we call home. Like our Constitution, treaties are living documents. The medicine chest clause in Treaty 6 has grown and evolved with us, no longer meaning a literal chest of medicine supplies given to reserve communities but, rather, a symbol of our commitment as a province and a society to continue to provide free, public, and comprehensive health care for all communities.

As unprecedented as this call from the treaty chiefs may be, it should not be a surprise. The UCP government has repeatedly shown indifference, disrespect, and arrogance toward the numbered treaties and the values that they represent, straining Alberta's relationship with Indigenous communities. By encouraging separatism and laying the groundwork for a destructive unconstitutional referendum on separation, they are now threatening to tear the treaties apart page by page.

Instead of working together to build trust and build the nation-to-nation relationships we need to grow our economy, get big projects done, and nurture our communities, the UCP government is catering to those who want to tear our communities apart with a divisive separatist referendum. It is no surprise that the chiefs are now speaking out and saying, "Enough," and we are proud to add our voices to theirs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Budget 2026

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to support Budget 2026, a budget built on responsibility, stability, and a clear plan for Alberta's future. At a time of global uncertainty our government is choosing stability. We are protecting core services, investing in communities, and managing taxpayer dollars carefully to protect families while ensuring a strong and secure future for the next generation. This budget proves that we can strengthen Alberta today while planning wisely for tomorrow.

For the Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock constituency this commitment is clear. With the continued modernization of Barrhead composite high school as well as the ongoing replacement projects for école Mallaig K to 12 and the Holy Family K to 12 school in Waskatenau, a particularly exciting development in my riding is the planning phase for a new school on the Buffalo Lake Métis settlement.

Transportation is also a huge priority in rural Alberta, and a $50 million investment to replace the highway 33 bridge over the Athabasca River near Fort Assiniboine is big news for my riding. This project will ensure safe travel and reliable economic connections for families, farmers, and industry. There will also be continued improvements made on highway 28, and the repaving of highway 769 has entered the design phase. As well, planning for improvements on highway 881 north of St. Paul to St. Vincent has also begun.

Budget 2026 also indicates a strong commitment to continue the local government fiscal framework funding for municipalities across our region. These investments empower local leaders to improve roads, utilities, and community facilities that residents rely on every day.

Mr. Speaker, this budget supports our children and families, strengthens our infrastructure, and respects the taxpayers. It builds confidence in rural Alberta and in the future that we are building together.

Thank you.

Alberta Separatism

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, "This UCP government has created conditions in Alberta that are unsafe for First Nations Peoples . . .

its support for the separatist agenda is leading to outright racism." Those are the words of Treaty 6 Grand Chief Joey Pete after the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs of treaties 6, 7, and 8 unanimously passed a vote of nonconfidence in this Premier's government on February 26, 2026. The chiefs said that the motion was prompted by the "government's refusal to respond appropriately to the current political atmosphere on . . . Treaty territories." That should be a wake-up call to every member of this Assembly. What the Premier is doing by flirting with separatism is bringing uncertainty to this province, uncertainty that carries an economic cost.

Treaty 8 Grand Chief Trevor Mercredi warned that "the growing climate of division and separation is a direct result of [this government's] failure to respect Treaty Rights, constitutional obligations." When First Nations leaders are warning of division and constitutional risk, no serious government should be fanning those flames, and Alberta can least afford that instability right now.

The $9.4 billion deficit projected for the next fiscal year exposes how vulnerable this province remains to volatility and loss of confidence. At a moment when Alberta needs predictability, stability, and investor confidence, this Premier is doing the opposite. In fact, the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce CEO warned that talking about separatism is costing us the leverage we need to win the fights that matter and that separatist talk would paralyze Alberta's economy and raise borrowing costs and shrink our markets. This is the real cost of the Premier's gamble with separatism: more risk to Albertans, reduced investor confidence, fewer jobs, and greater harm to Alberta's economic future. This is a gamble no one in our province can afford.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I read oral notice, I just wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Standing Order 7(8) the daily Routine may continue beyond 3 p.m.

Notices of Motions

Mr. Schow: Okay. Mr. Speaker, I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 34, sponsored by myself, which reads as follows.

> Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly order pursuant to section 15 of the Citizen Initiative Act the following:
> (1) A select special citizen initiative proposal review committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to review the Alberta Forever Canada citizen initiative policy proposal, which was tabled in the Assembly by the Speaker of the Assembly on December 2, 2025, sessional paper 241/2025;
> (2) The committee consists of the following members: Lunty, chair; Sawhney, deputy chair; Ellingson; Nixon; Pancholi; Sawyer;
> (3) The committee continues despite a prorogation of a session and may without leave of the Assembly meet during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
> (4) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff, assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair;
> (5) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may utilize the services of employees of the Legislative Assembly Office or, with the concurrence of the head of a department or an officer of the Legislature, utilize the services of employees of the public service employed in that department or office;
> (6) The committee must submit to the Assembly within 90 days after the passage of this motion if the Legislative Assembly is then sitting or, if the Assembly is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting either
> (a) a report with respect to the policy proposal at the earliest, practicable opportunity, or
> (b) a report recommending that the policy proposal and report be referred to the Lieutenant Governor in Council for the purpose of a referendum in accordance with the Referendum Act.

Mr. Speaker, I also rise to give oral notice of Bill 17, the Fiscal Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, sponsored by the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give notice that pursuant to Standing Order 42 at the appropriate time I intend to move the following motion.

> Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly does not have confidence in the government due to its ongoing failure to renounce separatism, which has severely damaged relations between First Nations and the government and is incompatible with respect for treaty rights.

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 the hon. Mr. Amery, Minister of Justice, Alberta Human Rights Commission 2024-25 annual report.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Jones, Minister of Hospital and Surgical Health Services, pursuant to the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act Give Life Alberta 2023 annual report and Give Life Alberta 2024 annual report.

The Speaker: Okay. That takes us to points of order.

The first one was after the member's statement. The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In advance of the point of order I will just say that the points of order called at 2:06 and 2:11 will be withdrawn from the government side.

Point of Order
Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: I rise on point of order 23(h), (i), and (j), particularly using language that would create disorder. In the member's statement that was being given by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I believe it was, the member referred to the separatist Premier and the separatist UCP members. Mr. Speaker, it is no more appropriate to call the Premier a separatist Premier than it would be to call the Leader of the Opposition a communist or something else that would be distasteful or less than favourable for that member in their own opinion.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is a point of order. This language should not persist, referring to specific members or generally a party as a separatist party. That is not appropriate in this Chamber. I'll leave it in your hands.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I disagree completely with the Government House Leader in his arguments. Debate in this Chamber about whether or not this is a separatist government, a separatist UCP

caucus led by a separatist Premier who is putting forth a separatist agenda are all things that we have talked about in this House and we will continue to talk about in this House because it is so important.

Now, the practices and precedents of this Chamber inform future rulings, and based on past rulings, Mr. Speaker, it has been very clear that talking about collectives as a matter of debate is parliamentary and has not been ruled a point of order. Where there have been points of order is when an individual has been addressed. Now, there have been exceptions, very important ones. Specifically, I will refer you to the Speaker's ruling on April 11, 2024, that reads: "This is a matter of debate on the former Premier's record, which we're not here to do. This is not a point of order." Specifically, that ruling on April 11, 2024, led to rulings on November 5, 2024, and April 14, 2025, all cases where the Premier acting as head of state and their actions were deemed not to be a point of order when the language was used because they represent the collective; they represent the government.

Specifically on the point of order on April 14, 2025, I would note that this was on a point of order where a member at the time asked: "Why is the Premier threatening a national unity crisis and encouraging Alberta separatism to gain some sort of maple MAGA political advantage?" I will not read this all, Mr. Speaker, but I will tell you that was not found to be a point of order, specifically for the reasons that I have outlined. Talking about a collective is not a point of order. Talking about the Premier as the head of state has not been ruled a point of order.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would note – and I do not have the benefit of the Blues – by my recollection and the information that I have, I believe that the member said, "but that is exactly what we are seeing happen with this separatist Premier and UCP government." In that sentence she is speaking about a collective.

Mr. Speaker, I do not have the references for you, but I would point out that the minister of community and social services on a regular basis will name a member on our side and then say "and the opposition," turning it into a collective. We have not been calling the myriads of points of order because when we have, it was found not to be a point of order because it was referencing a collective. If you rule this to be a point of order today, Mr. Speaker, I will have to call many, many more points of order on the members opposite.

I do not believe this is a point of order.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader only if you have something new and you do not enter into debate.

Mr. Williams: Agreed. I do have something new that is important precedent. The Opposition House Leader made multiple references to 2024 on April 11 particularly and also throughout April of '25. However, all of that debate culminated in a decision from the Speaker on April 30, 2025, pages 3085-3086, where the debater on the floor said, "The Premier is a separatist," and was found to be referring, according to the Speaker's ruling, "directly to the Premier as a separatist is a point of order." So the culmination of that debate and the precedent that the member opposite was citing clearly states that this is a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

The Speaker: Okay. I have the Blues. This is what they say: ". . . remind us that governments in this country have obligations that cannot simply be tossed aside, but that is exactly what we are seeing happen with this separatist Premier and UCP government." Okay. That's what the Blues say was said.

Now, the debate here is interesting. Some of the precedent, of which some of it was referenced even today, of Speaker Kowalski's ruling on December 1, 2010 – part of it said:

> I want to repeat again that there should be as wide a latitude as possible provided, that the Speaker should not deal with points arising out of members' statements, but that the members themselves have to discipline themselves with the civility and decorum that's requested and deal with [the] policy matters and not personalities. Without that, it turns into a donnybrook . . . Civility, decorum, [and] respect are very important. This is not an opportunity for someone to personally attack someone else.

On April 30, 2025, Speaker Cooper ruled that "referring directly to the Premier as a separatist is a point of order, and I'll ask the hon. member to apologize and withdraw." So there it is. There are a couple of examples. Both sides mentioned precedent, but the precedent is that.

Listen, there are several times that the word "separatist" was used. This is a House of debate. If, you know, you're talking about separatist policy even, I think it's a long-standing precedent here that you can insult the other party more than you can insult an individual. We don't like insults, but they happen here. In this particular case the Premier, out of using the phrase "this separatist Premier," was directly and personally insulted. I think it's a point of order. I think the member that used those words could probably accomplish the same thing while not offending the practices of this place, but they did not choose a different way and did offend the practices of this place. So it is a point of order, and I'll respectfully ask the member to apologize and withdraw that remark.

Mr. Schow: I referenced the wrong member, Mr. Speaker. It was the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. My apologies.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: That concludes this matter, and that is all the points of order we have today because I think all the other ones were withdrawn.

Mr. Schow: Nope. There's still another one.

The Speaker: Is there? I thought you said 2:06 and 2:11 were gone. Oh, there's one at 1:59. Okay. Pardon me. The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order
Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Yeah, Mr. Speaker. There is one at 1:59, and this is the mistake that I made. I referenced the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford in that one when actually this point of order is against the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. In that member's comments – I do apologize to the House. Mistakes happen. We move on.

Member Irwin: We look the same.

Mr. Schow: We're talking about looks now?

Mr. Speaker, I reference a point of order by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford at the time noted. The member said, "separatist Conservative party." We've gone back and forth about renaming names of the parties. This one definitely creates disorder under 23(h), (i), and (j), and there is also precedence for this. Changing party names or inferring ideologies upon parties is frequently called out of order. For example, April 9 of 2014 on page 400, "lake-of-fire party;" November 29, 2012, "wild Alliance;" June 23, 1988, "fascist government;" and of course who could forget November 26, 2019, "the incel caucus," which, given the person who made the insult, is slightly ironic.

Mr. Speaker, I would say . . . [interjections] Withdraw. Withdraw.

The Speaker: Oh, no. This is – and apologize. Thank you.

Mr. Schow: With that said, Mr. Speaker, it was offensive then, and to rename parties, whether we like it or not, is not appropriate in this Chamber. There is precedence. I hear the members have lots of things to say on this point of order, and I'll give them that opportunity in a moment. What I would say is if we're going to proceed down this path and continue to refer to one party or the governing party as a separatist party, this will continue to be called a point of order. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. We're sorting out the past bad behaviour; let's not add to it with current bad behaviour.

Go ahead.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The precedent to not rename somebody's constituency or party name or whatnot is long held here, and I would agree that that would be a point of order. But that is not what has happened here. Referring to the separatist Conservative party is describing the Conservative Party. SCP is not their acronym. This is not an attempt to be clever and rename something. It was a descriptive word before "Conservative Party." I simply disagree with the government on the reason why they had a concern here.

Mr. Speaker, the idea that talking about the government being separatist is something that might not be allowed to happen here, given that this government passed Bill 14, which was debated in this place, that enabled the separatist referendum, that this government passed Bill 54, debated in this place, that lowered the threshold on separation, that this government hosted the Fair Deal Panel and sent their lawyers . . .

The Speaker: I think we're in debate now.

Ms Gray: Yep. Apologies.

The Speaker: And withdraw.

Ms Gray: And withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Gray: I did not intend to continue to . . .

The Speaker: No, thank you. Thank you. Both sides have wandered into debate, and both sides have had to apologize. That's what happens when you say derogatory things in here and get everybody upset. It just doesn't lead to better behaviour in this place; it leads to worse behaviour. And now we've wasted 10 minutes of our . . . [interjection]. I'm talking right now. We wasted 10 minutes of our life that we'll never get back dealing with points of order, as we often do. We never get those minutes back.

Listen, this is one of those ones that walked the line. The phrase was "separatist United Conservative Party." Was the comma between "separatist" and "United Conservative Party?" I don't know. It was spoken, so I have no way of knowing that. It was on the line, and I don't advise that. In a House of debate making suggestions on what the other party may or may not believe as a party and not an individual is something that we largely allow around here, so it's not a point of order, but that doesn't make it a good idea. I will caution both sides not to go down this road of ramping up descriptions of the other party that are only going to cause disorder. There are the other parts of 23(h), (i), and (j) saying things that will cause disorder. Just don't do it. You all know how to do it. You all know how not to do it. Let's make good decisions. That solves that.

Point of Clarification

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, under 13(2) prior to us moving on from points of order, I respectfully request the ability to debate the point of order called at 2:07, which I did not hear the government withdraw and I did not hear you say was dealt with and concluded and does concern the rights of one of my members to be able to speak in this Chamber. Can we debate that point of order?

The Speaker: Against my better judgment, go ahead.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To begin, if it would please the Speaker, I'd like to know what point of order was called first before I defend it.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the comment in question, that I suspect – I'd never assume – the member is referring to is the one that you called the Member for Edmonton-Glenora out of order. But in this instance . . .

The Speaker: Let me help you out with this. I heard the Member for Edmonton-Glenora suggest that the other side was not honourable. Everybody in this place is honourable. That's one of the rules we live by in here. Let me just say that people often say things that perhaps they shouldn't, but when you say them louder than anybody else in the place and it's clearly a nonparliamentary word, I just kind of thought I could save us some time today. I heard it as clear as I needed to hear it.

Mr. Schow: I would like to finish.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Schow: I did not call a point of order on this instance. The points of order that I withdrew were both against the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. There was no point of order from the government called on the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. So there is no point of order.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I understood a point of order was called at 2:07. I'm happy to quickly make my remarks.

The Speaker: Go ahead. Go ahead. I allowed it.

Ms Gray: Thank you.

The Speaker: That was my fault.

Ms Gray: No, I appreciate it, Mr. Speaker. At that time the Minister of Justice began his sentence and began speaking and said, "We've said time and again in this Assembly that Alberta's government is . . . committed to protecting and upholding and honouring the . . . First Nations treaties in this province." The heckle of the word "dishonourable" was said during that sentence. The precedent in this House around heckling – and we've had a lot of wonderful heckles. The words "corruption" and "corrupt" became particularly sensitive during previous sessions given the corrupt care scandal. The timing of when those things were said is really important. The only times that that has been ruled out is when saying that heckle and completing that sentence implies that an individual member was corrupt or corrupted.

3:10

In today's example the minister said, "We've said time and again in this Assembly that Alberta's government is," and if the word "dishonourable" was said at that point, there is absolutely no implication that she is calling any individual member. In fact, if I

may, Mr. Speaker, at the time the question that the minister was answering was a quote straight from the Court of King's Bench decision on the separatist petition put forward by the Premier's friends.

> Alberta's argument is not just wrong, it is dishonourable. The Justice Minister cannot stand in the Legislative Assembly in May citing [his legislation] as a protection for Treaty rights and then send his lawyers into Court in November to make [an] argument that [the same legislation] is not protection for Treaty rights.

I understand that your interruption was because you felt an individual member may have been called dishonourable. That is absolutely not what happened, and I hope that that is shown in your Blues. I am concerned about the rights of my member to be able to speak in the future and the Speaker's early intervention, which I think will contribute to disorder if we are not allowed to argue and defend ourselves in points of order. Things are fast and loud. They can be misheard, and to threaten to take away the right of a member to speak deeply concerns me.

I appreciate you allowing me to make my arguments.

The Speaker: There are no Blues because there was no point of order called. The member's conduct was disorderly. As Speaker under section 13(1) I have the authority to preserve order and decorum. That's what I did. I stand by it.

Let me just say it's – and I talked to this House at the beginning of the session about how many more points of order and things like that we have here than other Legislatures. Let's just try to bring a little bit of order to this place. Listen, we all often, once in a while, or sometimes some of us more often than others, say things that we know we probably shouldn't. But let me say this. If you say something so loud that it can't be missed and it includes unparliamentary words like calling somebody dishonourable or using the word "liar" – and there's a whole other list of words I don't need to say out loud here right now because that just might encourage the future use of it – I reserve the right to uphold the order and decorum in this place, and I'll do it again as I'm required, and that's the end of that.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Alberta Separatism and First Nation Treaty Rights

Mr. Nenshi:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly does not have confidence in this government due to its ongoing failure to renounce separatism, which has severely damaged relations between First Nations and the government and is incompatible with respect to treaty rights.

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand pursuant to Standing Order 42 to seek the unanimous consent of this House for us to have an emergency debate. Thank you, by the way, to Parliamentary Counsel for helping us draft that resolution.

Mr. Speaker, the motion of nonconfidence referred to in that resolution was tabled by the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs on February 26, which was our last sitting day in this House, so as pursuant to the rule we're standing up at our first available opportunity to talk about the urgency of this matter. I'm going to spend a few minutes to motivate the House, to talk about that urgency. That will require me to talk a little bit about the actual nature of that nonconfidence resolution, but I will restrict myself to talking about why this is urgent, as is required by the rules of the House.

First of all, this is our first chance to talk about this in the House. Today we have with us the chiefs from treaties 6, 7, and 8. Part of that nonconfidence motion that they tabled was a request for us to have this debate in the House, so my colleagues and I are standing today to ask for that debate.

I have to highlight that this is completely unprecedented. The Assembly of Treaty Chiefs in Alberta has never moved a nonconfidence motion on a government of Alberta in the past, and I believe, though I'm willing to be corrected, that no province has had a nonconfidence motion by the assembly of all the treaty chiefs of that province ever. If you believe in the definition of an emergency, Mr. Speaker, this is indeed an emergency.

When I look at the government's plans for this session, there is no opportunity to talk about Indigenous rights in the broad section of this nonconfidence motion that the chiefs have brought us. So unlike in previous cases where, for example, the government has said that there's no need for an emergency debate on health care because we always talk about health care or there are options to talk about health care later on, there is no such option this time, Mr. Speaker.

The House has not discussed this in the past in detail, and there is no option for us to do it according to the government's own work in this section.

It is, in fact, an immediate crisis, and it will in fact affect the business of government. The Premier and her government are constantly talking about this MOU that they trumpet about building a new pipeline, but the very first lines of that MOU are that it requires Indigenous consultation and consent. This motion of nonconfidence means that a major portion of this government's entire agenda is at very serious risk. It's important for us to talk about this because it faces all of Alberta's economic future. If we know that current leaseholders will have difficulty renegotiating their leases, if we know that it will be very hard to achieve Indigenous consent for pipelines, this goes to the very heart of the government's economic development strategy, and it's important for us to talk about how this government will fix it.

Quite clearly, Mr. Speaker, the chiefs asked for this. They asked for it because they want to give the government an opportunity to regain their confidence by denouncing separatism today. Frankly, I'm not so sure I'd be as generous as the chiefs were in making that motion of nonconfidence, but this is a direct request from them and from the First Nations people that they represent. Continued support for this government's agenda and for separatism will lead to even more nonconfidence. Although the government members today have given us a lot of pretty words on the things they're doing to help Indigenous peoples, none of it matters if the chiefs have said they do not have confidence in this government.

This is the chance for this government to gain back that confidence if they can by allowing this debate and determining whether or not they want to denounce separatism publicly. We heard today from the House leader that separatist is an insult, which is brand new to me, but certainly if that's what they believe, then here's a real opportunity for them to be able to prove it.

If this government feels it has confidence, now is the time for them to test it, and that is why I seek unanimous approval from this House.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I would like to begin by offering an apology to the Member for Edmonton-Manning that we are using a political stunt rather than going to private members' business. To that member on behalf of her own party I do want to offer an apology.

I'd also like to say that I rise in response to the NDP's request for unanimous consent for a confidence motion to be brought forward. I, Mr. Speaker, will be opposing this motion. As we've said before, the Constitution is the highest law in the land, and section 35 of the Constitution recognizes and affirms existing Aboriginal and treaty rights, providing constitutional protection for these rights. These protections guide and bind all levels of government in Canada, and they remain firmly in place. Any discussion about Alberta's future must take place within the framework of the Constitution, including the protections guaranteed to Indigenous peoples.

However, Mr. Speaker, it is clear that this is, as I had said, a political stunt led by the NDP attempting to distract Albertans from their own horrible record. I've been a member of this House for almost seven . . .

Mr. Nenshi: You're calling the chiefs a political stunt. Well done.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I do believe the Leader of the Opposition has already had his time to speak, and I'd like to have mine to rebut. What I can say . . .

Mr. Nenshi: You should be ashamed of yourself.

The Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I will agree with the Government House Leader that he might not have agreed with what you said – maybe he did – but he didn't interrupt you. Let's extend the same courtesy, shall we?

Carry on.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, it never ceases to amaze me that the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, continues to rise in this House to that level of bravado unencumbered by the truth, unencumbered by the facts. But again, as I had noted, I've been a member in this House for almost seven years, and if there is one thing I've learned, it's that the NDP makes a great opposition, the largest opposition in the history of Alberta's government. [some applause]

3:20

Yes, Mr. Speaker. Give yourself a round of applause for being opposition because you make an awful government. Now, they've become known, particularly their leader, for having lots to say, lots of insults, baseless accusations, but no plan. Now, this is yet another example of that.

The fact is that Albertans are frustrated. They have been frustrated for a long time by the bad federal policies that have hurt and killed industries, killed jobs, driven out investments, and they have hurt our economy. We shouldn't be surprised by that because we've been talking about this for years, but throughout that time the NDP was right here with their federal government partners, cheering them on.

Think back to a time when we had a party in government here in Alberta, a Liberal party in Ottawa, and the now Leader of the Opposition in the mayor's seat in Calgary, something that I like to call the triple black swan effect.

Mr. Nenshi: You mean getting a pipeline built?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition does not get to take credit for getting a pipeline built. In fact, he's the last guy who should be talking about pipelines right now.

Now if that wasn't enough, Albertans had to deal with the worst Finance minister this province has ever seen. Together they cooked up plans for carbon taxes, take away jobs for Albertans . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. We heard the Leader of the Official Opposition. I don't know whether anybody liked it or not. It doesn't matter. We heard them. That's what matters. Now the only thing that matters is that we hear the government make debate.

Mr. Schow: How much time do I have left, Mr. Speaker? How much time do I have remaining?

The Speaker: A minute thirty-four.

Mr. Schow: I'll just simply say this, Mr. Speaker. Our government is working hard to restore hope in Canada with agreements like the MOU to build pipelines, create jobs, and unlock economic potential, but I have to ask the members opposite and anyone watching: who do you think you are to say that Albertans don't have a right to be upset? Who do you think you are to say that Albertans don't have a right or a say in this province, and who do you think you are to say that Albertans don't have a right to have their voices heard? That's why we have citizen initiative referendums. We believe in direct democracy. We believe Albertans have a say, and shame on the members opposite for suggesting otherwise.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to oppose this unanimous consent motion, but it is redundant. We have a confidence motion coming up with the budget, and I encourage the members to vote in favour. I, for one, will not be voting against raises for teachers, I will not be voting against historic investment in building schools, and I will not be opposed to raising and spending money to build hospitals in this province, including in the great constituency of Cardston-Siksika. At this moment I dare the members to vote against this historic budget because I can tell you that if they do, they are not standing with Albertans and the investments we are making.

I will oppose this motion, this request of SO 42, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to do the exact same.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Mr. Nenshi: Cardston-Siksika, eh? Good luck with that.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Nenshi: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: That's how it's done.

Carry on. [Disturbance in the gallery] Order. This is the people's House.

Mr. Nenshi: All peoples.

The Speaker: Yes, all peoples. [Disturbance in the gallery] Order.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 204
Public Interest Disclosure (Publicly Funded Health Entity Whistleblower Protection) Act

[Debate adjourned December 1: Mr. Dach speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to adding my comments to Bill 204, Public Interest Disclosure (Publicly Funded Health Entity Whistleblower Protection) Act, in regard to health care and protecting our more than 174,000 health care workers from

being disallowed to affirm when they see that there is unlawful behaviour or when there is unhealthy behaviour and so forth.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

You know, I can just say, Madam Speaker, that having been in this Chamber for longer than anyone else, I have never seen such disgraceful behaviour as I have here this afternoon in regard to this UCP government and the bills and the emergency debate that were brought forward to us here this afternoon. To acknowledge at the very least that there is a problem would have been a much more diplomatic way, a much more adult and administrative way, to deal with the situation here this afternoon. Instead, they discounted what people were here for, why we had this emergency debate in place.

It tells me more now than ever the importance of having protections in place like Bill 204 to make sure that citizens are protected from being able to speak out at things that a government is doing that are wrong. If we don't do so, if we are cowed to silence, then these things don't go away. They only get worse. If you have obvious impropriety taking place, as we saw with the corrupt care scandal here in health care in these last couple of years, if you try to cow people to silence, it only brings out more of a problem that the government has to deal with, just like what we saw here today with this emergency debate.

We know that if you're not acknowledging treaty rights in this province, if you're going to choose to ignore it and then use somehow aggressive behaviour to ignore that and to try to obfuscate that, you're only making the situation worse. As I said, Madam Speaker, I've never seen such a poor standing of behaviour and a government dealing with the situation here in this Chamber, and I hope to never ever see it again.

Bill 204, as brought forward by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Manning, is very timely and is hotly anticipated by the 170-some thousand health care workers that are employed here in the province of Alberta. We need to make sure that not only are we allowing people to call something out when they know that it's wrong or that it's unhealthy behaviour, but they have the confidence to do.

I know from personal experience and from, you know, taking the temperature of our health care system over these last couple of years that morale has never been lower in our public health system. We've seen cuts. We've seen the systems being blown apart. We see a shortage of workers, a chronic shortage of workers, and then just this whole idea that if you see impropriety somehow, you've got to keep your mouth shut when you know that it's against the law or that it's unhealthy: that just adds to the burden of the stress and the instability that's taking place in our system.

We know that this government knows this, too. They have put forward committees to investigate some of these things. We've had some, you know, reports like the Wyant report talking about impropriety and talking about the corrupt care scandal, and they choose to do nothing about it. So at the very least – maybe we still have to deal with the past, because Lord knows it's a messy place to be back there – we can deal as well with the future and to make sure that this kind of thing doesn't happen again. That's what Bill 204 is about. It's in order to protect people that come forward with information that needs to be dealt with and to make sure that they're protected to do so.

3:30

To do the opposite is somehow, as I say, putting a gag on our health care workers. Who better would know how to make improvements to our public health system than the actual people who execute it? It's not people in the government, the four or five or six or eight ministers that they have here on health care now, but the nurses and the doctors and the support staff that are actually executing the public health in our system today.

Other jurisdictions around the country have done so and done so very successfully. I'm interested to see that Saskatchewan has whistle-blower protection, for example. You know, sometimes you can get best practices simply, Madam Speaker, from copying what other people are doing. We see that this government loves to copy the conservative government in Saskatchewan. Well, here's a good spot to actually do so, to emulate good practice, to start good practice, which is making sure we have whistle-blower protection in place.

I know that there is something similar afoot with this government in terms of a committee to try to build some whistle-blower protections as well. Well, here we are with a bill that can actually kick-start that very process. We don't have to wait for another three, four, five years. Lord knows what we just saw in the last 24 months or so with this government, with corrupt care, just how low you can go. We could walk out of this place in the next week or so with adequate whistle-blower protection that will bring back confidence to our public health system.

I encourage everyone to vote for this private member's bill. I think it's well constructed. I think it's been vetted by different groups, the different health care professional associations and so forth. Legally it's very sound, and you know, we hear echoes from some other people like the Judge Wyant report that said that we do need to go further. Wyant's findings very obviously showcased the need for increased accountability and transparency in Alberta's health system. In fact, Judge Wyant himself suggested that a formal public inquiry might be necessary to identify deeper accountability.

Corrupt care dug a huge hole in the system that we're just only beginning to climb out. This Bill 204 will make sure that kind of thing doesn't happen again.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join this debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my honour to rise to speak to Bill 204, Public Interest Disclosure (Publicly Funded Health Entity Whistleblower Protection) Act. This side of the House, Alberta New Democrats, does respect and value the expertise and efforts of our health care workers in our publicly funded health care system. Health care workers should not be afraid of losing their jobs when they're reporting wrongdoing like we have seen in this province's corrupt care system.

Madam Speaker, this bill will create the publicly funded health entity protection act to provide workers in all publicly funded health care entities uniform whistle-blower protection. This bill aims to build trust amongst employees and restore accountability across all publicly funded health care entities. Bill 204 provides legal protection for health care workers who deliver publicly funded health services whether they're employed by a public entity, a nonprofit, or private-sector health care provider. It covers all employees of publicly funded health entities operating under newly created government-funded structures as well.

This bill ensures that health care workers who report wrongdoing or misuse of public funds are able to do so knowing they are protected from unfair retributions. This will include clauses from the existing Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act as well as new clauses to ensure that workers in health entities funded by public tax dollars are fully protected in legislation. Any health entity that receives public dollars, whether directly or through a contract, is required to comply with the requirements of this bill; as an example, private chartered surgical facilities.

As my colleague the Member for Edmonton-North West has said, this is a very timely discussion on the issue that is very important. I also wanted to actually congratulate my colleague from Edmonton-Manning for bringing forward this bill to discuss this issue. Not only is this bill so timely to act on an issue that is very important, but given what we have gone through for the past few years in the province, this bill is a mandatory exercise to legislate protection not only to protect the individuals but to save the very institutions for public good.

I often hear from the government side that, you know, they want to defend and protect freedom of speech, and they brag about individual freedoms and all sorts of things. I expect that this time they will hopefully look at this bill and they will support the bill because that will support those very fundamental principles to not only protect but strengthen our institutions, the institutions that we did not build in one day, that have come this far, working through centuries.

What we have seen in the last two years: our health care system, specifically that system, has broken into so many different agencies and four different ministries. The outcome of those actions I've seen in my constituency, where the family of my constituents is devastated by losing a young – I would say 44 years old is relatively young – healthy gentlemen that got sick. The very first time in his life that he felt that sudden sickness, and he gave his life waiting eight and a half hours in the emergency waiting room, waiting for treatment. That is a direct outcome of those actions and those policies in what had happened and how it has impacted our institutions, our health care system, our hospitals, and our primary care.

3:40

On top of this, I've seen the Friends of Medicare organization actually organizing town halls across the province. I was privileged to attend one of their town halls and listen to first-hand information from Dr. Paul Parks, how our health care system is on the brink of breaking and failing our very needy, vulnerable sick people, looking at that, listening to the conversation. This bill actually protects and encourages people that reporting wrongdoing, reporting something that is dangerous to society or to the institution or the organization is not just their choice; it is their duty. But they're afraid in this province because that can take their job away. They can face huge consequences.

We have obviously seen that there are huge corrupt care scandals, Sam Mraiche involvement in health care contracts. We have seen Judge Wyant's report, and we have seen the gag orders by this government. The judge actually reported that. Something wrong has happened, but he was not able to communicate with those people who could just provide information.

Given the situation, the direction we are going in, the crumbling institutions of health and hundreds and hundreds of e-mails and complaints from my constituents and, sadly, personally seeing a constituent lose his life because of lack of support in emergency care, I think this bill is very important and this bill needs to be supported in the House. I'm hoping the government House members will not only look at this bill but also will like to get up and speak in favour of this bill and support the bill in the House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 204, Public Interest Disclosure (Publicly Funded Health Entity Whistleblower Protection) Act. We live in an uncertain world, a very uncertain world, and health care workers in particular have gone through months of uncertainty. Uncertainty is felt everywhere, particularly by health care workers, but even business surveys are showing that businesses feel higher levels of uncertainty than in any time in recent memory, higher than during COVID, higher than during the financial crisis of 2008.

Madam Speaker, this bill is talking to uncertainty and fear. We live in a time when hundreds of thousands of Albertans are actively engaged in petitions to either keep this country together or tear it apart, and health care workers have no idea what the future of their life looks like. Some of them are waking up one morning not even knowing who they report to that day, never mind the kind of work that they might be doing. Separatism has thrown everything into disarray, including this, and in an unprecedented way, causing treaty chiefs to raise their voices against the separatist agenda. We saw, Madam Speaker, not less than an hour ago how people's voices are swept aside and deemed irrelevant. In a very public display we experienced right here in this House and on so many previous occasions how some voices appear to carry more weight than others.

Health care workers also take note of these very public displays of some people having a greater voice than others, and they are afraid to speak up about the work experiences that they have, the workplace conditions that they have. That's what this bill is all about: to be protecting those workers when they have valid things to say and raise about the workplace that they're in. Yet they feel like their voice doesn't matter and, worse, that they might suffer retribution.

Health care workers have gone through so much disruption, Madam Speaker. This government has created multiple agencies from one. This government has advanced their privatization agenda, throwing the health care system into disarray. We saw only a few years ago when that privatization agenda was applied to laboratory services and only months later where the government had to backtrack, costing us tens of millions of dollars to try and put it back to the system that was already in place and functioning. Now we're going through it all over again on a much larger scale.

This government has caused health care workers to wonder who they're reporting to, and through all of that we haven't been listening to the very workers who deliver care to Albertans every single day. It's true. Albertans and health care workers were asking for a better system, but they didn't ask for the system that they face today, and they weren't asked how to make the system better. Madam Speaker, the Premier promised to fix health care in 100 days, and here we are more than three years later with a health care system that is in crisis and a government unwilling to engage in an emergency debate on that crisis, a health care system more confusing than ever for everyone who works in it and who is served by it, a health care system that is causing people to wait hours in emergency rooms and, regrettably, some of them dying before they see a physician.

Madam Speaker, we have in place the Public Interest Disclosure Act, which covers public health care workers, but this government passed Bill 55 and other acts disrupting the system, causing people to now be working for private-sector delivery agents, and PIDA isn't clear on whether or not this covers workers in private-sector companies or organizations that are funded with government funds. So we, the Alberta NDP in opposition, have come forward. The MLA from Edmonton-Manning came forward with proposed legislation that is going to solve some of the challenges that we see and the gaps that we see in the existing legislation. Bill 204 brings clauses forward from the existing PIDA Act. It adds new clauses to ensure that workers and agencies that are funded with public funds are protected, not just those workers that work for a public agency

but also those workers that work for a private agency but are funded with public funds.

Madam Speaker, there's precedent for this legislation. In fact, we saw that back in 2021 similar legislation was brought forward by the opposition in Saskatchewan. At the time it was defeated, but the governing conservative Saskatchewan Party brought it back, understanding that a good idea is a good idea no matter who or what party brings it forward. Bill 204 is a good idea, and it's good legislation. As we saw that, you know, other governments like that in Saskatchewan moved forward to protect workers, Alberta now has the opportunity to also move forward and protect its workers. This is necessary.

3:50

Madam Speaker, the people who work in the health care system are afraid and with good reason. We've seen that through the disruptions in our health care system. The CEO of AHS brought forward concerns about alleged corruption. She brought forward concerns and filed reports with the Auditor General about procurement processes in AHS. Rather than listening to her very valid concerns, what was the response? She was fired. Not only was she fired, but shortly thereafter the entire board of AHS was fired.

This is really not creating a space or a time where people feel like the government wants to listen to what's happening in our health care system. It doesn't feel like a time where health care workers can step forward and talk about what they are seeing with respect to procurement processes, what they are seeing with respect to conduct or workplace conditions. Again, in a very public way the person who did stand up and speak out against it lost her job, so others, rightfully so, think that if they stand up, they might also lose their job. In effect, health care workers, public workers, are being silenced.

Again, we see other examples of how public-sector workers have been silenced, with teachers who are raising their very real concerns about classroom conditions, about crowding, about, you know, complex classrooms that were just very difficult to ensure that the students in those classrooms were going to get the very best education that they deserve. What was the response from this government? To use the notwithstanding clause and force them back to work without making any changes in the classroom or for those kids. Again, Madam Speaker, as we talk about Bill 204, we have to keep in mind that public-sector workers have very real fears and very real concerns.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 204, the public interest disclosure (publicly funded health entity) act brought forward by my colleague, my neighbour, the MLA for Edmonton-Manning. Now, you might wonder why this is a piece of legislation that's being brought forward. I think a lot of Albertans assume that those that work in health care are supported and valued and are able to disclose when things are going wrong. Unfortunately, that is not the case, especially what we've seen under this government. When there are significant consequences to health care providers in all areas losing their jobs, being publicly shamed for coming out and speaking out against concerns that they have, against allocation of dollars that they've seen done so in a corrupt sort of way, what this legislation is going to do is it's going to essentially protect the voice of those that are expressing concern.

We have seen a government that's been focused on helping themselves and their friends, especially when it comes to health care, with allocation of contracts in the millions of dollars. When this was brought forward as a concern, what happened was that one of the UCP ministers left government, became an independent member, and the AHS board was fired. There were a whole bunch of consequences when people started to talk about their concerns about how this government has been wrongfully allocating funds in the health care system.

As Alberta New Democrats we respect and value the expertise and efforts of our health care workers in a publicly funded health care system. This is something that has been consistent with who we are, what our values are. I would say, Madam Speaker, that the majority of Albertans believe that the experience and knowledge of our health care workers should be respected and should be listened to, and there should not be any sort of consequence when they disclose wrongdoing or misuse of public dollars. They should not be afraid of losing their jobs when they report wrongdoing.

Now, we've watched this government dismantle the health care system. They've created four different entities under health care. They're working aggressively to privatize the health care system. Those that see it first-hand are our health care workers. This piece of legislation, if passed, would protect approximately 135,000 health care workers in the province. Now, that's 135,000 people that see every day, front line, what is happening within our health care system.

Now, I would suggest that private members' business – we've watched this government not support private members' business when it has come from this side of the House. I would hope that government is listening to Albertans demanding that health care workers are treated with respect and not punished when they disclose wrongdoing within the health care system. I think being able to provide workers in all publicly funded health care entities uniform whistle-blower protection is the right thing to do. I think that it would help build trust again amongst employees and restore accountability across all the publicly funded health care entities.

I know that within my experience in the last year of being involved in the health care system due to illness myself, it's not good out there, Madam Speaker. I know that it's not just me that has had a horrible experience with the system, not the workers. The workers are desperately trying to do their best. The amount of moral injury that they're facing because they aren't able to do the job that they so desperately want to do, the impact on those health care providers is absolutely inexcusable. We should not be putting our health care workers in the position where they're having moral injury imposed on them daily because of the disruption that this government has done to the health care system, and then we're not giving them safety in their ability to report that.

Now, this legislation would do that. It would make sure that all employees of publicly funded health entities operating under the UCP's newly created governance and funding structures are covered. It makes sure that they're protected from any unfair retribution, which I think would create space for so many to come forward and actually talk about what's happening within the health care system. We've watched this government completely dismantle AHS, like I said before, replacing it with four new agencies providing health care services. That's four new ministers that are responsible for health care.

4:00

We've heard in the news and in this Chamber absolutely devastating stories of Albertans that have suffered greatly because of this decision to not support health care in this province. My colleague from Edmonton-Meadows just rose in the House talking about the death of a patient in the emergency room and the impact that that has had on his community and overall, I would say, a fear

for many Albertans. We hear story after story of people scared to access health care, that they are worried that if themselves, their child, their loved ones get ill, they could die in the emergency rooms in this province. That is a fear that they have because we've watched it happen, Madam Speaker.

I think when we're listening to Albertans, we should be listening to those that have that front-line, first-hand experience, and that is our health care workers. The only way that they're going to feel safe enough to come forward is by supporting this piece of legislation. I think having Bill 204 pass would signal to those that work in health care that this government wants to make change. Despite what we're seeing, despite all of the lack of funding and support that we've watched from this government, I think that by passing this piece of legislation, it could show health care workers that their voice matters and that they're not going to be punished if they come forward.

Now, I know that this government is hearing directly from health care workers because we're often CCed in those e-mails when they send them to the Premier or one of the four health ministers talking about, you know, the need for timely access to a doctor. There are thousands of Albertans right now without access to a family doctor. There are thousands of Albertans waiting for appointments with specialists of all different kinds in this province.

My specialist referral was two years under urgent. Now, that is absolutely not acceptable. When I spoke about this in this very House, I was quite emotional. I was upset, and members of the government were laughing, Madam Speaker. People trolling on the Internet were saying that I was lying. If we give space for health care workers to come forward and actually talk about the reality, my story wouldn't be the only one. There are wait-lists for specialists. There are wait-lists for surgeries, absolutely unacceptable wait-lists.

In the previous session I had put forward a piece of legislation asking for accountability regarding wait times and diagnostics and treatment for cancer because currently those that are diagnosed with cancer and are awaiting assessment and treatment . . . [Ms Goehring's speaking time expired]

Thank you. I hope everyone supports this, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today's health system runs on trust, trust that patients will be protected and that public funds will be used responsibly and that people who see problems first will feel safe and speak up. Strong whistle-blower protections are a cornerstone of patient safety, ethical care, and public accountability. On that principle there are differences between us on this side of the aisle and the other. Where we differ is how best to secure those protections. Today I rise in opposition to Bill 204 because it's premature, duplicative, complex, and ultimately unnecessary. [interjection] Yes, I used the word "unnecessary." It's double sided.

Alberta already has a comprehensive framework, the Public Interest Disclosure Act, PIDA, which is in the process of being reviewed by the Resource Stewardship committee, which I sit on. In fact, I believe we are about to table their report. Let's take a moment to review their good work, because the right way forward is to strengthen the act, not fracture it.

Madam Speaker, to begin, Bill 204 is premature and problematic. The bipartisan committee of this Legislature is already engaged in a comprehensive review of PIDA. Stakeholders from across the health sector – front-line staff, managers, professional colleagues, labour representatives, and patient advocates – have submitted written evidence and recommendations. Introducing a sector-specific act now risks short-circuiting this careful work. Let the committee complete its review, test the evidence, and propose improvements across the public sector, including health. We shouldn't shoehorn a new statute in just as that process begins.

Furthermore, our current protections under PIDA are strong and proven. PIDA protects the public interest, including health, safety, fiscal responsibility, and ethical conduct. It allows employees to disclose wrongdoing from unlawful acts or omissions that create a substantial or specific danger to life, health, and safety. Protection doesn't begin only when a formal complaint is filed; it starts the moment a worker seeks advice, refuses to participate in wrongdoing, or co-operates with an investigation. Reprisals, dismissal, demotion, layoff, reductions in hours of pay, transfers, and reprimands are explicitly prohibited, and those who retaliate or obstruct investigations commit offences under the act.

PIDA builds confidence in anonymity, addressing the fear that keeps people silent. It requires great public entities to have a designated officer and written processes with timelines for receipt, review, investigations, and reporting so cases are handled systematically, not ad hoc simply by order of submission. It provides independent oversight through the Public Interest Commissioner, who can approach directly with full powers to access records and investigate disclosures and reprisals. When reprisals are found, remedies including reinstatements, lost wages, damages, and legal cost reimbursements are available through established tribunals such as the Labour Relations Board.

This is a robust end-to-end system. It works, and it already applies to the health sector. Health organizations, AHS among them, have aligned safe disclosure slash whistle-blower policies with PIDA. Staff, learners, volunteers, even members of the public can report serious wrongdoings through multiple safe channels: the AHS designated officer, the chief officer, or directly to the Public Interest Commissioner. Policies emphasize confidentiality and anonymity – I'm having a hard time with that word – to the extent possible while respecting legal duties when imminent harm is involved. They distinguish whistle-blowers from routine HR grievances, keeping the mechanism focused on serious risk of ethical failures, and they prohibit reprisals against good-faith reporters. The combined framework between PIDA, institutional policy, and independent oversight is comprehensive, balanced, and practical. If we want to do more for health workers, the right fixes are implementation improvements, not new legislation.

Madam Speaker, Bill 204 is complex, overlapping, ambiguous, and unnecessary. Rather than building on PIDA, Bill 204 duplicates it and then layers in vague modifications for different health entities. It cross-references, carves out and alters sections of PIDA, which creates uncertainty about which rules apply when and to whom. Section 21 even forces employees to choose between filing under Bill 204 or PIDA for the same type of concern, an avoidable fork in the road that can delay actions and discourage reporting.

4:10

Key terms are ambiguous. "Reasonable human resource management decisions" are not defined, inviting disputes and creating space for reprisal to be disguised as routine decisions. The bill's scope depends on future regulations to flesh out critical concepts like gross mismanagement, who counts as an employee, and which entities are covered. All of that adds complexity without adding protection.

Two overlapping acts means two sets of policies, training, and reporting structures, more legal costs, and more confusion for every person involved, who we, by the way, want to empower. The risk isn't theoretical. Duplication leads to fragmented oversight, delayed

investigations, duplicative remedies, and worst of all, fewer disclosures because staff don't know how or which door to knock on.

Lastly, fragmenting protections makes the system weaker, not stronger. If passed, Bill 204 narrows who can report by tightening the definition of employee. Contract staff, trainees, and volunteers, often the first to see problems, could be left out. If anonymity is reduced or if reporting channels are complicated, people will stay silent, especially on sensitive issues like privacy breaches, patient safety risks, or mismanagement.

If we weaken anti-reprisal provisions, the core promise that enables whistle-blowing is undermined, particularly in the hierarchical environment where lower paid staff and learners are vulnerable. At a time when health care faces workload pressure, staffing constraints, we need more certainty and transparency, not more paperwork and uncertainty. Strong, simple protections help catch problems early, avoid harm, and preserve integrity.

Madam Speaker, the path forward is clear. We already have a robust law, PIDA, that protects patient safety and public accountability. We already have aligned policies and independent oversight. Rather than fragmenting the system, let's finish the bipartisan review, strengthen implementation, widen awareness, simplify access, and ensure protections reach everyone who needs them. Bill 204 does not add protection; it adds duplication and delay. For the sake of patients, workers, and public trust, we should reject Bill 204 and focus our collective effort on improving the framework we already have. Let's keep Alberta's whistle-blower protections strong, simple, and effective so people who can speak up to protect patients and the public can do so without fear.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 204, the Public Interest Disclosure (Publicly Funded Health Entity Whistleblower Protection) Act. I want to thank my colleague from Edmonton-Manning for bringing this private member's bill forward. I think fostering an atmosphere where workers feel safe and protected to bring forward concerns regardless of the sector is really important. It helps us improve systems, obviously, but it also really helps people to feel valued and empowered and supported in the work that they do. It's hard to imagine a sector where this kind of support and empowerment is more important than in health care.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, I feel that our health care workers are critical to the functioning of our society, and in the last few years they do feel disrespected and let down by this UCP government. A big part of that is that they don't feel comfortable voicing concerns or coming forward. I appreciate the member opposite talking about PIDA and how we already have these protections in place, but if these protections were in place and if they felt good, I wouldn't be receiving e-mails from health care workers, many of which start with: "I shouldn't be having this conversation with you," or "I don't know what to tell you; please keep this confidential; I fear for my job if I tell you these things." Those are clearly not people who feel protected and supported in the health care system, and that is very concerning for me not only as an MLA but as a resident of Alberta that relies on a health care system.

My mother was a registered nurse for many, many years. [some applause] Oh, yeah. Thank you. Yes, I applaud her, too. Definitely, I think one of the important things to recognize is that our health care system is humongous, and it's a huge budget line item. We all know that. With that humongousness comes a lot of complexity, and it is the staff that are on the ground in the hospitals, day in and day out, interacting with patients, interacting with each other, interacting with the system. They see and experience the health care system in a way that somebody in an office, myself included, does not.

So making sure that those people who are interacting with the health care system every day have an opportunity to voice any concerns is really critical to the functioning of the overall system. This bill aims to make sure that health care workers get the respect they deserve and that they feel safe in reporting when disclosing wrongdoing or misuse of public dollars. Health care is also the biggest part of our budget for the province, so making sure that those public tax dollars are spent wisely and efficiently to address the needs and priorities of Albertans is also paramount. We have seen what happened in the past with the former CEO of AHS. When she came forward to raise concerns about the appropriate spending of those public tax dollars, she was fired. Whether you think that that was appropriate or inappropriate or whatever, it doesn't matter because that decision has rendered a chill in the whole health care system for workers to be able to come forward and share their concerns.

This bill helps alleviate that tension and that stress so that health care workers feel safe to advocate for improved systems to serve patients. At the end of the day, that is what every single person working in health care wants to do, serve sick people. If in doing that work they come across misappropriation of funds or questionable processes, they need to be able to have an avenue where they feel safe reporting those things because that is how we get better, Mr. Speaker. We get better when we listen to people who understand the systems that we're dealing with and who have recommendations for improvement.

Now, PIDA does protect some health care workers, but with the restructuring of the health care system into these four new ministries and the whole bloated bureaucracy that that creates, there are people who are falling through the gaps in this space. This bill helps to address those gaps to make sure that everybody has equal protections.

The Speaker: It's now 4:18. The Member for Edmonton-Manning has an opportunity to close if the member chooses.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and to close debate on Bill 204, a bill that I find really, obviously, important to me but I think important to all Albertans. I found it really interesting to hear from the government member who just stood up to say: well, the committee is still deliberating on this bill, and we should wait and find out what's going on. That's done. We completed that review a few weeks ago. That review that was done by the committee: if we look at the recommendations that were put forward by the committee, they are actually recommendations that adopt my bill. They very clearly address the fact that the bill that is currently sitting in this Chamber today needs to be adopted and needs to be addressed. Every member on that committee agreed to those recommendations and agreed that the content of my bill, although drafted differently in language, needed to be amended into the whistle-blower protection act.

The interesting thing about that, though, is that the members of the government put forward a motion that said that those amendments did not need to come into force until three years from now. So the recommendation from the committee is that we agree with the intent of Bill 204 as presented in this Chamber today, but we're not going to implement it for three years. Well, that doesn't make any sense. We could literally pass this piece of legislation

from second reading today. We could have it passed again next week into Committee of the Whole and potentially pass it again in three weeks. In three weeks the recommendation from the committee that has been made by both sides of this Chamber in agreement could come into force and become law, or we could wait three years, as recommended by the government side of the committee.

4:20

I guess when the government stands and says, "Well, you know, let's look at what the committee recommended, and let's wait till they're done" – well, we're done. The recommendations have been made, and the government wants to wait three years to implement it. So who's on the right side of this? I would say that it's the opposition's Bill 204 that says: "Hey, in three weeks we're going to protect front-line health care workers who are working in publicly funded private agencies." Or we can listen to what the government wants to do and wait three more years for that to happen. It's not really a choice.

Albertans are asking for this. It does matter. The more we see Bill 11 roll out and the more we see the chaos happening in our health care system and the more we see privatization and more public health care workers working under private contracts, the more concerning this becomes.

It's not that hard to adopt this bill, bring it into force, and then figure out whether or not the government wants to roll it into the current whistle-blower protection act. Or they could wait three years. Kind of lazy governing, but I mean, up to the choice of the government to do that. That's kind of what it looks like. It's already done; just use it. The work is done. We have very, very smart people working within ministries that are able to figure out how to make the language match up with current legislation.

To the government members on that side of the House that just stood up and said, "Well, let's wait to see what the recommendations are, and then we'll decide," the recommendations are: adopt the bill. But don't wait three years. Just do it in three weeks. It's a pretty easy answer to the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:22 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Ellingson	Renaud
Batten	Elmeligi	Sabir
Brar, Gurinder	Goehring	Sigurdson, L.
Brar, Gurtej	Gray	Sweet
Chapman	Hoffman	Wright, P.
Eggen	Ip	

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 17 Against – 44

[Motion for second reading of Bill 204 lost]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: I'd like to begin, Mr. Speaker, by apologizing for speaking out of turn earlier.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Is there anything else you have to say today?

Primary Care Workforce

506. Ms Hoffman moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly
(a) acknowledges that there is a primary care shortage which includes family doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, physician assistants, and allied health members who focus on primary care,
(b) urge the government to implement workforce strategies, including the dedicated health care pathway strategy in the Alberta advantage immigration program, and
(c) urge the government to involve health care worker representatives in building a culture of trust and respect to enhance retention across the province.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to a motion that I've brought forward. It's not every day that private members have the opportunity to do this. In fact, in the seven years I've been a private member in this place, this is my first motion. I want to begin by saying to all members opposite and all members on this side that my attitude when I was on the government side was that if something wasn't going to make things worse, we ought to give it a try. I would like to say that I have a feeling that a lot of people over there are going to have a variety of arguments why they don't want to vote for something coming from an opposition member. But I think that we all need to acknowledge that things are not working today in primary care in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, why I outline these three specific areas is because I had the honour of serving as Alberta's first NDP health minister. During that time it was a monumental task, I'm sure for any health minister, and I felt an extra sense of obligation and opportunity given that the NDP has such a strong track record across this country in fighting for public health care and finding ways to improve public health care for all. In fact, it was Tommy Douglas who was voted the greatest Canadian for simply bringing the concept of universal single-payer health care to the country as something that we should embark on. He was never the Prime Minister, but that idea became something that all Canadians had the opportunity to benefit from.

We are in a position right now, Mr. Speaker, where in the province of Alberta nearly 1 million Albertans don't have access to primary care. Very clearly reported data from the last working plan from AHS, the physician workforce family medicine 2023-24 report, showed that a growing number of family doctors were exiting the sector. I know that often the Premier and the minister will say that everything is fine, everything is great. They often point

to the website where you can try to find a doctor, and there is one doctor south of Calgary today who is posted on that website, taking patients anywhere south of Calgary in the province of Alberta. I tried calling that office to see if that was indeed true because sometimes it takes a few weeks for the website to be updated. Often there are people posted there who say: "No, no. That's out of date. We're not taking new patients."

There's nobody in Lethbridge. That one doctor is in Medicine Hat, and if you live anywhere south of Calgary, that's a heck of a drive to get to what is hopefully one doctor who might be taking patients in Medicine Hat, Mr. Speaker.

I know, growing up in a very small community in northern Alberta where the closest doctors were a 30-minute drive one way or a 35-minute drive the other way – and there were times where neither of those communities had doctors – how scary that can be for people living in a remote community. It's hard enough when we're in major centres like Edmonton or Calgary to take the time away from your work and from other responsibilities, but when you or somebody you care about is sick or injured, there's nothing more important than getting access to health care.

We've also heard a lot – and I want to remind everyone that this is around primary care. This is about family doctors and nurse practitioners that you would be able to see on a regular basis. And while there are many patients who are currently attached to a primary care provider, whether that's a family doctor or nurse practitioner, the wait times to get in to see them is one of the things I get calls to my office regularly about. I get calls about wait times for surgeries, I get calls about not having a doctor, and then I get calls about having to wait weeks to get in to see your doctor when you're actually sick. Even if patients are part of a panel with a family medicine provider, that doesn't necessarily mean that they have readily available access.

We are not coming here to be descriptive. We are coming here with some olive branches, three specifically. One is acknowledging that there is a problem, and I know that on the weekend the Premier was on the radio, and said that there wasn't a problem. And I know for the people who were listening on the radio who wrote my office and called my office after: they know there is a problem. Mr. Speaker, so simply for us to say that we know that there is a shortage of primary care providers, and then we listed some of those. Certainly happy to hear the minister and others talk about additional areas where there might be shortages, but we're just acknowledging that there is a problem. Step 1, right?

4:40

Step 2: urge that the government implement a workforce strategy, including dedicated health care pathways around the AAIP program, making sure that when we are having newcomers arrive to the province because we know that, especially when – I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, when the Speaker was the minister responsible for Municipal Affairs, in many communities one of their number one issues that they talk about is attracting people to work in their health care facilities, keeping their hospitals open, making sure people can get the care when and where they need it.

I know as somebody whose grandmother left the farm and moved to the city that one of the biggest reasons was because she hit an age where she needed regular access to health care, and it just wasn't available close by to where she lived. So making sure that we acknowledge that there is an opportunity for when we are attracting people to be really focused on prioritizing those places for people who are coming to . . .

The Speaker: Stop the clock, please, just so the hon. member doesn't lose any time. I don't know what's going on, but I'm going to suggest a recess till the bell is done ringing.

[The Assembly adjourned from 4:41 p.m. to 4:44 p.m.]

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. members, we are in session, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is partially through her introductory remarks on Motion Other than Government Motion 506.

The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To continue, the second piece is around urging the government of Alberta, the current government, to implement a dedicated health care pathway strategy. I'm acknowledging that there is a health care pathway, but I want there to be a specific strategy that we're identifying and that we're focusing on areas where we need primary care providers.

I will also say, Mr. Speaker, that sometimes I've heard government say: well, the only positions that we'll be recruiting to are in rural communities. When I look at some professions – for example, I want to touch on midwives, such an important option for those who choose it, to be able to have low-risk pregnancies and deliveries at home or close to home. Right now the only positions that are available are in rural Alberta and the only training centre we have for midwives is in Calgary, so everyone is going to have to move if they want to be one of the very low number of positions that are available. If they're looking at, "Am I going to move to a rural community in Alberta, or am I going to move to another community in another province if I'm going to move anyway," I'm hearing that some are thinking: well, if I'm going to move, I'm going to move to another province. We know that we are recruiting international graduates who are midwives into those communities as well. So even for the very limited number that we're training, we are not giving them the opportunity to work in areas that could have more people providing this service.

I know that midwives have been reaching out to the government, were hoping to see something announced in the budget that could have supported them in growing the profession and the opportunities for practice within the province of Alberta. This could be an opportunity for the government today to support this, one of the ministers in their remarks speaking to wanting to work with midwives on expanding this and the dedicated health care pathway strategy for the Alberta advantage immigrant program to be focused around that.

Then the third section, Mr. Speaker, in the time remaining, is around urging the government to involve health care worker representatives in building a culture of trust and respect to enhance retention across the province. My colleague from Edmonton-Manning earlier today also extended an olive branch around wanting to expand opportunities for people to feel safe in speaking up when they see something happening in their workplace that they know isn't right, enhancing whistle-blower protection and being explicit that it's for anyone who's being publicly paid for providing health care services in the province of Alberta, no matter who their employer is.

This is about saying to workers: we want you back at the table, and we want you to help us build that culture of trust. I will say, Mr. Speaker, that we have heard so many different groups saying that they are beyond frustrated with the way that the relationship has evolved over the last several years. We've seen, over the holiday season that passed just a couple of months ago, emergency room doctors raising alarms about the state of crisis that we have in our emergency departments and the government taking weeks to

respond and at that time announcing something that still hasn't been implemented at all in the province.

I think that there are a lot of groups that are feeling frustrated, that want to be a part of a better, stronger culture. I will say that when I was the health minister and we were negotiating a contract with the Alberta Medical Association for doctors, it was doctors who, when I opened the books and led from a position of trust in wanting to come up with solutions, said at that time: we don't have a retention issue when it comes to physicians. In fact, one of our best staffed communities was Cold Lake, Alberta. It had the most physicians per resident of anywhere in the province of Alberta and I think maybe even in the country at that time. Why they did is because they liked working there. They liked having an opportunity to explore the recreation in the community, and they felt respected. Cold Lake is one of the hospitals now that regularly has their emergency department closed down or other parts of their hospital closed down.

Mr. Speaker, we can get back to that position of trust. I'm saying: here's an opportunity for the government. If you think this is redundant – and I'm going to guess that that's probably what's going to be said because that's often what's said in many of the speaking notes – but you think it's not going to move things backwards, please vote for this.

Health care workers need a bit of morale boost right now because many feel that the earplugs have been put in by the current government, by the UCP, over many, many years and that they're seen as a stakeholder rather than a partner. This is really about saying to workers: "You are partners in helping us ensure that we meet the needs for your communities. You know what the barriers are; you know what we need to do to be able to fix them." It isn't about giving severance to CEOs and setting up new org charts and putting a bunch of new logos on things. It really is about trust and getting back to the table.

These are three very simple areas that I know will go a long way. I know that I like to sometimes say that I was the health minister when health care was really boring. Most people want boring, reliable health care that's there for them when and where they need it. It's absolutely possible, and it's important for us to send this message to folks today by passing this motion and moving forward in partnership with health care workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On Motion 506, any more speakers? The hon. government health minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to rise today and speak to Motion 506. While I appreciate the concerns raised by the member opposite, I fundamentally disagree with the picture being painted of Alberta's health care system and the suggestion that this government has failed to act. The member opposite quotes old data, but today's facts tell a very different picture, and I want to address each part of the motion in turn.

4:50

Let me begin with the first component of Motion 506, its assertion that Alberta is facing a worsening primary care shortage. Demand for primary care in Alberta does continue to grow, and we all recognize that primary care includes not just family physicians but nurse practitioners, nurses, physician assistants, and allied health professionals. Acknowledging the challenge does not mean ignoring the progress, and it certainly does not justify overlooking the historic growth that Alberta has achieved. In fact, Mr. Speaker, in February the national OurCare Survey reported over 87 per cent of Albertans say that they have a regular health care provider. That's the third-highest in Canada and 6 per cent above the national average. I can tell you that I won't rest, nor will my colleagues, until that number is 100 per cent.

According to the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta's latest records, as of December 31, 2025, Alberta has a record high 13,741 registered physicians. Per capita that works out to 273 physicians per 100,000 patients, the highest it has ever been in Alberta. By comparison, in 2015, when the member opposite was in power, only 244 physicians per 100,000 was the number. As of September 2025 that includes 6,683 family physicians out of that 13,700. It's an increase of 445 from last year. In one year alone Alberta has achieved a net gain of 903 physicians, the largest single-year increase in provincial history.

I would say that while we do have a large number of physicians, sometimes it's a distribution problem. Two weeks ago I was proud to stand beside the Premier in announcing our government's record investment of $7.7 billion for physician recruitment, training, compensation, and development, a 22 per cent increase compared to last year, Mr. Speaker. Even through the Canadian Resident Matching Service, or CARMS, Alberta medical students had excellent results in the first round of the matching process, which determined where Canadian medical graduates will complete their residency programs. Most of Alberta's 459 residency seats were filled, proving that Alberta offers an exceptionally attractive environment for resident physicians to train and practise, supported by recent compensation increases that ensure competitive, fair market pay for physicians in training.

Members opposite couldn't be more wrong. We are growing, and we are doing so aggressively and strategically. More importantly, physician supply is growing more than twice as fast as our population. We are growing our physician workforce at 6.5 per cent compared to the population growth of 2.5 per cent. When more physicians are entering Alberta than ever before at a faster rate than our population is growing, the narrative of decline simply cannot hold.

Alberta's government and Primary Care Alberta have also launched Alberta Find a Provider. It's a redesigned website that helps Albertans locate nearby family doctors, nurse practitioners, registered midwives, and clinics accepting new patients. Through this tool we can see that the number of primary care providers accepting new patients reached a four-year high of over 800 in February. In Calgary the number of providers accepting new patients has increased by 400 per cent and in Edmonton by 180 per cent. These are concrete measures of improved access, measures the opposition leaves out.

Primary care is not only about physicians; our nursing workforce has also reached a historic high. Alberta boasts more than 48,480 registered nurses, an increase of 12,000, or 32 per cent, since 2019. Licensed practical nurses have grown by 20 per cent and the overall number of psychiatric nurses by 10 per cent. Alberta nurses are now the highest paid in Canada, supporting retention and bringing more nurses into our system. We're also extremely proud of Alberta's 1,137 nurse practitioners and their growth of 500, or 74 per cent, since 2019. The nurse practitioner primary care program continues to expand rapidly, and 96 nurse practitioners currently are practising as of last month, with a dozen or so more on pending and onboarding. This first-in-Canada program is transforming access in rural and remote communities, and other provinces are copying it, Mr. Speaker. There are also an estimated 42,000 health care aides in Alberta, which has increased by nearly 10,000, or 34 per cent, since 2020.

We are also expanding medical education by more than 100 new physician training seats each year, many of them focused on rural

and family medicine. This is complemented by targeted rural recruitment programs, including the $16 million rural and remote family medicine residency physician bursary program. I know that there are roughly about 130 physicians, medical residents, that have taken us up on that three-year return of service program, and there's also $8.9 million rural health professions action plan allocated with regional medical training centres in Lethbridge and Grande Prairie, again making sure that we train in those rural communities so that they'll stay in rural communities. Primary Care Alberta has strengthened patient attachment, expanded team-based care, and improved planning across the entire primary care sector. Virtual care expansion and mobile clinics are supporting rural and remote communities as well.

Through internationally educated health professions programs, 1,800 training seats, $18 million invested, and streamlined licensure we are ensuring that skilled nurses and physicians trained abroad can join our workforce quickly, because we also want to see those individuals come into our workforce as quickly as possible and that our kids that are studying abroad can come back and make Alberta their home.

Mr. Speaker, now let me turn to the second component. Alberta has already implemented a dedicated health care pathway to bring internationally trained physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals into our system much more efficiently. Since launching this pathway, Alberta has prioritized applicants with health care skills and created mechanisms to integrate them quickly into the workforce. This was before the federal government did anything in this regard. For internationally educated nurses we have invested $18 million between 2022 and 2025, creating 1,800 bridging program seats, and streamlined the registration process. Qualified IENs can now become licensed for more efficiency. This is making a significant difference in rural and remote areas. We're doing it much more quickly, and kudos to all the colleges for stepping up in this area.

For internationally trained physicians, Alberta has gone even further. Improvements at the College of Physicians & Surgeons now allow IMGs who meet Canadian standards to obtain full licensure without a practice readiness assessment. Where a readiness assessment is required, our expanded sponsorship programs enable clinics, municipalities, and even individuals to support an IMG transition. Mr. Speaker, before that, it was only AHS that could sponsor an IMG.

Rural Alberta continues to benefit from the $16 million, as I said earlier, on the resident physician bursary program. We continue to aggressively recruit across Canada and internationally even as we advocate for the federal government to restore Alberta's provincial nominee program allocation, which was recently cut by more than 50 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

Despite these federal cuts Alberta continues to outperform almost all other provinces in health workforce growth. All this work is guided by the Alberta health workforce strategy and the 30-year acute-care workforce strategy. Again, we have these in place already. These strategies use evidence-based modelling to forecast supply, demand, and future needs for physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals. As of this year Alberta has 9,052 paramedics and 1,420 emergency medical responders, improving coverage right across both urban and rural communities.

Let me turn to the final component of the motion. Our government collaborates with workforce representatives through advisory committees, engagement groups, and collective bargaining. I'm happy to say that we were able to reach a negotiated agreement with the nurses' union.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on private member's Motion 506, put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. I'm very grateful to her for bringing this forward. I think this is absolutely what we need considering the chaos in our health system currently.

5:00

You know, a recent poll indicated: what are Albertans most concerned about? Affordability was the number one for sure, but closely behind it was health care, and for good reason. The UCP has created so much chaos in our health care system. One of the major reasons for that is that approximately a million – a million – Albertans do not have access to a family doctor. Of course, if you don't have access to a family doctor, that means that your health issues aren't being addressed in a timely manner. Maybe you're going to the emergency room and waiting for a very long time. Perhaps that's not the best place for you to get your health care services, but it's the only place because you don't have access to a family doc. We know that this is also exacerbated, the lack of Albertans with family doctors, by our aging population. We know that we have about 800,000, more than that, Albertans over the age of 65. As we age, we need more access to health care. Our bodies wear down, and we need to see the doctor more often. As I just turned 65, I can concur with that. I just want to say that this chaos the UCP has created is really creating so much poor health care for Albertans.

I guess the part of the motion I want to focus on the most is (c), which says, "urge the government to involve health care worker representatives in building a culture of trust and respect to enhance retention across the province." Certainly, the trust between health professions and the UCP has been significantly eroded. This doesn't happen just by chance. This has happened because the UCP has done many, many things to actually be very disrespectful of professions. Professions have every right not to trust this government. It's certainly disturbing to me to, you know, sit here in the opposition and watch the UCP attack professions time after time. For example, when the UCP was first elected, the minister of health at that time unilaterally tore up the master agreement with AMA, the Alberta Medical Association, without, you know, any consultation at all. Certainly, that does not provide trust with health professionals.

They had created billing restrictions, capping the number of patients a physician could bill for even though the physicians were, you know, having to take on more cases, more patients because there weren't enough doctors. What they do is that they actually make it harder for them, the physicians, so that they can't even bill for some of these patients. In terms of wage and contract issues the UCP has demanded wage freezes and cuts for nurses, social workers, therapists facing intense workload pressures. This is all during their mandate.

I just wanted to give a shout-out to social workers because this week is Social Work Week. I just want to acknowledge that. I'll have more to say about that later in the week. In our caucus we have five people with social work backgrounds, so we are well represented in this caucus. The UCP doesn't have anyone from our profession.

Certainly, the UCP is ignoring the expertise of professionals, no consultation with them, and they certainly are undermining self-regulation. That's a hallmark of a profession. You know, professions have – there are certain characteristics to be a profession. One is a code of ethics and standards of practice. These are the values, the ethics of a profession. Another is a high-level body of knowledge and training to become that professional, an organization that regulates that professional, autonomy and self-

regulation, and accountability. Certainly, the UCP is stripping away the autonomy of professional colleges and handling licensing and discipline, and this is certainly very disturbing to me.

I can totally get why health professionals do not feel that they can trust this government. They are not trusted by the government. The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul said that trust was such an important aspect of this and that the UCP was trusting and working collaboratively with professionals. You know, already what I've said so far has indicated very clearly that that's not the case, that the UCP is time after time eroding the independence of health professionals and obviously disrespecting them.

In December Bill 11, also known as the Jordan Peterson bill, restricted regulatory bodies so that they banned professional regulators from implementing initiatives that support equity, inclusion, and diversity, requiring training and cultural competence. Professions can't ensure high standards of competence and patient safety when this happens. You know, if you just look around our province, we've had huge in-migration, and we have a much more diverse population. This should actually be enhanced, but instead the UCP says: "No, no, no. We will actually regulate you so that you can't do this and ask your members of your profession to actually have some sensitivity to people from different countries, different backgrounds, different ethnicities." I mean, it makes absolutely no sense, Mr. Speaker. Reaching in to control what an autonomous profession should be able to regulate shows extreme disrespect.

The UCP also moved to limit regulatory colleges to discipline members for public statements such as antivaccine views and – this is a good one – overriding scientific clinical judgment. For example, harm reduction programs: there is a tremendous amount of research, direct practice experience that shows that harm reduction programs are extremely effective in supporting people who have addiction issues. These programs are often brokers. They support people to develop relationships with the health professionals that are serving them and often give them access to health services, affordable housing. You're meeting with someone who's treating you in a respectful manner. It's supporting people to know that they have more choices than they realize they may, and it keeps people safe. It keeps people safe. Lives are not lost because people are supported in a supportive, loving environment.

The UCP, guess what they've done? All across Alberta harm reduction programs have closed, and we have more chaos than ever. Anyway, this is a bit different than (c), but now they're, you know, putting people in jail because they have addiction issues. That seems ridiculous to me.

Another area where they are overriding scientific and clinical judgment is vaccines. So they're antivaxxers. You know, in this current budget it shows on 5.5, which is public health services – public health services are the area where, you know, there would be some public education, support for populations in general to know what helps people be healthy. In estimates, page 187, it says public health services "includes services to maintain and improve the health of the general population through promoting and protecting health, with a focus on preventing disease and injury." Of course, vaccines fit right in there, and guess what? [Ms Sigurdson's speaking time expired] Okay.

5:10

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

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's just so much more to be said about this, and on behalf of the minister I hope you'll allow me to talk about this final component of the motion.

Our government collaborates with workforce representatives through advisory committees, engagement groups, and collective bargaining. The negotiated United Nurses of Alberta agreement now in effect makes Alberta nurses, of which I was one, the highest paid in the country. The Health Sciences Association of Alberta, representing 30,000 professionals across more than 240 disciplines, has secured improvements in pay, working conditions, and career progression. AUPE's auxiliary nursing care agreement includes nearly 24 per cent wage increases for LPNs, improved compensation for health care aides, and enhanced shift premiums and professional development supports. These agreements reflect respect, engagement, and the value that we place on Alberta's health care professionals.

Beyond bargaining tables, the government continues to strengthen workplace culture through the Alberta health workforce strategy. We're enhancing scheduling flexibility, investing in mental health supports, expanding scopes of practice, and improving leadership development. Under the acute-care action plan we're modernizing emergency health services, building workforce resilience, and ensuring working conditions reflect the realities that staff face today. In rural and remote areas where I live, relocation support, financial incentives, bursaries, and autonomy through programs like the nurse practitioner primary care program are helping professionals to stay in their communities long term.

Workforce feedback directly informs how primary care networks, community health centres, and attachment programs operate. The results are clear. In 2025 Alberta saw record numbers of nurses, LPNs, and nurse practitioners renewing their registrations, demonstrating confidence in our system and in their future here. Retention remains among the strongest in the country.

Overall we've reached negotiated agreements with nurses and other health care professionals. We negotiated a successful primary care physician compensation model, and this was done off the master agreement cycle because it was needed to stabilize family medicine. And we will continue to value and respect our health care professionals. Motion 506 is based on outdated assumptions and doesn't reflect the significant measurable progress that Alberta has made and continues to make every day. For these reasons, I encourage all members of this Assembly to oppose Motion 506.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and join debate in favour of this very smart motion brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. We have a crisis in our health care system, and as much as it might certainly feel like we've had alarms sounding for the last seven years, these alarms are no longer just voices like mine from 2019, from the front line, who are finding themselves struggling to be able to provide care to their patients the way they know their patients deserve to have. These alarms aren't only from the hundreds of physicians who signed a letter just recently calling for a declaration of a state of emergency in our hospitals, which this UCP government ignored.

These alarms aren't alarms anymore, Mr. Speaker. Instead, in 2026 in Alberta, Canada, we have Albertans dying in our emergency rooms waiting for care. Twenty twenty-six. Alberta, Canada. There was also an emergency debate called right here just two weeks ago, which this UCP government ignored – pardon me – claimed that we had so much time to debate health care in this space that we didn't need to miss out on very exciting debates of standing orders. Sure, today we have an entire 60 minutes allocated to this very smart motion.

What this motion asks for is a recognition that there is a shortage because, Mr. Speaker, there is. Alberta's health care system wasn't invested in at the same rate that the number of Albertans being served rose. It just wasn't. It's a fact. Arguably, in the investments that were made by this UCP government – Turkish Tylenol, for instance, where the government took a gamble and lost – they didn't bother – well, maybe they did and didn't care; I'm not sure – to check whether or not it was a medication Albertans could actually use. Turns out they couldn't, but Albertans have certainly paid for it. They paid for it initially. They paid for the product, the shipping, the storage. Oh, goodness, the storage. Then, of course, they paid – or we paid as Albertans – for its destruction. That wasn't a very smart investment for Albertans. Voting yes for this motion would be a great step forward. This motion motivates the government to create a workforce strategy involving health care workers and their representatives as part of the conversation. See, it's smart and it's simple, and I hope that the government sees it the same way.

Like all professions, nurses who practise in different areas kind of have different, we'll say, stereotypes that go along with their personalities. So, like, emergency nurses: those are thrill-seekers. They are drawn to the uncertainty of who's going to come through that door, and they're ready for everything. Intensive care nurses, especially those who maybe care for little 400-gram babies who decide to show up, you know, too many weeks too early, are sticklers for data. They watch for subtle trends, and they try to anticipate when a 400-gram baby decides that its breathing tube or its central lines are no longer necessary. Then you have your public health nurses. They're historians. They're the ones who put together your health story to better support your health. Now, public health, of course, is more than the very important fall vaccinations that we see for influenza and for COVID. Public health acts as our first defence against serious illness. It should serve as an alert to Albertans of possible health threats and be able to guide each of us to make our best decision for ourselves, for our health, and as an Albertan for our province.

Now, these are just three examples of some of the fiercest health care workers I have ever had the pleasure to call colleagues. But the cool part, Mr. Speaker, is that family physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, and other health care professionals all play a part in public health and in prevention of serious illness for Albertans. Which pillar of health does public health fit in now? I heard a reference to a budget line, but honestly of the pillars it's still unknown. It's an important part of health care yet unassigned. I digress.

At a time when Alberta is seeing massive wait times in emergency rooms, a smart government would see serving the interests of Albertans – would jump in at a chance to support this motion. Further, a smart, fiscally responsible government would invest in primary and preventative care so that Albertans are supported before they need the emergency room. They certainly wouldn't be creating new barriers like pay for access, which, of course, we're seeing with this UCP government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, imagine your neighbour slips on some ice and lands, you know, solidly on their butt. They say: "No. I'm good, I'm good, I'm good; no worries; I'm good" but then later that evening start feeling like, you know, maybe it's a little bit more than a bruised tailbone. Now, they are one of almost a million Albertans without a family doctor, meaning that they don't have anyone to connect with who knows their history, their medications, their kids' ages, their wishes. Health is incredibly, incredibly private and incredibly sensitive and highly personal. Now, your neighbour's option is only to go to the emergency room and wait and wait some more. Maybe be seen; maybe not.

This motion builds on some of the fantastic work the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and the Alberta NDP government started when they were government. In fact, connect care, which was a program brought in by the Alberta NDP government which had been slowly and poorly, arguably, rolled out by this government over the last seven years, was an intentional investment in health care. The program's purpose was to connect patients with their information, regardless of where they were, meaning that if you went to see someone about a broken leg, you weren't responsible for remembering every shot, every X-ray, every medication. You were not burdened with having to remember that when you were in crisis. That's one of the beautiful things that connect care was supposed to bring; that is, before AHS was torn into four different pillars, seven different ministers. I'm not even sure anymore. What I'm trying to say is that we have investment in public health care that's been there prior to this government. There are ways to invest in public health care so that every Albertan has access.

5:20

This motion is simple. It's straightforward. It is not redundant. It shows a willingness to rebuild trust with health care workers and with Albertans. I hope that everyone has paid close attention and that they value our public health care system and that they will vote in favour of this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Seeing no more – now I do see another speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-North East.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Imagine being a single mother in rural Alberta: three kids, two of them neurodiverse, bills piling up but no family doctor. Elizabeth Fox moved to the small hamlet of Elnora in 2013, and back then finding a family doctor was easy. Why? Because she was pregnant, and she was told that when you are pregnant, every clinic will take you. So she found a doctor, built a relationship, and for years she believed her family had the stability every parent hopes for.

But seven or eight years later she received an e-mail from her clinic. That e-mail was not a check-in e-mail, not a reminder for her appointment. That was an e-mail telling her she had been derostered, removed from her doctor's patient list because she didn't come in often enough. The clinic needed that spot for someone else. And Elizabeth asked the clinic something that many Albertans would assume is obvious: don't you just shift patients around? No, Mr. Speaker, they didn't, and just like that it became her problem, her responsibility to find a new doctor. But by then Alberta had changed due to this UCP government's reckless policies.

Doctors weren't taking new patients anymore, so Elizabeth and her three kids joined the growing line of almost a million Albertans searching for care. Her eldest son had moved out, but her two younger children are still at home. One of them is finishing high school and lives with autism and social anxiety. The youngest has ADHD, and Elizabeth knows that when her daughter graduates, she'll need to apply for income assistance. To do that, she needs medical reports, and to get the medical reports, she needs a medical doctor, and she doesn't have one.

Now she goes from one clinic to the next clinic to the other clinic telling the same story over and over and over again. Different receptionist, different doctor, different rules, and sometimes there are fees. Sometimes the clinic will only see overflow patients, and sometimes they simply say no. And she starts again and again and again. She looked for doctors in Sylvan Lake, she looked for doctors in Olds, and both are an hour away from her. But Elizabeth

is a single mom living on a tight budget. She said, and I quote, sometimes we have got to move our appointments because I don't have gas money.

Imagine being a single mother living on a tight budget, not having a family doctor, and not having enough money to put gas in the car for a doctor's appointment. Think about that for a moment, Mr. Speaker. Not missing an appointment because you forgot, not missing an appointment because you don't care; missing it because you can't afford the gas money.

So when her kids get sick, she goes to the emergency room even for the smallest things. She said it plainly: "It doesn't matter what it is. If it is the littlest things, I take them to emergency." She's not wrong. Any parent would do that, Mr. Speaker. She knows that the wait line will be long, but what choice does she have? Virtual care doesn't work as well for her neurodiverse kids. Walk-ins turn them away, so the ER becomes the family doctor. Elizabeth said something that should stop all of us in our tracks: we are not getting the care we need.

Alberta was not always like this, Mr. Speaker. Albertans had family doctors. Albertans could access family doctors whenever they need it, wherever they need it without paying a single dime out of their pocket. They have never felt helpless. Unable to access family physicians, longer wait times, Americanization of health care have become a norm under this UCP government, and this UCP government has worked hard to dismantle our health care system. Nearly a million Albertans cannot find a family doctor during the current severe shortage of primary health care providers, 18 per cent of adult Albertans do not have a family doctor, and only 50 per cent of those with a family doctor can usually secure an appointment when needed.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve a health care system whenever they need it, wherever they need it, and without having to pay out of pocket because it protects people, it saves lives, and it thrives in our communities. Today our province faces some key questions. How do we make sure that every single Albertan, including every single immigrant, has access to a family physician? How do we make sure our health care system is publicly funded and publicly delivered? How do we make sure that a single mother with three kids has access to a family doctor when she needs it and that not a single Albertan dies ever again waiting to be taken care of in emergency rooms?

Our health care system is a bridge that every one of us gets to cross at one point in our life. I have had multiple conversations with my constituents, and they tell me that this UCP government was supposed to strengthen that bridge, but after seven years of their mismanagement, planks are missing, cracks are visible, and Albertans are feeling unsafe to put a step on it. It doesn't have to be this way, Mr. Speaker. It is un-Albertan, it is un-Canadian, and it is unhuman. Instead of taking responsibility, apologizing, and fixing it, now this government is telling immigrants that they will no longer be able to step on this bridge. It's shameful.

I want to take a moment to remember one of the most remarkable immigrants that this province has ever seen, Dr. Raj Pannu. Dr. Raj Pannu, who was the leader of the Alberta NDP and Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, fought for health care in this province, fought for health care for every single Albertan. Me and my colleague from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall and my colleague from Edmonton-Meadows went when he was in hospital in Edmonton. He was barely able to speak, Mr. Speaker, but when we met him, the first thing he said was: the people working in this health care system are really nice and taking care of me. He was so thankful to every single person who made sure that our hospitals are open, accessible, and available for every single one of us.

Today, continuing that legacy, my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, the first NDP health minister and the best health minister Alberta has ever had, has put forward three solutions to strengthen this bridge of our health care so it can be stronger, open for all, and built for generations to come. The first one is to acknowledge – acknowledge – that there is a shortage of family doctors, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and allied health members. These are the pillars of our health care system. Without these pillars we cannot fix our health care system. The UCP has a record of insulting these doctors, the UCP has a record of ripping up the contracts of the doctors, and the UCP has ignored these pillars of our health care system.

I request all members . . .

5:30

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 506. I think these are, you know, really important things that this member is trying to get the House to address. To acknowledge that we have a primary care shortage: it seems to me that the government has to take that very important step to acknowledge we actually have a problem. They'd rather spew numbers and confuse people and say: no problem; nothing to see here. There's a huge problem here.

I thought that this motion actually introduced some really great ideas, to "urge the government to implement workforce strategies, including the dedicated health care pathway strategy in the Alberta advantage immigration program," and, of course, to "involve health care worker representatives in building a culture of trust and respect to enhance retention across the province." I think that's pretty self-explanatory and important.

You know, the government will stand up and say: "No, no. There's nothing to see here. We've got four new ministers, four new pillars. We're investing all this money." But the reality, Mr. Speaker, is that people still can't access the health care that they need, particularly people with disabilities. We have failed to pass accessibility legislation that introduces a very basic framework about how to create government supports and services that are accessible to all Albertans. This government has refused to pass any of that.

Now, we know the government's own disability advocate published a report two years ago that the government hid or sat on until we tabled it. It was about explaining why this accessibility legislation was essential. A lot of that report focused on health care and the very systemic barriers to people in health care, everything from language barriers to equipment barriers. Some people couldn't even get in the door, Mr. Speaker. They may have had X-ray equipment or MRI equipment in locations that were simply not accessible to them physically.

That is not the only thing that is missing in health care. Just navigating is very difficult. For people with disabilities it can sometimes be a little bit more complex to find the right health care provider. I can give you a few examples. When I was in my previous role to being elected here, I would have access to lots of different stories, people with disabilities trying to get medical services and them not being able to because of barriers because of their disabilities. For example – kid you not – I had a person in her 40s. People with Down's syndrome tend to get Alzheimer's a little bit younger than the rest of the population, so naturally we could tell that some of the symptoms of Alzheimer's were starting to present in her daily life. We found a physician that actually treated people with Alzheimer's, and this physician actually didn't feel like he could prescribe the medication and treat this person because of

the Down's syndrome and felt that that was the barrier for the physician.

You can see that it's a really clear example, Mr. Speaker, that there are all kinds of barriers, not just physical barriers that we encounter every day but also the things that need to happen in postsecondary. We need to be working with people that are training as physicians or nurse practitioners for them to fully understand barriers for people with disabilities, particularly in the health care system.

Now, what's really quite interesting, Mr. Speaker, is that the disability advocate has a disability himself and was very clear about all of the barriers that exist in the health care system, in all of the systems, actually, under government's purview but very specifically around health care. Not only did this government choose not to address those very good recommendations to improve the health care system, they actually hid the report. That tells you how important it is for health care to be accessible to all Albertans.

Could I actually get a time check, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Seventeen seconds.

Ms Renaud: With that, I will take my seat. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Well, because I have little confidence someone could do a speech in 17 seconds, I will now offer the Member for Edmonton-Glenora to make closing comments.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the members for the opportunity to debate. While however brief, I think this is a crucial conversation for the people of Alberta to know where all members of this Assembly stand on their public health care and their health care in general, making sure that they have access to a doctor, a medical team where and when they need it close to home, and there is nothing more close to home than that primary care team.

Mr. Speaker, we've had some of our own health care forums recently, and I have attended many other forums, town hall meetings with Friends of Medicare in various communities throughout this province. I want to thank the folks who have taken time out of their evenings to come and hang out in these community centres, seniors' buildings and learn about what's happening in their own town and city and also to take the opportunity to share their stories with their friends and neighbours. The number of family doctors who have attended these and participated is amazing.

There are a couple still coming up. We have one in Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, I know, that's being organized by Friends of Medicare. Friends of Medicare also has one in Grande Prairie, and they also have one in Drayton Valley, I believe, coming up very soon. I'm very excited to get a chance to connect with more people in those communities. Their executive director, Chris Gallaway, has done a lot to reach out to local leaders and have opportunities for them to hear their voices and for members of those communities to hear their voices as well.

I want to acknowledge that nearly a third of family doctors practising in Alberta are 55 or older, and 61 per cent, almost two-thirds, of family doctors practising in Alberta report that they're thinking about retiring, leaving the profession, or leaving the province. These numbers should be shocking to us all. We also know that 1 in 5 Albertans is not attached currently to a medical home, doesn't have access to a family doctor or a nurse practitioner. That really is what point one in this motion says: acknowledge that there is a problem. One in 5 people. I'm sure every single person in this room loves somebody who doesn't have a family doctor today, and that is so wrong, Mr. Speaker.

There is nothing more important than making sure that when you move to a community, when you're building your life, you have access to health care and education. It's actually Dr. Jane Philpott who has the analogy. Imagine moving to a town, showing up with your child for the first day of school, and being told: in two to three years we'll have a spot for your kid in this school. That's what people are experiencing right now with family medicine in communities throughout our province. It is unacceptable, and step one of this motion is for the government to acknowledge that it's not okay. That's it, that we're not fine with almost a million Albertans having no family doctor, with there only being one doctor on a website right now anywhere south of Calgary who is willing to take patients. You have to drive to Medicine Hat. That is not okay, Mr. Speaker. Step one is admitting that there is a problem, and there is a problem.

Step two is urging the government to implement the strategic workforce strategies in a specific stream through the Alberta advantage immigration program. We brought this motion forward back in the fall, and it was actually the day it was supposed to be debated that the federal government announced that they were going to be enhancing the opportunities for international medical graduates to come to Canada. We could have debated it the very day that the federal government made that announcement, but the Government House Leader and cabinet decided that they wanted to take the afternoon off instead, so there was no debate that afternoon. The best day to debate it would have been in that fall, in the December time when it was originally on the Order Paper. The second best day is today, but the best outcome is for us to actually pass this.

The third piece is acknowledging that the government has a role to play in involving health care worker representatives to rebuild a culture of trust and respect and enhance retention across the province. Those nearly 33 per cent of family doctors in your community, in my community who are thinking about retiring need to know that their voice is valued and that there is a role for them all to play in making sure we have a sustainable system.

Making sure that those nurse practitioners, those midwives – and it's nice that the minister acknowledged that one labour group reached an agreement with the minister, but there are midwives waiting on a contract and have definitely been getting the runaround from this government for many months as they are trying to expand the workforce and work in partnership to expand primary care throughout the province. So there are other staff groups that are definitely not getting the respect or the due consideration that they deserve.

I also want to say that if the government truly cared about expanding access to primary care, they would put focus on that instead of the biggest increase in the health budget, another half a million dollars towards private, American-style health care when it comes to surgical centres, Mr. Speaker.

We've been mired in chaos and corruption when it comes to the corrupt care cover-up scandal and the layoff of leaders within AHS and other sectors as the government's response to that. It is time for transparency. It is time to acknowledge the problem as it relates to primary care and for everyone to vote yes on this motion, please.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 506 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:40 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eggen	Renaud
Batten	Ellingson	Sabir
Brar, Gurinder	Goehring	Sigurdson, L.
Brar, Gurtej	Hoffman	Wright, P.
Chapman	Ip	

5:50

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 14 Against – 45

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:52 p.m.]

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