



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 1, 2026

Day 42

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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

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Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
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(UC)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Progressive Tory: 1

Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 1, 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.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very excited to you and through you to introduce my very first school from my constituency. It's the grade 5/6 students of Olds Koinonia Christian school along with their teachers. Fun fact: their teacher, Mrs. Ziegler, was my children's math teacher in high school. Could you please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not too often that I get a school group here either. I'd like to introduce the grade 11 and 12 students from Livingstone school all the way down in Lundbreck Falls, which is about a six-hour drive from here on a school bus. I ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you members of the Archaeological Society of Alberta, including my constituent Jennifer Hallson, vice-president of the Edmonton branch, and Taydem LaRocque, secretary and provincial board rep. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo and I had a very productive meeting with them. The ASA does very important work promoting and preserving Alberta's heritage. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you members from the Christian Health Association of Alberta, who work each and every day with our province to provide over 38,000 units of continuing care and assisted living facilities in our province. Without them we couldn't do what we do, and I ask them to rise – there you go – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Gurinder Brar: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to introduce you to some strong women deeply committed to strengthening our community. Leading them is Gurcharan Thind, who runs the Calgary Women Cultural Association, an organization doing incredible work to empower women and improve women's safety in our city. Along with her are Kiran Kalsi, Taranjeet Parmar, Samar Parmar, Balvir Grewal, and Maninder Channey. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you members from my department, more JETIs who have helped on legislation coming forward: Lisa Ho, Mary Nguyen, Mark Zhao, Alejandra Varela, Gerald Afadani, Jolanta Slaska, and Jeanique Tucker. I apologize if I got some of those names wrong. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise to introduce Kathy Rast. Kathy is a dedicated teacher that has deep community roots across the province. I want to thank her for her tireless service to Alberta and to her students. I ask that she rise and be recognized.

The Speaker: The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce the Kurbis family from my wonderful constituency of Calgary-North West. Trisha Kurbis is home-schooling her five sons: Daniel, Andrew, Luke, David, and Joel. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you, through you, and to all members of this Assembly I'd like to introduce from TC Energy Trevor Ebl, president for Canadian natural gas pipelines, and Brock Harrison, manager of government relations, a friend of my former chief of staff in this building. They're here to talk about how we can grow Alberta's natural gas infrastructure to get more of our resources to market, which I know all members of this Assembly and all Albertans are grateful for. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Bill 24

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across Alberta you'll find people taking what we grow right here at home and turning it into something they're proud to put their name on. In small towns and big cities family-run distilleries and local businesses are putting in the work every single day to craft world-class whisky. They're creating jobs, supporting farmers, and building something that reflects who we are as Albertans.

For rural communities like Lacombe-Ponoka this work matters. Clear recognition for Alberta whisky strengthens demand for Alberta-grown grain, creating new growth opportunities for barley breeding centres like Western Crop Innovations in Lacombe and the Rahr Malting plant in Alix, one of the largest of its kind in western Canada. This gives producers confidence to invest in a strong, local whisky industry.

It's why our government is introducing the Alberta Whisky Act, to ensure Alberta whisky rightfully gets the recognition it deserves right here at home and across the world. When someone picks up a bottle labelled, "Alberta whisky," they should know it was made right here with local ingredients by hard-working Albertans because, at the end of the day, this is about people. It's about the farmer growing the grain, the distiller perfecting their craft, and the small businesses and communities that benefit when things go right. When our distillers succeed, it means more visitors coming through our doors, more opportunities for local tourism, and more Alberta products on shelves right here at home and around the world.

This legislation sets clear standards. To be called Alberta whisky, it must be made right here in Alberta from start to finish, using 100 per cent Alberta water and primarily Alberta-grown grains. It also means strong quality standards like being aged for at least three years, minimum alcohol requirements, and keeping additives tightly limited so the final product reflects real craftsmanship. Importantly, it's voluntary. Distillers can keep doing what they're doing, but those who meet the standard can proudly call their product Alberta whisky. This is about pride: pride in what we grow, what we make, and who we are, proud to be Albertan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Passover

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, today marks the start of Passover, the Jewish spring festival where families celebrate freedom and the escape from slavery. Jewish Albertans will be gathering around the Seder table tonight to begin the eight days where they will share the rich stories of the Haggadah. I still remember my first Seder in Toronto decades ago. I remember the smart conversation, the power of history and ritual, the warmth of the people I was with, and, yeah, the gefilte fish.

In this role I love to spend time at Temple B'nai Tikvah in Calgary-Elbow. I'm always comforted and warmed by the welcome that I receive there from my friend Rabbi Glickman and the incredibly kind worshippers. They have welcomed me, a stranger, and shown me so much hospitality. Every time I'm at the temple, I make sure that I thank the guards standing there outside, even at minus 20, keeping people inside safe. I'm thankful for their presence and saddened that they need to be there.

I've lived for many years under the illusion that anti-Semitism had gone away. I was a boy during the Jim Keegstra hate speech trial and the ensuing Ghitter Committee on Tolerance and Understanding in the 1980s. Sadly, anti-Semitism has been a part of Alberta's history for a long time. Today we're seeing a resurgence of anti-Jewish hate. We're openly hearing slurs and conspiracy theories that I thought we would never hear again.

The Jewish community is small here in Alberta and around the world, and they need support from all of us in this very tough time for Jewish people, when many tell me that they're afraid to live their lives and afraid to be publicly Jewish, when they take down their mezuzahs and worship behind armed guards. To Jewish Albertans: I want you to know that I admire the spirit of Passover that you keep in your hearts every day.

[Remarks in Hebrew] Have a joyous Passover.

EpiPen Availability

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share a story that reminds us why legislation such as the Protection of Students with Life-threatening Allergies Act, that I brought forward in 2019, matters. On the weekend I received a call from a local school principal. The call was not political. It was human. A young student was playing basketball in gym class, had no known history of allergies, and without warning began coughing severely and was struggling to breathe. The school staff acted quickly and brought the child to the office. Within minutes his condition worsened. His eyes and lips began to swell. It became very clear that he was experiencing a severe allergic reaction. Because the proper policies were in place, staff did not hesitate. They followed protocol. They administered an epinephrine autoinjector, and almost immediately the child began breathing. When paramedics arrived, they confirmed what everyone feared. If the epinephrine had not been available and used, the outcome would have been different.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, the epinephrine autoinjector saved a child's life. This is exactly why the Protection of Students with Life-threatening Allergies Act matters. This is why ensuring every school in Alberta stocks epinephrine, trains staff, and has a clear response plan is so important. When seconds count, hesitation costs lives. This child had no allergy on record; therefore, no care plan, no warning signs. But because the tools were there and the school staff were empowered to act, a family was spared unimaginable grief and a young life was saved. This is what good legislation looks like: quiet, effective, proactive, focusing on protecting our children and supporting those trusted in their care every single day. I want to thank the school staff who acted with professionalism and courage.

I want to remind the Assembly that decisions made here reach far beyond our Chamber. On the weekend one of those decisions saved a young life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Sikh Heritage Month

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to proudly recognize April as Sikh Heritage Month and to commemorate the establishment of the Khalsa, a moment in history that embodies bravery, equality, and service to humanity. The Sikh faith is rooted in the teachings of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji and grounded in equality, honest labour, and the responsibility to share with others. This faith was given form in 1699, when Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji created the Khalsa, a fearless community of principled soldiers, sant sipahis, committed to belief in one God, the pursuit of justice, and protecting the most vulnerable.

Sikh identity is inseparable from the dastar, the turban. It is not merely an article of faith; it is a crown of sovereignty, equality, and duty. The dastar reminds the world that the Sikh will never remain silent in the face of injustice. This spirit of inclusion lives on through langar, the free community kitchen. During global crises or moments of everyday hardship Sikhs across Alberta and Canada continue to serve all people without judgment.

Sikhs have contributed to this province for more than a century. We stand on the shoulders of pioneers like Harnam Singh Hari, Alberta's first Sikh settler in Calgary, whose resilience and hard work helped build this province. We honour heroes like Private Buckam Singh, who made the ultimate sacrifice for Canada during the First World War. Sikhs continue to live by the principle of chardi kala, eternal optimism, dedicating themselves to serving humanity, building a fair society, and unwavering courage to face injustice.

I ask all members of this Assembly to join me in celebrating Sikh Heritage Month and enduring values of bravery, sacrifice, and unity, that strengthen our province and our country. [Remarks in Punjabi] Victory to charity and arms.

Thank you.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, reports suggest that it's RCMP organized crime units executing search warrants. Court cases are mounting. Scandals are breaking. This is no coincidence. The same names keep appearing across contracts, land deals, ministerial decisions, court proceedings, and now police investigations. Albertans are asking: what is going on with this government?

Let's follow the money: a \$70 million Tylenol deal paid up front despite objections, legal concerns, and a lower bid; tens of millions unaccounted for; chartered surgical contracts issued above market rates; over \$100 million in sole-source recovery centre funding, with \$38 million routed through a lawyer having close ties to government. "Nothing to see here," says the UCP.

But, wait, there's more: a property flip generating a \$300,000 gain; reports of private travel, luxury suites, even golden statues; family members tied to the same network, working inside this government. "Nothing to see here," says the UCP.

Multiple cases before the courts, allegations of co-ordinated online harassment identified as witness intimidation, those same tactics repeated by government cabinet ministers, now RCMP search warrants: "Nothing to see here," says the UCP.

Yet information is restricted, oversight weakened, and decisions are centralized in the Premier's office. Warnings were raised; the pattern continued. Ministers with a duty to act do not. Contracts, money, access, court cases, appointments, police investigations. This is not an exception; it's the rule. It repeats, persists, and it's not going away. But whether there is a public inquiry or not, the RCMP are closing in. "Nothing to see here," says the UCP.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ismaili Muslim Community

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Aga Khan Prince Rahim Al-Hussaini wrapped up his first official visit to Canada in his new role. Over the last few days he has broken ground on the first Ismaili jamatkhana in the province of Quebec, and he cut the ribbon on Generations Toronto, a long-term care centre and multigenerational housing facility based on the incredibly successful model of Generations Calgary. Of course, here in Edmonton we enjoy the Aga Khan Gardens.

I'd like to tell my own story. When my parents moved here in 1971, there weren't very many Ismaili Muslims here, and there weren't any jamatkhana. On Fridays my mom would strip the sheets off the beds and hand-wash them and hang them to dry. In the evening she would bundle those damp sheets up in her backpack, get on the subway, and go to someone's basement where she would lay the sheets on the ground to lend a bit of dignity to that makeshift prayer space. Not even a year later the government of Canada welcomed thousands of Asian refugees from Uganda, the first major influx of non-White refugees in the 20th century. What a great decision that was.

In the half-century since then the Ismaili community in Alberta has contributed so much to this province and to this country as a whole. Beyond parks and community spaces, we've contributed to all aspects of life in this great place. Of course, here in Alberta Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, a stateless person from that same expulsion, now represents the Crown as a proud Muslim woman. I am proud to be an Ismaili Muslim, and I'm deeply grateful for the leadership of the late Aga Khan and for Prince Rahim. I look forward, inshallah, to welcoming him soon on his first official visit to Alberta.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 28, Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, sponsored by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 26 Immigration Oversight Act

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today and request leave to introduce Bill 26, Immigration Oversight Act.

If passed, Bill 26 would give Alberta's government more control over and improve the integrity of immigration in Alberta. Enhancing oversight of employers, foreign worker recruiters, and immigration consultants would provide us with the tools needed to monitor immigration and ensure the people hired to work in our province are being treated fairly and meeting Alberta's workforce labour needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With that, I move first reading of Bill 26.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

Bill 27 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 27, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

In February this government introduced Budget 2026, focused on disciplined choices and clear priorities for Albertans. Bill 27 delivers key measures from that budget, including focusing seniors support on those who need it most, strengthening our insurance framework to enable the care-first system in 2027, and enabling strategic co-investment to support innovation and growth. As we face global uncertainty, we remain focused on practical action and responsible decisions.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move first reading of Bill 27, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a first time]

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Judicial Appointments

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy birthday to the Premier.

Conservatives, Mr. Speaker, are supposed to be about limited government, and if you believe in limited government, the first question you should ask when you put in legislation is: what problem am I trying to solve here? Yet they're flooding the Legislature with legislation that solves no problems Albertans actually have. First of all, they want to run the judicial system themselves instead of respecting judicial independence. What problem is the Premier trying to solve? Which judges doesn't she like, and why doesn't she like them?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have much more to say on this later when I bring forward the motion, but I can say that we already do appoint judges. We appoint judges to the provincial court. We appoint, actually, hundreds of them. We also appoint supernumeraries to the King's Bench, and we also appoint justices of the peace. We believe that that process has served us well and it should apply at the federal level when it comes to the two higher courts that operate in our province. Section 92(14) does give administration of justice powers to the province, and we intend to fully exercise that.

Mr. Nenshi: So there is no problem she's solving; this is just about deflection.

Let's be clear. The federal judicial appointment committee is made up entirely of Albertans, and it's also been long-standing practice of the federal government to run names by the government of Alberta before they appoint any judges. We know that this Justice minister has had nothing but enthusiastic praise for every name that has come across his desk, so again, what's the problem here? Specifically, which Albertans should not be on this committee, and which judges should not be appointed?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I mean, technically there are six Senate seats that are occupied by Albertans, too, but I don't know if any of those would be able to get democratic approval in this province either or necessarily reflect the majority view of this province. We're just talking about reversing the process that the member opposite was talking about. Rather than them giving us a phone call the day before and saying, "Hey, this is what we're doing," we would actually give them a list and have a proper vetting process and a true collaboration. That's how our country is supposed to work. That's what collaborative federalism looks like.

Mr. Nenshi: That was a deeply troubling answer from the Premier because it is exactly what this government does, a very dangerous slide towards authoritarianism. She says that only Albertans that agree with her are true Albertans, implying that she has all the power. L'État, c'est elle. That she is the government, and only she can represent real Albertans. That is not what Albertans voted for. There is not one Albertan who wants Sam Mraiche, the minister's cousin, or the Premier, Donald Trump's employee, to make every single decision. So what judges is the Premier scared of?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know why the member opposite constantly talks down Alberta and constantly talks down the power of the provincial government to be able to exercise its areas of jurisdiction. We are a strong and powerful province. We have over 5 million people, and as you become a strong and powerful province, you take on more duties that are given to you under the Constitution. Under the Constitution – and I encourage the member opposite to read it – we are going to do exactly what Quebec is doing. Quebec has already passed a constitutional motion in their Legislature to allow for the government of Quebec to make recommendations, and we're going to do the same.

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

Bill 25

Mr. Nenshi: It's very clear that it's this Premier who does not trust Albertans, including members of her own caucus, including elected school board trustees, including anyone who doesn't agree with her. They now want – you know, education is a mess. There are a lot of things to fix, and today the government is focused on woke virtue signalling and saying that they want to be able to say who schools should be named after. I want to know: who is she scared of? Is it the Michael Phair school because he's a gay man? Is it the Nelson Mandela school because, well, you know? I look forward to the Sam Mraiche school of ethics and corruption. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. We all have a chance to rehearse before this, and we should all finish on time.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the main intent of the bill that is being put forward is to make sure that we're protecting teachers and students in the schools. We know from our complexity review and

our complexity task force that, sadly, basic rules of occupational health and safety are not being followed in our school jurisdictions. We're going to give the power to principals, to superintendents, to trustees to ensure that students who are violent in the school do not end up terrorizing the teachers and the other students. We have to find a different pathway. You have the right to earn your way into the classroom, and you can earn your way out of it, too.

Mr. Nenshi: What was that? So naming schools after nonconservatives makes students terrorists. I think that's what she said. It makes no sense, what she is trying to say here. Instead of funding education . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Nenshi: . . . the government appears to be funding bureaucrats to go through the Education Act and remove scary words like "welcoming," removed eight times, like "diversity," removed five times. So who do they want public schools to be less welcoming to? Is it immigrant kids, kids with disabilities, or is it gay kids?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Violent kids.

The Speaker: Oh, a point of order.

Sorry, Premier. You haven't started yet. You'll get your 35.

A point of order was noted at 1:56.

Ms Smith: Violent kids, Mr. Speaker. Maybe he should talk to his Member for Calgary-Beddington, who seems to understand exactly what teachers are experiencing on the front line, having students kicking them in the stomach, punching them in the face, biting their nipple to the point that they need to have surgery. That's what we're talking about. That kind of behaviour would never be allowed in our workplace. That kind of behaviour should not be allowed in a school environment as well. That is the essence of what the bill is about, to make sure that we have the tools and that the teachers and principals have the tools to get those kids the help they need, but get them the heck out of that school.

Mr. Nenshi: If this was truly an act that had anything to do with school safety, we would welcome it, but the Premier seems to say that the words "diversity" and "welcoming" are so triggering that they make students violent and so, by the way, are flags. The Sam Mraiche school of ethics and finance will not be able to fly any flags other than the provincial and Canadian flag. No city flags, no Métis flags, no Treaty 7 flags: nothing else. Let's be serious here. This isn't about that. This is about banning the pride flag. So why doesn't the government just stand up and say: we want to ban the pride flag?

The Speaker: The Premier. [interjections] Order. I heard the question just fine. Let's hear the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know at the NDP federal convention all we saw waved was the Palestinian flag and the Venezuelan flag. We didn't see the Canadian flag, and that, I think, is really problematic and indicates a lack of respect for not only our incredible province but also our incredible country. We have two flags in this Legislature as well as many of the flags from other provinces. We want kids to understand how our country works. It's part of the reason why, just like the tradition of this Legislature, they are going to be starting each school week singing *O Canada*, and I would like the members opposite to support us in it.

The Speaker: The hon. opposition leader.

Mr. Nenshi: I do appreciate that the Premier, in the middle of her answer, suddenly noticed there were other flags in this Legislature, just as there are in schools.

Electoral Boundaries

Mr. Nenshi: Yesterday the Premier contradicted her Justice minister, which is easy to do because he contradicts himself all the time. The Justice minister told me to remove my tinfoil hat on electoral boundaries. I would be happy to give that hat back to the chemtrail caucus over there, but the Premier can make that easy for us today by simply saying: will the Premier adopt the majority report of the independent commission?

The Speaker: That was the start of the third set of questions.
The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite well knows, Members of the Legislative Assembly will indeed make the decision on the Electoral Boundaries Commission report. I once again would just express my gratitude for the work that the committee did, and I also want to express gratitude to all of the Albertans, including members of this Assembly, who participated in that process. There will be a moment in time where Members of the Legislative Assembly will have an opportunity to vote, and I look forward to that day.

2:00

Mr. Nenshi: You know, when they thought that the commission would go their way, the Premier and the Justice minister were way more clear in their answers and said, quote, politicians should never draw electoral boundary maps, but what the Premier just said is that Members of the Legislative Assembly will draw the maps, which, of course, means the Premier will draw the maps. Does the Premier understand that this is both illegal and unconstitutional and, in fact, she can't use her favourite notwithstanding clause on section 3 of the Constitution?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is not new to this Chamber. Maybe his House leader can explain how legislation works and how we make these motions in the Legislature and how they get passed. Yes, indeed, we did have an Electoral Boundaries Commission. They have reported back, and Members of this Legislative Assembly are going to be able to vote on that. That's the process. That's the way it works, and I look forward to that day when we have the vote.

Mr. Nenshi: We would be thrilled with an up or down vote on the recommendations of that committee, and there was only one.

We know that the stunning about-face from the UCP commissioners came fast. Strange maps with the same font and style were distributed across the province that are the same font and style as the minority report. We know that the minister of transportation this weekend told one of his constituents: ignore the majority report; look at the minority report. We know that the Premier's staffers have been handing out those same maps for weeks. Who gave the political direction to interfere . . .

The Speaker: Time's up. We had one warning about finishing on time. This is the second one.
Go ahead, Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I encourage all members to read the report, including the words of Justice Dallas Miller, who is

the lead of that report. We're going to be able to have an opportunity to discuss it in this Legislature and an opportunity to vote on it in this Legislature. That's how it works, Members of the Legislative Assembly are able to make . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. When you actually have the question, perhaps you should hear the answer.

Ms Smith: Members of the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, as you know and as he knows, make the decision.

Judicial Appointments (continued)

Ms Pancholi: In today's version of UCP-manufactured outrage, the Premier has decided she wants to amend the Canadian Constitution so that she decides who gets appointed as a judge in Alberta. The Premier and Justice minister are openly calling into question the credibility and objectivity of the judges who hear the most serious criminal and civil cases in our province simply because the UCP didn't select them. This is dangerous and undermines the rule of law. Since she's been Premier, over 30 judges have been appointed to Alberta's superior courts, so Albertans deserve to know: which of these 30 judges does the UCP specifically object to?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All of the judges in this province do a remarkable job in leading our courts, doing wonderful work, protecting Albertans, and making important decisions day to day. Asking for additional input is exactly what the Premier is looking for. That's exactly what this government is looking for. Other provinces have been doing it for a very long time. Quebec has made great inroads in their processes. We're looking for greater collaboration and greater co-operation in the selection of superior court judges. That's a good thing for Alberta.

Ms Pancholi: The Justice minister knows full well that the current appointment process involves a committee made up of representatives from the Chief Justice of Alberta, the Canadian Bar Association, the Law Society of Alberta, the federal government, and the Minister of Justice, but the UCP think cabinet members like the minister of service Alberta, who was just found to have breached election laws, are more qualified to decide who should be on the bench. Can the minister explain why in the world Albertans should trust his UCP cabinet more than a group of highly qualified individuals to appoint judges in Alberta?

Mr. Amery: Well, Mr. Speaker, it may come as a surprise to that member, but we do it all the time. In the Alberta Court of Justice we have appointed hundreds of judges in this province, and we have a remarkably independent and nonpartisan committee that does exactly that. In the superior courts we don't have the same type of input. We don't have the same type of say. The Premier is asking for more collaboration, more input, and more engagement. Once again, the people of Alberta will be better for that.

Ms Pancholi: The only problem that needs fixing is that Albertans need a government who cares about them even half as much as the UCP cares about inventing fights with the feds.

No. What's really going on here is that the courts in Alberta have repeatedly applied the law fairly and consistently said no to the UCP's most unconstitutional and dangerous actions like allowing referendum questions that breach treaty rights, like the interference of the Premier into prosecutions, like violating the Charter rights of

parents and vulnerable youth. Will the Premier admit that nothing in our democracy is safe from her ideological and dangerous overreach?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Look, the NDP opposition can't have it both ways. They can't in one breath say that the entire judicial advisory committee for superior court judges is made up of Albertans, and then oppose the government's move to have greater input and collaboration in the selection of superior court judges to Alberta. It makes no sense. You can't speak out of both sides of your mouth. On this side of the House we're looking to represent Albertans. We're going to defend Albertans, and we're going to do what's right for Albertans every single time.

The Speaker: Okay. No preambles from here on in the supplementaries.

Electoral Boundaries (continued)

Ms Ganley: After months of work talking to Albertans all over the province, an interim report, and more talking to Albertans, the Electoral Boundaries Commission has come forward with its recommendations. Completely disregarding that work, the law, fairness, and democracy, the UCP appointees have suggested something else: a rigged map. Albertans had no input. This is not the report. The minister now has two options: respect Albertans' right to vote and accept the report, or U.S.-style gerrymandering. Will the minister introduce the report as written?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, there is so much wrong in that question that I'll try to begin to help elaborate for the member what actually happens. This is a decision for Members of the Legislative Assembly. They are not decisions for the minister or any minister, for that matter. We know that the work of the Electoral Boundaries Commission was great work. They canvassed the entire province. They spoke and sought input from Albertans all over. This is important work. It deserves the attention of this Assembly and all members in it.

The Speaker: Just as a reference here, clearly not pointed at the current questioner or answerer, but it's timely. There is a rule that you shouldn't criticize judges in this House, which means asking the other side to ask which judges they're afraid of, or something else, actually shouldn't happen. The citation is pages 527 and 528 in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. I only say this as an example of good advice that everybody should heed.

Ms Ganley: Given that this very same process took place under the NDP and we received a report that drew together my riding with a colleague's, impacting me pretty directly, but given that my colleagues and I knew that this was about fairness and democracy and that no political interest should trump that and given that I introduced a map into the House, as the minister now must, will the minister show Albertans the same respect I did and introduce the majority map?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again, we've said time and again that we respect the work of the boundaries commission. We respect that this is an independent process. That's why it is a role not of government but of the Legislative Assembly to look at the findings, to look at the recommendations, and make a decision. That report was tabled by you, Mr. Speaker, and all members in this Assembly will have the opportunity to weigh in on it. Let me remind members

opposite that everybody in this House had the opportunity to provide submissions to the commission, and it's disappointing to see that the NDP continues to politicize an otherwise independent process.

Ms Ganley: Given that when the options are to respect the right to vote on the map that you introduce or to rig the game, all options should definitely not be on the table and given that bringing in any map other than the one recommended by the commission, which this minister must introduce into this House, would be a slap in the face to democracy and given that this government, particularly the Justice minister, claims to be all about democracy, will the minister put his money where his mouth is and introduce the map the commission recommended?

2:10

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, let me try for the third time. Once again, the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, not the minister, not the government, get to draw or choose the map. That is an opportunity for every member in this Legislature . . .

Member Miyashiro: Just say yes.

The Speaker: Lethbridge-West, I can hear you better than I can hear anybody else, and you don't have the floor.
Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All of the members in this Assembly will have the opportunity to weigh in on the maps, to debate them, to discuss them, and to represent on behalf of their constituents. Let's let the Legislative Assembly do its job.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Bill 24

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across Alberta local businesses and family-run distilleries are taking grains grown by our farmers and turning them into something special, something they're proud to put their name on, but until now there's been no clear definition of what Alberta whisky actually is. Without that identity, it's harder for these businesses to stand out and grow. To the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction: how will the Alberta Whisky Act support local businesses and put Alberta distillers on the world stage?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta we have world-class distilleries that produce amazing whiskies. Companies like Anohka, GrainHenge, Eau Claire, ADL, they've won awards on the global stage, yet they're still one of the best kept secrets in the whisky industry. The Alberta Whisky Act is about to change that. The Alberta Whisky Act is about pride in our local industries. It's about pride in our world-class grains. Industry had a lot to say, and we chose to listen.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that response. Given that Alberta whisky starts with the hard work of our farmers using the finest grains grown right here at home in Alberta and given that the Alberta Whisky Act puts our world-class agriculture sector front and centre in a growing global market, can the

Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation please explain how this legislation showcases the craftsmanship behind Alberta's agricultural industry?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I mean, Alberta whisky truly starts in our fields, and no one grows better grains than Alberta farmers. Our grain is so good that even Scotland and Ireland use it for their Irish whisky and their Scotches. This legislation shines a spotlight on that world-class skill and craftsmanship at every step from grain to glass. It's about backing our farmers, telling Alberta's story, and putting our products front and centre on the world stage.

The Speaker: The hon. the member.

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given Alberta's tourism industry is growing at record rates and given local distillers can add to that momentum by turning homegrown grain into whisky that people are proud to share and further given this is an opportunity to bring more visitors into our communities and support local businesses across the province, can the Minister of Tourism and Sport share how the Alberta Whisky Act will build on this growth and strengthen Alberta's visitor economy?

The Speaker: The Minister of Tourism and Sport.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the great question. Alberta's tourism strategy is focused on diversifying and growing unique tourism experiences and destinations across our beautiful province. An Alberta whisky trail will help us to reach our goal of \$25 billion of visitor spending by 2035 as we attract new visitors and dollars as visitors explore, learn, and taste Alberta's rich whisky distilleries in the province.

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

Physician Services Agreement

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today stipends end for family medicine hospitalists. The minister has known since February that very few of these doctors signed up for the poorly remunerated ARP. About 5 per cent of hospitalists have already completely resigned, while more and more hospitalist shifts are going unfilled. It's clear there is a crisis, but it can still be resolved. Health care workers, including doctors, feel deeply disrespected by this government. How will the minister resolve this situation, or will he blame someone else like this government usually does?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In actual fact, of the over 280 clinical and surgical hospitalists, we've only received 11 formal notifications, and services are continuing today as they have. We have clinical coverage and full consultant support. The ARP referenced by the member opposite, we've got one of those open for Edmonton hospitalists today. That's roughly a \$450,000 salary, and it includes an after-hours modifier. That's an additional \$183 per hour on top of that \$450,000 salary. Top in Canada; very reasonable.

Dr. Metz: Given that in the final hours before surgery cancellations start, general internist hospitalists and associate physicians at the Grey Nuns have been assigned to cover the family medicine hospitalist night shifts and given that this is unsustainable and will

drive more physicians to leave our public hospitals to where they get fair remuneration and are treated other than like widgets, how will this minister prove that he can do better than Tyler Shandro, who began the decimation of Alberta's physician workforce in 2019? It's not a very high bar. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the claims of the member opposite, we do around 6,000 surgeries per week here in Alberta. We've had two surgical cancellations as a result of the end of stipends. Again, the vast majority of physicians are continuing to show up and do the great work that they do every day, and that's because the reasonable alternative compensation is the top in Canada. They can continue fee for service with POCP, or physician on call, amounts on top of that or a clinical ARP. That's around \$450,000, with evenings and night modifiers of up to \$183 an hour on top.

Dr. Metz: Given that respect and fair remuneration are needed for a stable hospitalist workforce to assure that the critical work that makes patients safer and reduces surgeon burnout is consistently done and given that driving hospitalists away will make surgical wait-lists longer, drive more people to emergency departments, and reduce patient safety, it is clear that this UCP government has no clue how to run the public health care system. Why has the UCP so badly messed up the surgeries and doctors are disrespected yet again?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In actual fact, we've recruited over 2,000 physicians over the last five years, record numbers, and that's because we are leading with the top compensation in Canada. It also turns out that we are a very low-tax and desirable place to live. That's why we continue to have success not just with physicians but with the 12,000 nurses and the 10,000 health care aides. The members opposite are just not being accurate. We are continuing to have great success recruiting health care workers to Alberta, and we will continue to.

Alberta Separatism and Government Caucus

Mr. Shepherd: It seems the Member for Red Deer-South is a separatist. That's bad, but at least it's honest. In an op-ed in the *Western Standard* the member is very clear. He says that Canada is hopelessly broken, "a first-world country moving towards a third-world country . . . rigged against Alberta" in a way that can never be fixed. Now, that flies in the face of the Premier's claims that her support for separatists is about fixing Canada, making it work again. Why is this member still her hand-picked parliamentary secretary and in the UCP caucus? Does he represent this separatist government's actual views?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that I caught your eye, and I appreciate you recognizing me despite leaving my equity card at home, that I forgot after the NDP leadership convention. What I can say is that questions like that from the members opposite show their disdain for direct democracy and truly listening to Albertans. We have created a process by which . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. It was quiet during the question.

The Government House Leader. Let's hear the answer.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They clearly don't like what I have to say because it's the fact.

We have created a process by which members of the public can put forth questions and gather petition signatures that are in the best interest of the province. We're here to create that process, and we're going to let the process play through.

Mr. Shepherd: Now, given that the UCP doesn't get to define or claim ownership of the history, the culture, or the symbols of our country – they belong to all of us – and given that their views on what denigrates or degrades are not Albertans', particularly given that day after day this government shows disrespect and disdain for our province, our country, our institutions, our democracy, First Nations, and the rule of law, if this minister and his colleagues are truly the patriots they claim, will they do what the Premier won't and denounce separatism today?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not that member's first day on the job, but I did not hear a question about government business at all in the ramblings of the Member for Edmonton–City Centre. What I did hear, though, is clear disdain for Albertans and their right to have a say on matters that are incredibly important to them, particularly matters about fairness for Alberta within Confederation. We believe Canada can work. We believe in a united Canada. It's why we have all of the flags here in the Legislature. We also believe in a sovereign Alberta within a united Canada, and I don't understand what problem the members opposite have with consulting Albertans.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that Albertans aren't impressed by this self-righteous word salad full of more fertilizer than facts and given that actually denigrating our institutions would be chugging a beer on the floor of the Legislature like an immature frat boy or saying, like the Member for Red Deer–South, that the Canadian Constitution, the foundation of our country, is permanently rigged against Alberta and broken beyond repair, will the Premier simply stand and tell us today: does she truly believe in Canada, or is she a separatist like the Member for Red Deer–South?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you. I love that the member opposite brought out "facts." I admire the fact that he's able to stand in this Chamber and speak unencumbered by the facts, Mr. Speaker.

What I can say on this side of the House is that we believe in Canada. We also believe in direct democracy and listening, truly consulting. The members opposite hate that idea because every time they go to Albertans writ large, they are rejected. They are rejected by record numbers, Mr. Speaker. It happened in 2019, which made them the first-ever one-term government in the history of Alberta as a province and punted Rachel Notley to the curb, wherever she may be today. We're on the right path.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to the Member for Olds–Didsbury–Three Hills.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:22.

I think we can all agree that you never got a chance to start, so you have your full 35 ahead of you.

Career Education Programming in Alberta

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural youth often have fewer opportunities to explore different career paths. In my constituency a

home building company in Didsbury is partnering with Alberta futures and the local school on the future builders of Alberta program, a three-day, hands-on experience introducing grade 10 students to all aspects of home building. It's exciting because programs like this show rural students what's possible close to home. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration: how is our government supporting partnerships like future builders that give rural students practical exposure to careers in construction?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank that member for the question and encourage the members opposite to take note. That's how you ask a question in this Chamber and represent your constituents.

It's programs like this that give young Albertans real-world experience, Mr. Speaker. This is something of absolute value that helps youth to grow into productive, confident members of our workforce, something that we need more of. We want to make sure that here in Alberta Albertans have the first crack at jobs and get them the skills they need as early as possible so they can start training for a vocation and be awesome, contributing members of our province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that programs like future builders in Didsbury show how powerful it is when employers, schools, and community partners come together to support youth pathways and given that rural communities depend on these partnerships but often need additional support to sustain them, including access to wage subsidies and employer-focused grants that help create student opportunities, to the minister: what further steps is the government taking to strengthen and expand youth employment partnerships across Alberta, particularly in rural areas, so that more employers can access the grants and supports available to hire and train young people?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That first employment opportunity is critical along the employment path. That's why we introduced the youth hiring incentive here in Alberta, initially committing \$8 million to that, which has now supported 8,700 youth in Alberta. In this budget of '26-27 we've also added another \$20 million over three years to continue to invest in Alberta's youth, making sure they get that first job experience and those critical skills that help them along a successful employment path.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that strengthening Alberta's skilled trades requires exposing students to hands-on learning earlier and given that rural schools like Acme and Olds high school are actively utilizing dual credit programs, helping students begin identifying potential career paths earlier in their education, especially with Acme's new school and innovation centre supporting expanding opportunities, to the Minister of Education and Childcare: how is the government expanding dual credit with trades focused on high school programming so more rural students, like those at Acme and Olds . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister of education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very important question. We want to expand opportunities for students in the

member's constituency and across the province to be able to access trade programming. There are a number of things that we're doing. For example, one of the things that we're doing is expanding access to collegiate programming. We're investing \$32 million in Budget '26 to help more school divisions develop collegiate programming that gives students exposure to trades and other career-related opportunities. Furthermore, we're also expanding career education in our curriculum to ensure students have access to these opportunities.

National Defence Investment in Alberta

Ms Goehring: Edmonton is vital to our national defence. Federal commitments to increase defence spending to more than \$62 billion next year and \$150 billion by 2035 show that these investments should not pass us by. The Edmonton International Airport is the planned location of the western main operating base for the Royal Canadian Air Force's CC-330 Husky fleet, which extends defence operations for CFB Edmonton, Wainwright, and 4 Wing Cold Lake. How does the government ensure Canadian military operations are supported here with separation threatening these future investment plans?

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wish we could focus on one specific issue for the members opposite, which was raised and very important, which is how Alberta can capture the billions of dollars that are being allocated for defence spending. Alberta is the best place to invest in defence spending. We have a perfect landscape. We have the proper climate for this. As we drive towards getting the F-35s here in Alberta, we'll use our air bases to the maximum of their potential. Lots of members of this caucus have done tremendous work creating relationships, making sure that we are a primary destination for that investment.

Ms Goehring: Given the Edmonton region is uniquely suited to support our national defence efforts with its research-intensive postsecondary sector, international airport, proximity to major military bases, and Canada's largest energy and manufacturing cluster and given our capabilities to advance Canada's security, economic resilience, and sovereignty, how can the Canadian military community expect Edmonton to contribute to our national defence goals when this separatist government is a threat to our national sovereignty?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea why the members opposite continue to go down this trail when all we've put together is a path towards a question for the public. As far as defence spending is concerned, we continue, with the leadership of the Premier, to make the case that Alberta is the primary destination for investment in defence, particularly with the air force. As we support that investment in places like Cold Lake, we will work with them on things like infrastructure development, making sure they know that Alberta is open for business.

Ms Goehring: Given that the Alberta Industrial Heartland has decades of strength that align directly with Canada's defence needs and given that the region provides the materials, expertise, and capacity required to produce and maintain advanced systems, how can this government possibly support industry partners and their plan for a thriving future in support of our nation's defence when investing in this province poses great risk with separatism looming?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, in answer to that question I'll quote the Business Council of Alberta.

For more than a decade, business investment in Canada has stagnated while peer economies have accelerated. Productivity has slowed, major projects have stalled, and investor confidence has weakened.

The root cause is clear: Canada's project approval and regulatory system has become the single largest barrier to investment and prosperity in the country.

In this province we will reduce every regulatory barrier possible in the way for us to attract and maintain defence and industrialization spending right here in Alberta, and we're going to make it happen.

2:30 Economic Development and Investment Attraction

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, NDP support of Liberal policies imposed major barriers to building projects and absolutely destroyed investor confidence in the nation. The Trans Mountain pipeline, which was partially completed, was stricken by so many federal policy changes that it became unfeasible for private industry to continue. The Liberal government ultimately purchased this; otherwise it would have died. Where Kinder Morgan had cost budgeted it at \$7.4 billion to build this, it cost the federal government over \$34 billion to finish that. To the government, what assurances can we offer investors that future projects will be supported rather than impeded? [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy and Minerals, and let's – order. Order. Order.
Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we believe in creating the conditions for investments, and we're not going to do what the Trudeau Liberal-NDP coalition did for years: drove out investment. We're eliminating red tape. We're bringing in a 120-day approval process. We're working with Ottawa to kill some bad laws that those folks over there brought in. We're promoting our responsible energy, doubling our production of oil, and diversifying our markets, diversifying our sector. I could go on and on and on. We're doing so much for Alberta because we actually believe in Alberta and Albertans so much.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. It's given that left-leaning policies to support the environment actually damage the environment more. It's given that the ban on single-use plastics is a prime example, as many can attest to their collection of reusable shopping bags and the waste that they've created. Further given that while Ottawa has backtracked on their export ban on plastics, the suspension of single-use plastics remains and is hurting Alberta businesses. To the government: can you please tell this House how Alberta is continuing to fight back against these federal policies that harm Alberta's industries?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environmental and Protected Areas.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It is true. The plastics ban is a terrible policy. Every modern necessity is either made from or contains plastic. This sweeping ban hurts every Canadian and business and does nothing for the environment. Even the Calgary Food Bank has suffered under this policy, paying as high as \$67,000 more a year on bags because of this ban. Our Premier's leadership got rid of most of the nine bad laws, but this one remains. We will continue to fight back and explore all options to defend our jurisdiction and jobs, including supporting our appeal to the Supreme Court.

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister for that answer. It's given that Alberta has set up an ecosystem that enables businesses to thrive. Given that between 2020 and 2024 Alberta netted 56 new corporate head offices, according to Statistics Canada, which equates to over 7,000 jobs, with growth in tech, energy, financial services, and engineering – the highest profile being De Havilland – to the government: how has Alberta's approach helped create a business environment that attracts investment, sustains high-quality jobs, and supports manufacturers?

Mr. Jean: It's true, Mr. Speaker. The NDP drove out investment; we are bringing it back. The NDP wanted to raise taxes. We're not going to do that. We're going to create an environment that's good for businesses, and we have. We've seen, just in the last little while, Dow Chemical added an \$11.6 billion investment, \$2.8 billion in the Yellowhead mainline natural gas pipeline, \$350 million in a naphtha recovery unit tailings treatment project, CCUS agreements for Atlas carbon sequestration hub, Glacier gas plant CCUS phase 2. Deep Sky chose Alberta for direct air carbon capture test site, and we are set up to . . .

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

Hospitals in Edmonton

Member Hoyle: After seven years of this UCP government, Albertans are paying more and getting less, and nowhere is that failure clearer than in health care. This government backed out of the south Edmonton hospital, a project that should have been opening this year, after already spending \$69 million of taxpayers' money with nothing to show for it. Families in south Edmonton are still waiting for care, while emergency rooms remain overcrowded. How does this government justify wasting \$69 million on a cancelled hospital while communities are still left without the care they were promised?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the projects that we've announced for the Edmonton area, which include a bed tower at the Misericordia, a net increase of 350 beds; a bed tower at the Grey Nuns hospital, again, doubling that hospital's capacity with another 350 beds; the stand-alone Stollery; and then, of course, backfilling the University of Alberta hospital with adult acute-care capacity, we will create vastly more capacity on a dollar-for-dollar basis and will be better for patients, better for access to care.

Member Hoyle: Given that cancelling the south Edmonton hospital is not just a health care failure but an economic failure for Edmonton and surrounding communities and given that this project was expected to create thousands of construction jobs and long-term employment while supporting local businesses and contracts and given that after spending \$69 million this government walked away, leaving workers without jobs and businesses without opportunity, how does this government justify cancelling a major economic project after wasting \$69 million while local workers are left behind?

The Speaker: Minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In actual fact, despite what the members claim, all of the projects that I've highlighted are in the budget. In addition to that the member opposite highlighted our economic record, which is an odd thing to do given their economic record. Over a 12-month period Alberta was responsible for almost

the entire job creation across the country. With Alberta's job creation removed, the country would have lost over 30,000 full-time jobs. That sounds like a year under the NDP. We're going to continue to lead with world-class business policies while building the health care people need.

Member Hoyle: Given that the south Edmonton hospital was a major opportunity for skilled trades and apprentices across Alberta and given that large public builds like this create steady work for electricians, plumbers, carpenters, and apprentices who rely on these projects to complete training hours and build their careers and given that by cancelling this project, this government removed critical work opportunities for the next generation of trade workers, how does this government justify cancelling infrastructure projects that would have supported thousands of skilled trade jobs across our province?

The Speaker: Minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to highlight some other major projects like the Red Deer regional hospital redevelopment. These projects are part of the 300 net new acute-care spaces that are under construction today, with over 2,000 spaces now in planning and design across the province. Those projects would include, of course, the South Health Campus additional in-patient tower and women's health centre, which, of course, is included in the budget under other health initiatives like capital planning. It includes \$63 million for developing shelled and vacated and decanted space across the province in rural settings as well.

Bill 25

(continued)

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, the amendments to the Education Act show just how out of touch this government is with the real challenges that teachers and educators face in Alberta's classrooms. Rather than hiring more teachers and educational assistants or addressing overcrowded classrooms, the government is once again playing politics at the expense of actually improving education. Will the minister cite more than one specific example of bias in the classroom that this legislation is expected to fix or is this another gesture to his UCP base who do not support public education?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I get e-mails all the time from parents concerned with bias in the curriculum. It's obvious that the Member for Edmonton-South West has not received those. I would make a plea now to concerned parents that consistently write into my office with examples and concerns to copy those to the Member for Edmonton-South West so that he can see those as well. We believe that schools should ensure that students are being taught how to think, not what to think.

Mr. Ip: Given that this new legislation clearly demonstrates this government is inherently distrustful of teachers, educators, and school boards and given that this legislation will significantly impact how teachers can teach in the classroom, but teachers have never been asked and have never been consulted and given that teachers already have their own regulatory body that oversees professional standards and that educators are concerned that this legislation will do nothing more than instill a culture of fear amongst teaching staff, why is the minister waging another war on teachers?

Mr. Nicolaides: Regrettably, Mr. Speaker, the member's question just proves that he actually has not read the bill and has no understanding of anything that's contained within the bill.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Nicolaides: And I say that because the legislation – well, you know, the member may claim it's a point of order, but it's not a point of order to point out the facts, Mr. Speaker, because the legislation does not actually make any changes to teacher professional conduct, does not make any changes to teacher expectations. It creates changes to board expectations and responsibilities of school boards.

The Speaker: A point of order was noted.

Mr. Ip: Given that the education minister said that social and political issues should be avoided in the classroom and that teachers will be mandated to be balanced and maintain neutrality on all the issues, can the minister explain how he expects teachers to balance the curriculum that states that students will analyze ultranationalism as a cause of genocide or maintaining neutrality on teaching about racism or discrimination? Or since he said that teachers cannot teach about separatism, are these topics going to be banned from discussion in our classrooms?

2:40

Mr. Nicolaides: Regrettably, just another example of the member's lack of understanding of the legislation and of the curriculum and how our education system operates. The curriculum has very clear . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Nicolaides: . . . expectations and outcomes. Again, the members can continue to raise points of order, but this is how our education system works. We have a curriculum with clear expectations and outcomes. Teachers are required to teach those outcomes, Mr. Speaker. We don't decide what topics are to be discussed in a classroom. That's up to the teachers and the students to discuss themselves.

The Speaker: In 30 seconds we will continue with the daily Routine.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: And a point of order was noted at 2:40.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Tablings. Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Oh, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a letter. This is from an anonymous constituent of Edmonton-Strathcona. This anonymous constituent is writing about her extreme concerns around tax on AISH and cuts to persons with disabilities, and I urge everyone to read this letter.

The Speaker: Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Mr. Speaker, I table five requisite copies of the budget summary for the Lethbridge Police Service within the 2021-2022 operating budget review as published by the city of Lethbridge. It lists the Lethbridge Police Service reduction of \$1 million, as approved by city council on December 14, 2020.

I also table five requisite copies of a December 14, 2020 story from *Lethbridge News Now* titled Lethbridge City Council Approves Operating Budget, \$1M [Lethbridge Police Service] Cut Goes Through.

Then, finally, the five requisite copies of the meeting minutes for the December 14, 2020 Lethbridge city council meeting, where a motion to not reduce the police budget by \$1 million was voted down.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: All right. We don't usually heckle during tablings. I don't see any more tablings. That takes us to points of order.

An Hon. Member: Best part of the day.

The Speaker: Actually, respectfully, it's the worst part of the day, but it's what we are required to do by our own rules, so that's why we do it.

At about 1:56 p.m. it looks like the hon. Government House Leader called a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, as I review the unofficial records, the Leader of the Opposition was speaking at the time noted in response to an answer given by the Premier and said: "What was that? So naming schools after nonconservatives makes students terrorists? I think that's what she said. It makes no sense what she's trying to say here," and then it goes on to ramble incoherently.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier at no point has said anything about students being terrorists. If we want to go deep into what the definition of what a terrorist is, we can do that. But I think to equate someone who would create violence, death, mass destruction, all for the purpose of creating fear and terror in the heart of their enemies, would not be a fair characterization or even remotely in the same ballpark as the bill that has been introduced about having the Canadian national anthem played once a week in schools and also limiting flags in schools and naming schools.

Mr. Speaker, this is an absurd thing to say in this Chamber. While I would never presuppose a ruling and it is your discretion as to how you use the chair, Mr. Speaker, it's comments like this that may at some point in the future need to be addressed in the moment because this is egregious. The Premier at no point did anything remotely close to this, and it is disgusting when we are dealing with real incidents of terror around the world today. This is a point of order.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I disagree with the Government House Leader that this is a point of order, and I also disagree with his understanding of the facts. I'm not going to sling insults inside a point of order the way the Government House Leader chose to do so. I'm really hoping we can bring this to a better level.

I will say that the context is important. The Leader of the Official Opposition asked a very pointed and important question about school naming in a bill. The Government House Leader is aware of this bill and the school naming change. He just talked about it in his point of order argument to continue debate. The Premier in response to a question about school naming proceeded to talk about something nothing to do with school naming, including this sentence: "We're going to give the power to [school] principals, to superintendents, to trustees to ensure that students who are violent in the school do not end up terrorizing the teachers and the other students." Then the Government House Leader stands up and says, "Nobody said anything remotely like that," which would be untrue. You need the full context.

To a question about school naming the Premier talked about students terrorizing the teachers. Now, this was understandably confusing to the Leader of the Official Opposition, who literally started his next question with, "What was that?" and tried to understand what the Premier might have said. If the Premier doesn't want to be misunderstood, perhaps she should answer the questions that are asked.

I don't believe under 23(h), (i), and (j) that this is a point of order. I think that this was legitimate debate that was happening. The Leader of the Official Opposition was not trying to mischaracterize. The Premier literally talked about terrorizing the teachers and other

students to a question about school naming, and that is why we are at this point of confusion here.

I look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, the Blues are here. A question from the Leader of the Opposition:

It's... clear... this Premier who does not trust Albertans, including members of her own caucus, including elected school board trustees, including anyone who doesn't agree with her. They now want... education is a mess. There are a lot of things to fix, and today the government is focused on woke virtue signalling and saying that they want to be able to say who schools should be named after... who is she scared of? Is it the Michael Phair school because he's... gay? Is it the Nelson Mandela school because, well, you know? I look forward to the Sam Mraiche school of ethics and corruption.

The Premier gave the answer:

We're going to give... power to principals, to superintendents, to trustees to ensure that students who are violent in school do not end up terrorizing the teachers and the other students. We have to find a different pathway. You have the right to earn your way into the classroom, and you can earn your way out of it, too.

At which point the Leader of the Official Opposition said:

[Who] was that? So naming schools after nonconservatives makes students terrorists. I think that's what she said.

It actually isn't what she said.

Listen, imputing motives – here's the problem. The Leader of the Opposition didn't just talk about: violent students are terrorists. Actually, he brought in that "naming [them] after nonconservatives makes students terrorists." It's not helpful. I'm not exactly sure what the innuendo is about the Nelson Mandela school. I'm sure probably a hundred people in this room may know what it is, but I sure don't. You certainly leave that open to negative interpretation.

Honestly, to me the language is very much inflammatory. The comment about "naming schools after nonconservatives makes students terrorists" crosses a line we shouldn't cross here. There's probably a way that it could be said without spurring a point of order, but I don't think the care was taken in this particular case to say it that way, so this is a point of order.

2:50

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

The Speaker: Second point of order is at 2:22 or thereabouts by, I think, the Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of a Member

Ms Gray: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, I don't have access to the Blues. At 2:22, though, the Minister of Forestry and Parks could be heard to yell, "Not true," and reference somebody not being in the House. This would be a point of order, particularly if the Blues caught it as I did. I look forward to your ruling.

Mr. Schow: Didn't hear it. Can't comment.

The Speaker: Well, I didn't hear it either, nor did the *Hansard* Blues pick it up.

I think the hon. member accused of saying this has been warned about it before. It's not a point of order because it wasn't heard, but I would respectfully ask the Government House Leader to just review that with the hon. member, and if indeed he did say it, maybe counsel him that that's not where he should go. I think he's been called on this point of order before. That doesn't mean he said it today;

nonetheless, you might want to just put a bug in that member's ear that that's something we can do without, if indeed that was said.

Another one called at 2:39 and one at 2:40, I think both by the Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order

Insulting Language

Ms Gray: Yes. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I will deal with them both at the same time.

At 2:39 the minister of education was responding to a question from our member and, with my unofficial records, proceeded to say: regrettably, Mr. Speaker, the member's Q just proves that he's not read the bill; he has no understanding of anything that is contained in the bill. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) – imputes false and unavowed motives, uses abusive and insulting language, and, of course, makes allegations against another member – I rose to call a point of order.

Interestingly, the minister of education at that time said, "The member may claim it's a point of order, but it's not a point of order to point out the facts." Mr. Speaker, it is not a point of order to point out the facts; it is a point of order to insult your colleagues in this place. If that is the only way the minister of education can defend himself and his bills, he should find another path. He clearly said insulting things rather than engaging in debate on the matter at hand, which is unfortunate and sets a terrible example for children in our classrooms.

I will continue, Mr. Speaker. At 2:40 it continues again: "Regrettably, just another example of the member's lack of understanding of the legislation and of the curriculum and how our education system operates." The member asking the question at this time is a former school board trustee and a very educated person about our system of schools.

Hurling insults is not the way to win in a debate. It is also not parliamentary. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) the minister of education should not have done this. I think your ruling is particularly important today, Mr. Speaker, given the minister of education said on the record that it wasn't a point of order. I think we need some real clarity here, and I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Well, there's a little bit to unpack here, and we'll start unpacking after we hear the arguments from the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Counterargument here: I do appreciate that the Opposition House Leader brought up the fact that the member asking the question is a former school board trustee because on this side of the House the minister of primary and preventative care was also a former school board trustee, but that did not prohibit the members opposite from berating her and questioning her intelligence and once actually talking about her ability to understand legislation and understand the laws that she oversees.

To the point, though, Mr. Speaker, I do agree with the Opposition House Leader that this is a critical point of order because I think suggesting that this is a point of order and ruling as such creates a dangerous precedent where in this House we are not able to say on the record whether we believe or don't believe the members opposite understand the legislation or the motion or whatever it is we are debating that day.

Mr. Speaker, to suggest, with my unofficial records, as the education minister said, "He has not read the bill; he has no understanding of what the bill says," and then the second point of order, "Lack of understanding of how the curriculum works" – that is debate. That is the very nature of debate. If we are going to devolve into calling points of order because of hurt feelings of comments made from the government side

about whether someone does or does not understand the legislation, if that's a point of order because of hurt feelings, some people may just not be built for this job, then. That's what I'm going to have to say.

This is a tough place to work. We have robust debate, and we disagree, and sometimes insults fly. Sometimes they're points of order, and sometimes they are not. In this instance I do not believe it is. I think that you can make this ruling, Mr. Speaker, that if we're going to rule this as a point of order – hopefully, you agree with me on this – it could curtail a lot of debate and prohibit members of both sides to properly represent their constituents, which, in essence, would be a breach of privilege.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, we'll get to that unpacking part here.

I would say that the advice that this is hard to watch for kids in school: I don't disagree with that. Maybe if there are kids in school that are watching, maybe their teachers could find a different channel or teach something else. I in no way mean to denigrate teachers here. I'm just saying that what happens in here isn't always the best example for children. I'm not picking on teachers. I'm picking on us in this room here. I think most of us could probably agree with what I just said, including the part about not picking on teachers when I say that, because in no way is that my intent or anybody's intent in here.

The other thing is that if insults weren't allowed in here, it'd be a lot quieter than it is. Insults are certainly not encouraged. It's why we have whole books full of points of order and nonparliamentary words and all that kind of stuff. Regrettably and sadly, the way we insult has boundaries. That's what the points of order are for. Insults happen here constantly, not just occasionally but I dare say constantly, which is why we have the rule books as long as we do – *Beauchesne's*, the House of Commons proceedings books, and our own Standing Orders – unfortunately, to referee the fact that it seems irresistible for people in here to insult people on the other side.

Now, let's start talking, dial in to what was said here. I think nobody objected to both points of order being kind of dealt with at the same time, so I'll try to deal with them at the same time, too. At 2:39, what the Blues say, it says here, the minister said, "Regrettably, Mr. Speaker, the member's question just proves that he actually has not read the bill and has no understanding of anything that's contained within the bill." A point of order was called.

Let me just say this, hon. Opposition House Leader. It's not helpful that the minister decided to coach me on what's a point of order and what's not. You called a point of order, which is, as a House leader, completely within your purview to do. It's not helpful when anybody from either side coaches the chair, no matter how well intentioned it may or may not be. It's just not helpful.

In this case I don't think, based on the rules of this place, that it's in and of itself a point of order unless I ask them to stop and they carry on, in which case it could become that instantly. If they said that the member has not read the bill and has no understanding, then you're on the edge of a point of order, but he kindly said "based on" – he didn't say "based on." But the inference is: based on the member's question, it proved, it proved. That seems like debate to me because it was based on the way the question was asked.

The second one, the minister says, "Regrettably, just another example of the member's lack of understanding of the legislation and of the curriculum and how our education system operates." You know, I would say that both of these are very close, and this is a pattern that's existing here. In fact, basically, it says, "Another example of the member's lack of understanding of the legislation and of the curriculum and how our education system operates." This is close to the line. I'll ask the hon. member to apologize for the second one but not the first one.

3:00

Folks, the rule here is – this is where this is close to the line. I just want to put some context around this. I'm going to call the second one a point of order, but it's very close. The first one isn't, and it's also very close. You know what? One of the rules here is that you can't impute false motives to the opposite members, and you can't say what they think and what they don't think and what they know and what they don't know, but you can have an opinion about the answer to the question that they just gave. This straddles that.

I'm going to ask both sides because this seems to be a pattern that's emerging here. I don't want something like the word "understanding" to become a point of order, because it's actually a point of legitimate debate. But how you talk about whether somebody else knows something or doesn't know something: we don't know what's in the other person's mind. You can say that the answer certainly doesn't indicate that, and I would say the second comment was less that way than the first. I would just ask for an apology on the second one and not the first one.

Mr. Schow: Apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: That ends that.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Constitution of Canada Amendment

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to rise and move Government Motion 36. This motion is on the Order Paper for all to see, but I would read through the motion if it pleases the Speaker.

The Speaker: Madam Premier, it is your time. If you choose to spend it reading the motion, then no one should stop you.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, let me read it into the record, to put the proper framing on this really important issue.

36. Ms Smith moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) recognize that the Governor General has the power to appoint judges to the superior courts of Alberta under section 96 of the Constitution Act, 1867,
- (b) recognize that the superior courts of Alberta have, since their creation, consistently demonstrated excellence in their judicial function,
- (c) recognize the fundamental importance of judicial independence,
- (d) recognize that the government of Alberta does not have an equal voice to the government of Canada in appointing judges to the superior courts of Alberta,
- (e) recognize that addressing this gap will strengthen public confidence in the justice system and ensure that Albertans have a meaningful voice in decisions that shape how justice is delivered in their communities,
- (f) recognize that it is important that the judges appointed to the superior courts of Alberta be selected from the members of the Alberta bar who are recommended by the Lieutenant Governor in Council,
- (g) recognize that this approach will bring greater balance to how judicial appointments are made and support a more transparent and accountable process while reinforcing judicial independence, and
- (h) authorize an amendment to the Constitution of Canada to be made by proclamation issued by Her Excellency

the Governor General under the Great Seal of Canada in accordance with the schedule set forth below.

SCHEDULE

AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF CANADA

1. The Constitution Act, 1867, is amended by adding the following after section 97:

97A The judges of the courts of Alberta appointed by the Governor General shall be selected from the members of the bar of Alberta recommended by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

2. This amendment may be cited as the Constitution Amendment, [year of proclamation].

MODIFICATION DE LA CONSTITUTION DU CANADA

1. La Loi constitutionnelle de 1867 est modifiée par l'ajout de ce qui suit après l'article 97:

97A Les juges des tribunaux de l'Alberta nommés par le gouverneur général sont choisis parmi les membres du Barreau de l'Alberta ayant été recommandés par le lieutenant-gouverneur en conseil.

2. Titre de la présente modification : Modification constitutionnelle de [année de proclamation].

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Madam Speaker, the reason we are moving this motion today is because at its core the motion is about ensuring Alberta has a stronger voice in its own justice system. Alberta has a historic opportunity to formalize a more meaningful role for the province and judicial appointments to our superior courts.

I would also just take a trip down into the Constitution for a moment, Madam Speaker, to point out that section 92(14) does give exclusive jurisdiction to the provinces in certain matters, and 92(14) in particular says:

In each Province the Legislature may exclusively make Laws in relation to Matters coming within the Classes of Subjects next hereinafter enumerated; that is to say . . .

The Administration of Justice in the Province, including the Constitution, Maintenance, and Organization of Provincial Courts, both of Civil and of Criminal Jurisdiction, and including Procedure in Civil Matters in those Courts.

I think it's important to put that context on the record, Madam Speaker, especially since it does seem that some members don't realize how much of this we already do and that it does firmly fall within our jurisdiction.

One of the things that I would say – because we do have the power to appoint people to the Court of Justice. We actually have 136 current appointees to the Court of Justice. We have 92 individuals who've been appointed to the King's Bench. Most of those, of course, have been appointed federally, but there are 11 supernumeraries which we have appointed, and of course the Court of Appeal has 17 justices.

As you can see by looking at those numbers, Madam Speaker, we actually appoint more judges to provincial courts that operate in our province than the federal government appoints. I would say that if you also add in the 45 justices of the peace, we have a well-established process to ensure that there is fairness.

We had a number of vacancies, Madam Speaker, when I came in, but I can tell you the current status of our court since June 2023. This government has made 48 judicial appointments to improve access to justice. It included one Chief Justice of the Court of Justice, eight assistant Chief Justices, 25 justices, 12 justices of the peace, and two application justices to the Court of King's Bench.

Since June 2023 we've also successfully petitioned the federal government to fill judicial vacancies: 24 justices to the Court of

King's Bench, including five new positions, allowing for more matters to be heard and greater access to justice.

At the moment we do not have any vacancies also on the Court of Appeal. We have currently 17 on the Court of Appeal: 14 judges, two supernumeraries, and the Chief Justice.

All that is to say, Madam Speaker, that we have worked collaboratively with the federal government in this regard. We have not held up any nominations or appointments, but we have also said that in future we would like things to be done differently.

Now, we also recognize under section 96 of the Constitution Act, 1867, the federal government appoints judges to the provincial superior courts, even though the provinces are responsible for administering those courts. In Alberta, of course, the Court of King's Bench of Alberta and the Court of Appeal of Alberta are both established by provincial legislation. Given this responsibility, Alberta believes strongly that provinces should have a meaningful say in the judicial appointment process.

Now, earlier this year, Madam Speaker, I wrote to Prime Minister Mark Carney requesting meaningful reform to the federal judicial appointment process. At that time we had suggested balance, that we should have an equal number of appointees to the committee to vet and determine the nominees and ultimately make the appointments. We did not receive a favourable response to that.

Last week I followed up with a second letter, this time, of course, joined by Ontario Premier Doug Ford, Quebec Premier François Legault, and Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe, calling for a new collaborative approach to judicial appointments to superior trial courts, Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court of Canada.

We are advocating for provincial governments to participate directly in the selection process. Addressing the gap that we have will strengthen public confidence in the justice system and ensure that provinces have a meaningful voice in appointments that shape how justice is delivered in their communities.

This framework is set out in the Canadian Constitution. Section 96 of Canada's Constitution Act requires that the superior court judicial appointments be made by the Governor General. Section 97 further requires the judges appointed to that province's superior court be drawn from the bar of that province. Quebec has a separate provision that states essentially the same thing; that is section 98.

Now, in April 2025 the Quebec National Assembly unanimously adopted a motion that section 98 be amended to require that appointments to Quebec's court be chosen from among members of the bar of Quebec, similar to what we have here, but who have also been recommended by the government of Quebec. This approach would give the province a meaningful role in shaping its courts.

Alberta, we believe, should have the same thing that Quebec has. We would like to have the same authority. Judicial appointments to Alberta's court should be drawn from members of the Alberta bar who have been recommended by the government of Alberta.

As a result, I am moving a motion for the Legislative Assembly to approve a constitutional amendment that, if passed, formalizes Alberta's role in selecting superior court judges. We are calling on the federal government to support and pass both Alberta's and Quebec's motions in the House of Commons and in the Senate, formally recognizing a constitutional role for provinces in the judicial selection process. This is a concrete opportunity for real meaningful change, one that will significantly improve how Alberta's judges are selected.

I ask all members of this Chamber to support it. I would like to move Government Motion 36.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate on Government Motion 36? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

3:10

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This motion essentially seeks to amend the Constitution of Canada to allow the judges of the superior courts in Alberta to be appointed by the cabinet. I will be speaking against this motion, and in so doing, I will touch on some of the things mentioned in the motion, talk about this government's record, rather strong track record, the current process for judicial appointments, and some recent developments respecting the rule of law and independence of the judiciary in this province.

The motion states that we "recognize the fundamental importance of judicial independence." Let's start with that. The core components of judicial independence as outlined in Canadian constitutional law are security of tenure, financial security, and administrative independence. Security of tenure protects the judiciary against arbitrary removal so that they can make a decision without any fear of repercussions. Financial security: sufficient and stable compensation protects them from any pressure or coercion. Administrative independence gives them control over their own affairs to shield them, again, from political interference.

The administrative part of this independence has something to do with the province, and I will talk about that, but these principles together ensure that impartiality and fair adjudication protect the rule of law and constitutional principles and protect individual and minority rights against government overreach. The judges that are appointed to superior courts are subject to strict ethical guidelines, principles that are developed by the Canadian Judicial Council, and these principles serve to guide the judges and are developed in consultation with the broader public across Canada. These guidelines also ensure that judges do what they are required to do under the Constitution and maintain their impartiality and independence.

In short, Madam Speaker, an independent judiciary is the ultimate check on government power and overreach. An independent judiciary is the cornerstone of a strong and functioning democracy. An independent judiciary is the distinguishing line between a democracy and an authoritarian regime, and that is why it's important that the judiciary be independent and be able to make decisions free from any political interference whatsoever, be that government or a third-party influence.

While the government doesn't get to have a say in the first two aspects that I mentioned, security of tenure and financial security, they have a role to play in the administration of justice, and that's an important role. Not only, Madam Speaker, is this government failing to fulfill that role, but the Premier has quite recently threatened to withhold judicial funds from the administration of justice. The Premier is on record saying that, and that's an attack on the administration of justice in this province and across this country.

More recently, just earlier this week, the Minister of Justice was asked about whether they're serious about withholding judicial funds, and the minister responded that that threat is not off the table. That's a blatant interference in the independence of the judiciary, and that is unacceptable, and the government should be ashamed of their statements and actions.

Many organizations, individuals have raised concerns about this. Threatening to hold funds or use judicial funding as a pawn to further their demands is unacceptable interference in the working of the judiciary, in the independence of the judiciary. If they were serious about strengthening the judiciary, they will fulfill this role a bit better. Alberta courts are underresourced. They are facing significant delays. They are facing Jordan delays. If the government wants to be taken seriously, they could have hired more clerks, they could have hired more prosecutors, they could have hired more support staff, they could have opened more courtrooms so that we can address the issues facing our judiciary.

When you talk to Albertans, Madam Speaker, their issue is not who is appointing the judges. Their issue is whether they can access justice in a timely fashion. Because of this government's failure on the administration of justice, on the funding of the administration of justice, we are seeing significant delays in our justice system. That is interfering with Albertans' access to justice.

Now, I think, let's talk about the motion, that says that the approach the Premier is suggesting, that cabinet approve superior court judges, will make it more transparent and accountable while reinforcing judicial independence. Nothing can be further from the truth. Nothing. If you look at this government's record, in the span of just a year and a half, June 2024 to November 2025, a third of the UCP-appointed judges had made donations to political parties. Madam Speaker, you won't be surprised that those donations were all to the UCP and conservatives. That's their record on appointments. I don't want to get into the specific appointments. I could if need be, but that's their record that shows you how transparent they have been with the appointment of judges, how apolitical they have been with the appointment of judges.

That's what they want with this motion, that cabinet, behind closed doors, can appoint their donors to the bench. That will not happen under, I guess, our watch, and Albertans will not stand for that. The UCP has infiltrated court appointments with political appointments. Why should Albertans trust that they respect judicial independence in any manner whatsoever?

The Premier and the UCP, Madam Speaker, have a strong track record of interfering in the justice system and undermining the rule of law in this province. Currently they're embroiled in the largest scandals in the history of this province when it comes to Turkish Tylenol, when it comes to health procurement, and court cases are mounting. The RCMP is closing in. Just last week, I guess, there were two raids on some of the people who are named in those scandals: their friend and confidante Sam Mraiche, and the list goes on and on.

Let me get to the specifics of why Albertans should not trust this government to respect judicial independence or respect the rule of law in this province. In 2023 the Premier was noted to have violated the conflict of interest rules over the criminal charges of Artur Pawlowski. That was noted by Justice Marguerite Trussler. That's a matter of public record. She may be the only Premier who has been found to have interfered in the justice system like that. Before that, the former Justice minister Kaycee Madu was also noted to have attempted to interfere in the justice system over a traffic ticket. There is a written report by Justice Adèle Kent. There are other justice ministers who are also facing disciplinary hearings.

The good thing is that the current Justice minister has passed a bill through this Legislature that gives him immunity and his friends immunity from any oversight from the Law Society of Alberta. If the chief law officer of this government, this province, thinks that he is above the law, can Albertans expect that they will respect the rule of law in this province?

3:20

And then there was a recent case before the Court of King's Bench where the Chief Electoral Officer brought forward a reference to the King's Bench under the Citizen Initiative Act, seeking some guidance whether the question about the separation of Alberta from Canada will violate the Constitution and treaty rights. What the government did was they rushed changes through this Legislature to take away the court's ability to judicially review that provision that was allowed under the Citizen Initiative Act. Nonetheless, Justice Feasby handed down the decision and wrote some things about this Justice minister and this government, how they disrespect and disregard the rule of law and interfere in the court process, and clearly stated that any

separatist referendum will violate the Constitution and treaty rights. Nonetheless, the government will not listen to what the justice has to say. Rather, they chose to amend the legislation and took those provisions out so that those cases won't go before the court anymore. That's what they do when they don't agree with superior court judges.

In this House the Premier has responded many times with words like "unelected judges, activist judges" and "judges cannot interfere in what the government is doing," those kind of things. Those are part of the record. If I go further back, during the pandemic, when the Premier was newly elected, she wanted to give clemency to the Coutts blockaders. Then she was on record, on video, saying that she was in touch with Crown prosecutors about the cases involving those blockaders, involving those protesters who were protesting the lawful public health sanctions of this province. This goes to show how much they respect the rule of law, how much they regard the rule of law in this province.

Madam Speaker, while I was looking at the background for this government motion, I also found that the Free Alberta Strategy, back in 2021, exactly asked for those kinds of things. And it's a coincidence that the author of that report happens to be the Premier's current chief of staff as well, and I think may have something to do with this motion.

In short, Madam Speaker, this government has interfered with the independence of the judiciary in this province every step of the way. There are numerous examples. They have disregarded the rule of law in this province, and nobody believes them when they claim that cabinet making superior court appointments will make this process better or in any way free from political interference, influence. I think that's not true, and I don't think that there's any reason for anyone to support this process.

The current process: let me talk about that quickly. The current process is the same for every single province, including Quebec. There is a federal judicial committee, and that consists of a nominee of the Chief Justice of Alberta in the case of Alberta, but in the case of other provinces their Chief Justice, a nominee of the Law Society, a nominee of the Canadian Bar Association from that province's section, a nominee of the justice minister of a province, and three public members that are appointed by the federal government, all Albertans.

The committee consists of seven Albertans, including a nominee of this government. Those seven people, who are from law backgrounds, who are respected in their professions, in their communities: I think the decisions that they have made so far have worked for this province. The motion acknowledges that the superior courts of Alberta have, since their creation, consistently demonstrated excellence in their judicial function, and that speaks to the work of the judicial committee that has been working to appoint these judges.

Quebec doesn't have a separate process as it stands now. Quebec has two judicial nominee committees for east and west, exact same composition. Their judges are appointed from the Quebec bar, but the process is the same. They are appointed by the federal government. It's not the Quebec cabinet, and it should not be the Quebec cabinet, that appoints these judges.

Speaking of judicial excellence demonstrated by the current judiciary, we couldn't agree more. We are proud of Alberta's judicial institutions and know that Albertans' frustrations are not with the appointment process. Their frustration, Albertans' frustrations are with the lack of access to the justice system. Their frustrations are with the delays. Their frustrations are with Jordan delays, and their frustrations are with the lack of resources that are made available by this government to the judicial system. The Premier doesn't need to hand-pick those committee members or the judges on the superior court. There is nothing that needs to be fixed here.

In opposing this motion, we want to make sure that Alberta's judicial system remains impartial and free from political interference. We are aligning ourselves with the three Chief Justices, who have clearly spoken about the importance of judicial independence and the rule of law in this province. I quote from that letter of the three Chief Justices.

Independence of the judicial branch protects the public. It ensures judges can make decisions based solely on the law and evidence presented. It frees judges from pressure or influence from external sources including the governments that appoint us.

That's the kind of judiciary we want in this province. That's the kind of judiciary Albertans want in this province, and that is the reason that many lawyer organizations, many organizations representing the legal community, have spoken out against the outrageous behaviour and actions of this government infringing on people's rights, infringing on the independence of the judiciary, and disregarding the rule of law. We are aligning ourselves with those Albertans and those professionals who have raised serious, serious concerns about this government's conduct, and we will not be supporting this government getting more power to control the judiciary. An independent judiciary distinguishes democracy from authoritarianism, and we will always stand on the side of democracy, not authoritarianism.

Finally, I want to say – I don't have much time left. I'm sure my other colleagues will talk about that, that the Premier just wants Albertans to believe that somehow people who are appointed in Alberta are from outside this province, that those making recommendations of those appointments are from outside this province. They are Albertans, proud Albertans with sound judgment. It's just that the Premier wants to have more power, grab more power. It's not about fixing anything. It's not about making the judiciary any better. It's just that the UCP wants more power.

We cannot support this, and I urge all members of this Legislature to stand up for an independent judiciary.

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise briefly to talk to Motion 36, a government motion moved by the hon. Premier, as it pertains to requesting that the federal government take into consideration Alberta and our recommendations for appointments to the courts.

Now, Madam Speaker, it's not any secret that I am not a lawyer, nor do I try to wade into those waters. I don't even try to play one on TV like some of the members opposite. What I can say is that this motion is actually about more Alberta autonomy within Confederation. Now, this is not uncommon for Alberta as a province, for us as a government to be asking that the federal government take into consideration recommendations put forward by the government.

The first case in point, of course, Madam Speaker, that comes up often is appointments to the Senate. Now, we believe that the Senate, in theory, is supposed to be a check and that it should also be representative of the areas of the country where the representatives are from. Unfortunately, we have seen in recent years appointments of members who, I would argue, do not represent the best interests or do not represent the will of the people in Alberta. Of course, I'm referring to Paula Simons and Kristopher Wells.

It is my position, Madam Speaker, that these two appointments to the Senate were an absolute slap in the face to all Albertans, and their conduct in the Senate and the comments they have made since being appointed and long before, if I may say so, prove exactly that. I mean, for one, Kristopher Wells has gone on a long tirade on Twitter, because apparently he has a lot of time on his hands, criticizing this government for its stance on protecting women and girls in sports and also advocating that this government not impose itself to ensure that children in elementary schools are not subjected

to graphic depictions of pornography. Now, Kristopher Wells may think that's appropriate for children, and that in itself is quite concerning, but that's one appointment that I think is egregious.

Now, when we talk about the courts, we already have a process in place for appointing judges in the provincial court. We have a nonpartisan committee that makes recommendations. Then, of course, cabinet approves those in cabinet meetings. I am still curious, and the members opposite have not given a good reason, as to why they would oppose the federal government taking recommendations from the province about who should be appointed to the important role of being a judge. Madam Speaker, what is the problem? Why is it that the members opposite don't trust an independent body to make recommendations, recommendations for an important position like a judge who will sit on the bench and be part of a representative of Alberta?

Now, this speaks to their intent, which is to delegate all authority to their overlords in the federal government. This was on clear display when Rachel Notley was Premier, and it is wonderful that that member is no longer in this Chamber. I suspect she is somewhere in recovery for her ego after being bounced from this place. Madam Speaker, I don't understand why in the four years that Rachel Notley was Premier she never once stood up for Alberta's interests, and I have referred to this several times when I talked about Bill C-69.

At the time Bill C-69 was introduced, I was a staffer for the then newly formed United Conservative Party opposition caucus. I remember watching this press conference on TV, thinking: I'm hoping the government of the day in Alberta would get it right and put out a statement immediately, vehemently rejecting the contents of this bill and the damage it would have on Alberta's economy and investment attraction, something the members opposite love to talk about but clearly have no idea how to execute, because if they did, people wouldn't have fled this province by the thousands when they were in government, but I digress. What I would say is that in this instance we saw an epic failure on the part of the Premier of the day, Rachel Notley, to actually defend Alberta's best interests and stand up for the people who elected her, albeit not a majority of Albertans.

Going back to Government Motion 36, where we are proposing that Alberta play a role and be consulted on the appointment of judges, something as critical as the position of a judge, why do the members opposite hate that? I think the short answer is this: they don't have a plan. They don't have any idea how to govern. They don't have any idea how the process works, so they'll defer to the so-called experts and let the chips fall as they may. In doing so, Albertans will be left to pick up the pieces. What Albertans want is a government that is competent to trust them, to trust the people, and in doing so, Madam Speaker, allow us to create a new process whereby Alberta will be consulted on things like judicial appointments.

The members opposite will speak for the rest of this afternoon, I suspect, on why they oppose this, but what they're really opposing, Madam Speaker, is Alberta having more say in Confederation, Alberta having more control over things that directly affect our province. That is what is at debate today, and if the members opposite have a problem with Alberta having more say in Confederation, that's something that they may have to go and take to the public and say: we don't want the job; we don't want the job of making the tough decisions.

You know, Madam Speaker, I watched with great amusement clips from the New Democratic Party convention over the weekend. It was nothing short of a circus, absolute chaos. The new boss for the NDP, the members opposite, their new boss, will demand that they subject themselves to his will. National grocery stores. Apparently, eating the rich was on the menu as well. Taking over control of most choice in this country because, of course, the NDP

elites, the millionaire film producer Avi Lewis: he knows best, so all members opposite must now obey the orders of their new leader and overlord. That is something that we will not tolerate as a government. We will continue to advocate and fight for what's best for Alberta, and that means having more say in judicial appointments because Alberta knows what's best for Alberta.

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

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak and express my opposition, my deeply held opposition, to Government Motion 36. I think we begin from the premise of asking ourselves: what problem is this motion intended to fix? We have not heard a rationale articulated in any of the speakers thus far from the government side nor in the statements that have come from the Premier outside of this House, to articulate what exactly the problem is that they're trying to address. This is a UCP-manufactured outrage of the day, which is a very convenient distraction from the real jobs that Albertans have given them to do and the real issues that Albertans care about.

It constantly baffles me why they think Albertans care more about who's appointing judges to the courts than how they're paying their bills at the end of the month, how they're affording their groceries, how they're going to get access to a doctor, how long they're waiting for a surgery or procedure. I'm certain, Madam Speaker, that this government and the members on the other side are hearing the same thing from their constituents as we're hearing from ours, which is that those are their priorities: cost of living, health care, good-paying jobs into the future. I'm not sure how they think anything in this motion is at all related to those priorities of Albertans.

3:40

We haven't heard anything to explain what the challenge is behind the current appointment process. I want to take a moment to highlight that while the narrative has changed slightly and we've heard now government, the Minister of Justice, and others speak as if they don't want to in any way denigrate the quality of the judges who currently sit on Alberta superior courts, that is not the messaging, unfortunately, that this government has been giving over and over again about our judicial system, about the people who are entrusted to apply independently and without bias and according to the law the laws of this land in a fair way. Unfortunately, we've heard the Premier and her ministers and various members of the government: whenever there's been a court decision they don't like, they have maligned not just the decision but actually the courts. They've accused them of being unelected and therefore somehow partisan in some way, and that is a really deep misjustice to not only those judges, who are doing this work day to day, but it really undermines the confidence that Albertans should rightly have in the rule of law and that decisions are being made separate from the executive branch of government.

This is the key, Madam Speaker. This is the key to our democratic system, that not only do we have, yes, elected officials who make the laws but that we have a separate, independent judiciary whose responsibility is to interpret and apply those laws fairly in a manner that does not bring in partisan values and ideological values. That is deeply important to our system so that every Albertan can feel confident that when they go before the courts or a matter is before the courts or a court is making a decision on rights that affect them, that is being interpreted in a fair way. If we do not have people and Albertans feeling confident in our court system and in our judges, then we're going to have – well, this is how you lead to chaos and anarchy, because then people seem to think that certain laws

shouldn't apply to them and that they can go around that. We need to have that sense of trust in our judicial system.

So we go back to: what is the problem they are trying to fix? The Government House Leader asked: why do we oppose? You know, the reason is that they as government have the responsibility to justify why they are doing this. The reason why we oppose this is because this government has not laid out a thoughtful rationale for why the Constitution of Canada should be amended. This is not simply just an idea. This is our Constitution, that has been in place and applies to all provinces. When a government seeks to amend the Constitution of Canada, the onus, Madam Speaker, is on that government to justify why, and that is what they have failed to do. They have failed to articulate any problem with the current system as we have it.

Now, Madam Speaker, back in January when the Premier wrote to the Prime Minister, she made a statement that actually elicited an unprecedented response from the Chief Justices of Alberta courts.

In her letter to Prime Minister Carney the Premier stated that providing Alberta with a formal and meaningful role in the appointment process would strengthen public confidence in the administration of justice, promote national unity within Alberta and help ensure judicial decision-making reflects the values and expectations of Albertans.

By making that statement, she's actually undermining the confidence that Albertans have because she's insinuating that there is a problem with the way the courts are currently comprised and the judges that are currently sitting on the bench, and she's made, quite frankly, the insulting insinuation that the judges who sit on the superior courts in Alberta are not reflecting the values of Albertans.

Madam Speaker, that is why the Chief Justices of all three of the Alberta courts – the Court of King's Bench, the Court of Justice, and the Court of Appeal – made the unprecedented action, and this has never happened before, where we've seen the three Chief Justices come together and make a statement that they felt that they needed to respond to the insinuation of this Premier that somehow they are not reflecting the values of Albertans. In that letter dated January 27 of this year, the statement from the Chief Justices of Alberta courts stated that

each day in Alberta's courthouses, judges apply the law – to protect individual rights, decide disputes fairly and hold parties, including governments, accountable. The rule of law means no one is above the law, everyone is treated equally before the law, and power is not used arbitrarily. Alberta's judges will continue to do this work faithfully.

Alberta's judges are Albertans, like the people we serve. We are proud of the work judges and staff do every day to protect the rights of all Albertans and to safeguard our democracy.

Madam Speaker, it is not only a personal insult to the many judges who sit on our courts and do the hard work every day in those courtrooms, but it is an insult to the decisions they make to suggest that somehow their values or their positions are somehow impacted by the fact that the process by which they were appointed included the federal government. First of all, by the way, federal government – you know, we are proud Albertans. We're also proud Canadians. But to malign the values of these judges simply because their process of appointment included the federal government is despicable, and it should be completely unacceptable.

Similarly, we've seen several groups of lawyers speak out. We had a group of lawyers from Camrose who expressed their concerns about the maligning of the judicial appointment process. We've seen an unprecedented – I think it was 80 or 90 lawyers who signed an open letter who also called on this government to respect the separation of powers in the judicial branch from the executive branch and to stop maligning the rule of law and the role that the courts play by insinuating that somehow there is some sort of bias

or inappropriate action simply because judges of the superior courts are appointed by the federal government.

I want to talk a little bit about the current process. If you listen to the members across the way, they act as if the Alberta government or Albertans are not involved somehow in the process that goes about that leads to the appointment by the federal government of judges here in superior courts. But as we know and as the members across the way know, that process includes an incredible amount of input from qualified individuals into recommendations that go to the federal government for appointees to those superior courts. There are representatives from the Chief Justice of Alberta represented on that committee, as is the Law Society of Alberta, the Canadian Bar Association, members of, yes, the federal government, Madam Speaker, and a representative of the Minister of Justice. Those are all Albertans sitting around a table with high qualifications who are making recommendations to the federal government about who to appoint.

We know, Madam Speaker, that since this Premier has been made Premier, there have been over 30 – I believe it's 33 – appointments to superior courts by the federal government. I believe it's eight Court of Appeal judges and 25 Court of King's Bench judges, 33 appointments, to which I would ask – again, this government has not articulated any difficulties with the quality or calibre of those people who are appointed as judges, so what is the concern here?

Those people who sit on that committee that make those recommendations: they are Albertans, and they deserve to be in those positions. I think, Madam Speaker, those individuals on that committee, the federal appointment committee, are far more qualified than many of those members of the government cabinet.

In fact, we know many of that cabinet have their own problems with adhering to the laws of this land. We know that the Premier has a very freewheeling association with her role as Premier and what that gives her the right to do. She's the only Premier in Alberta history who's been found to be in violation of the Conflicts of Interest Act. We just last week had one of those members of cabinet found to be violating the Election Act. We have previous ministers of Justice from this cabinet, from this government, who have been found to be in conflict of many pieces of legislation. We have the current Minister of Justice, who had to write a law to protect himself from being sanctioned under professional standards for lawyers. Who knows why he felt the need to do that, Madam Speaker? We can only guess.

I think, Madam Speaker, the UCP cabinet suggesting that they are more qualified to make recommendations who should sit on the courts in Alberta rather than the individuals who represent those organizations I referenced is outrageous. It's outrageous that Albertans should trust these individuals over there more than they should trust this committee, who at least has some knowledge of the legal system.

Now, Madam Speaker, there are a number of reasons why this motion should not be supported, but I think more than anything else we should be thinking about the fact that this government has demonstrated that they are willing to undermine any institution that disagrees with them. Any elected body, unelected body that disagrees in any way with this government will certainly be on the receiving end of a piece of legislation whereby this government is going to reach in and take over.

3:50

This government is the exact opposite of small-government conservative. They could not be any bigger and more interventionist, Madam Speaker. It's simply remarkable. From intervening into – well, now we think school boards. More and more they're going to make decisions about how often *O Canada* should be sung in schools,

and I've got to tell you, Madam Speaker, that once a week is, I've got to say, not enough. In my kids' school, if they actually went in and paid attention to what happened in schools, they sing it every day. I don't know why this government is less patriotic than my kids' school and they only want to have it once a week, but in my kids' school they do it every day.

Now, Madam Speaker, whether it be school boards, whether it be municipalities, even when we're talking about justice – I mean, if they want to talk about real issues facing our Alberta justice system, this is a government that went in and essentially cut the funding and took over money that didn't even belong to the government through the Alberta Law Foundation. They pretty much gutted that institution. That foundation was funded through funds from lawyers, not from the provincial government. It wasn't the province's money, and that money went to support a lot of nonprofit access-to-justice organized work that was going on. Many of those projects have now been cancelled. The government has seized control of that body meanwhile continuing to radically underfund legal aid in this province.

Access to justice could not be poorer than it is right now, yet this government wants to have more intervention and more say in the justice system. They need to justify that, Madam Speaker. They cannot continue to waste this Legislature's time, to waste the time of Albertans who have real priorities, real concerns. They're focused on making sure that they're able to put food on their table. Meanwhile this government is playing games, as they always play.

I want to point out that it is interesting that we're having this motion brought forward by this government when just I believe it was Friday or maybe a couple of days ago this government passed an order in council whereby they called a referendum on the very topic that they're now bringing forward a government motion on. I'm completely confused, Madam Speaker, as to whether the government actually does want to talk to Albertans about this or whether they don't. They're already bringing forward a motion, yet there's going to be a referendum on the very same topic, apparently, coming in a few months. It's almost as if they don't really care; they're pushing their own agenda no matter what. I mean, the very fact that it's on a referendum in the fall has nothing to do with what is coming forward as a priority from Albertans.

Their rigged Alberta Next Panel, their laughable survey with its predetermined outcomes – they wouldn't even release the results of those surveys because they knew how skewed and unreflective they are of Albertans' views – are now justifying not just a waste of time and money in a referendum in the fall, but here we are wasting time on a government motion.

I've got to tell you, Madam Speaker, that I'm deeply frustrated when I look at the e-mails that come to my inbox. I've got to tell you that it's not just from my constituents. We get e-mails from across the province, mostly because people feel that their MLAs outside of Edmonton and Calgary and outside of the opposition caucus do not listen to them, do not hear their concerns. They're not asking: "Hey, I really feel like we need to be more involved in appointing judges. That's what we feel like we need to be more involved in." No. They care about putting food on the table, getting access to a doctor, and getting a good-paying job. But this government wastes time on priorities that are only about posturing and fighting and looking like they're doing something significant. Really, this government is not focused on the priorities of Albertans.

Unless they can come up with any fundamental reason as to justify why, I'm not supporting it.

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

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to speak in support of this government motion, which

advocates for constitutional change to the process of superior court appointments in Alberta. At its core, this motion is about giving Alberta a direct and formal voice in the selection of judges to our provincial superior courts, ensuring that our justice system is truly reflective of the needs and values of Albertans. This motion is aimed at increasing public confidence in the judiciary at a time when it has come under pressure and scrutiny, particularly due to concerns around issues such as bail, which have a direct bearing on community safety and well-being.

As it currently stands under section 96 of the Constitution Act, 1867, the federal government is responsible for appointing judges to provincial superior courts. It does so by reviewing and choosing from nonbinding recommendations made by judicial advisory committees that assess and screen applicants. The problem here is twofold. First, the reasons and justifications underlying the selections made by the committee are not made clear, with provinces being kept out of those discussions. Second, although the federal government isn't assessing and screening applicants themselves, they still retain the ultimate power to appoint candidates of their choosing to provincial superior courts. Although it is not a certainty, it does leave open the possibility of appointments being made for reasons including ideology, connections, or strategic considerations as opposed to being based on a candidate being best suited to serve that province and its needs.

While opponents of reform claim that provinces are consulted when the federal government makes its choice, this doesn't mean much in the way of having meaningful say. At the end of the day, under the existing system provinces do not have veto power and can be put in a situation where they are forced to accept whoever is appointed. Madam Speaker, under the Constitution provinces are responsible for administering the very courts to which these judges are appointed and, by extension, keeping communities safe and upholding the rule of law. It stands to reason, then, that Alberta should have a meaningful voice at the table, especially when these decisions shape how justice is delivered in our province. We cannot afford to continue having a system where appointments are made on questionable and ambiguous grounds, especially given that Albertans are already facing a wave of crime and an economic environment that has brought a great deal of fear and uncertainty.

This motion seeks to give Alberta a stronger voice by calling for constitutional amendments that would place the province at the forefront in selecting judges appointed to its superior courts. Alberta would no longer be relegated to the role of a party that is merely consulted in the process. Specifically, this motion proposes that appointments to Alberta superior courts be made from candidates recommended and approved by the province, with the understanding that the same information already used to assess candidates through the advisory committees is made available to the provincial government.

By formalizing this role, Alberta, being closer to the day-to-day realities of its communities, is better equipped to identify candidates who understand the province's unique legal landscape, from rural crime to resource-based disputes. This proximity allows the province to select judges whose experience aligns with local needs while ensuring the bench reflects the social, economic, and cultural realities of the communities that it serves. It would also allow Alberta to address specific gaps on the bench, whether in expertise or representation, leading to a more balanced judiciary.

At the same time this approach strengthens public confidence by reducing the perception that judges are being imposed by a distant federal government, particularly in light of court decisions on major provincial issues like natural resources, environmental regulation, and criminal justice, where significant public concern has arisen due to how detached these decisions can appear from Alberta's

economic and social context. Albertans need judges that reinforce their trust in the justice system, and this happens through having judges who exhibit a deep understanding of their grievances and are willing to take the actions necessary to deliver relief and hope.

Madam Speaker, it's important to note that Alberta is not alone in calling for meaningful say in judicial appointments to its superior courts. Ontario, Quebec, and Saskatchewan have all joined us in doing so, rightfully expressing similar concerns with the current system of judicial appointments. This motion urges the federal government and all parties in Parliament to seriously consider voting in support of this constitutional amendment and in the spirit of co-operative federalism, which has long guided this country.

Canada as of now stands as an outlier among federal systems as the dominance of federal government in making appointments to provincial courts goes against standard practice. In the United States the states often appoint their own judges, often through elections or state-level commissions, and in Germany state governments play a direct role in judicial selection. A constitutional amendment would bring Canada in line with these countries, where citizens feel a greater sense of ownership and representation in their judicial institutions. The common thread across these systems, which have delivered better outcomes for citizens, is clear, greater regional input, which paves the way for having courts in touch with local realities on the ground.

4:00

Madam Speaker, this motion is about fairness, accountability, and strengthening trust in our justice system. It recognizes that while judicial independence must always be protected, it need not come at the expense of provincial say and public confidence. Alberta's role in administering justice, maintaining public safety, and upholding the rule of law must be matched with a meaningful role in selecting those entrusted to interpret and apply that law in our province.

By advocating for a constitutional amendment that gives Alberta a substantive voice in superior court appointments, this motion seeks to modernize our federation and align Canada with other countries that respect regional input in decision-making. It reflects the principle that justice is best served when those who administer it understand the communities they serve. At a time when confidence in our institutions is being tested, Albertans deserve a justice system that is transparent, credible, and responsive to local realities.

For these reasons I urge all members of this Assembly to support this motion and stand up for a stronger, more accountable, and more representative justice system for Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am delighted to rise and speak to this motion. I'm not delighted by the motion; I am delighted by the opportunity to respond. This is a motion that would fundamentally undercut fairness, justice, and democracy in our province. It is aimed at ensuring that there is partisan influence over judges. It is, as the Premier has said, an attempt to control judges. I don't think I can say clearly enough the reasons why this is a terrible idea. Some of the members opposite have talked about confidence in the system; the people undermining the confidence in the system are them, and they should be ashamed.

In case anyone listening to this or reading it at some point in the future were to think that somehow this is a deeply partisan issue,

that only the left wing cares about the rule of law, I would hasten to counter what the members have to say with the following words. Quote: "Being democratic is not enough. A majority cannot turn what is wrong into right. In order to be considered truly free, countries must also have a deep love of liberty and an abiding respect for the rule of law." Madam Speaker, I would say that that is exactly what the members opposite lack. That quote is from noted socialist Margaret Thatcher.

So what does the motion actually do? There is a lot of misinformation floating around about there, spread primarily by the members opposite. Section (f) says that this motion intends to "recognize that it is important that the judges appointed to the superior courts of Alberta be selected from the members of the Alberta bar" – this is a thing that is already the case – "who are recommended by the Lieutenant Governor in Council." Because some members in this Chamber seem confused about what the Lieutenant Governor in Council is, it's probably worth clarifying that the Lieutenant Governor in Council is not an independent committee; it is the UCP cabinet. What they're asking for is for their cabinet, who is, again, not an independent committee – an independent committee exists now. The members opposite are trying to replace the independent committee with the judgment of the UCP cabinet.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Just to clarify what's actually happening here, the members opposite would like to move away from the Canadian Bar Association, the Law Society of Alberta, the Chief Justice of the province having say into this matter. Instead, they feel that their own cabinet ministers are better placed to understand the legal community in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I have had significant opportunity to talk about several different matters with many members of the legal community in Alberta, so allow me to provide their feedback to the members opposite, which is that no one could possibly speak for the legal community of Alberta less than the UCP cabinet.

This motion isn't about giving input to the Alberta legal community. The Alberta legal community is thrilled with the input it has already. This is about the UCP cabinet being able to put partisans on the bench. Why, Mr. Speaker, would they like to do that? Well, we are not permitted in this place to speculate what is in someone else's mind, but let us take a little walk down memory lane about actions of this government recently. I think the best place to begin is the Premier herself, who seems to have said the quiet part out loud and just indicated that they would like to control judges. That's obviously one indicator of what it is they might be thinking.

Another indicator to look at is, I would say, whether or not they have a history of wanting to have different rules for their friends and insiders. On this matter, Mr. Speaker, I would cite the fact that the Minister of Justice has chosen to exempt himself from the ethical and competence requirements that every other lawyer in the province is held to. I mean, again, one cannot in this place speculate as to what might be in someone's mind, but I would be really curious as to why a Minister of Justice would trot out publicly and say: I don't want to be held to the competence requirements that every lawyer in the province is; I don't want to be held to the ethics requirements that every other lawyer in the province is held to. I mean, it seems a little weird to take that political hit unless you have some reason, but I shall simply leave that there.

It's also worth noting, Mr. Speaker, that the rule of law is not a force that exists in opposition to democracy. It is a force that supports democracy. The fact that every Albertan has an equal right to vote: I mean, let's start with the fact that that is a right. When you

have a government that's willing to take away rights – I mean, the right to vote is a right, so the more rights they take away, the more fear we have that they'll take additional rights away. That eventually strikes directly at the heart of this problem. On top of that, the right to vote is supported by a number of different procedural things. The way in which our society is structured, the respect for citizens, the fact that they have equal rights: those are the things that allow them to have equal access to voting.

Some of the things that we see down south and one of the things we just heard the Minister of Justice today talking about, how he thinks that politicians should make the decisions on what the electoral boundaries are: in the U.S. we have that. It's called gerrymandering. He is incorrect. Politicians should not make those decisions. That's why we have an Electoral Boundaries Commission. The Electoral Boundaries Commission makes representations, and a minister acting ethically introduces an act to implement those recommendations. A minister acting unethically, trying to rig the game, trying to win by – well, you can't say that word in here, either. Trying to win by tomfoolery. Let us say "tomfoolery." That one's allowable, I think. That is a minister who introduces a map that is not the recommendation of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and our minister here today has indicated that he plans to do that.

Now, once that map is introduced, does the Legislature get to look at it? Does the Legislature get to talk about it? Sure. But the minister pretending that he doesn't understand the difference between the introduction of the bill and the drafting of the bill and then ultimately the debate on the bill – I mean, well, if he doesn't, then it's a good thing that he has exempted himself from the competence requirements.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, that's one of the things the UCP has done. Another thing that's worth looking at is the fact that they have changed the rules for their separatist friends. They put through an act that they claimed to be all about democracy. This is representative democracy; we love democracy at the UCP. But apparently those rules, which were fine for the forever Canada petition – they achieved those rules – the members opposite didn't think their separatist friends could manage. So they changed those rules to slant the playing field in favour of those separatist friends so that they had to get about two-thirds the number of signatures.

I mean, for a moment contemplate a game in which you have two teams on the field and one team can win with two-thirds of the points of the other team. I mean, that's pretty transparently unfair. You don't need a law degree to understand that. I think that anyone can understand that. The members opposite tilted . . . [interjections] I mean, they can scream until they're blue in the face. Requiring one team to get two-thirds of the points of the other team is unfair. Everyone knows it's unfair. [interjections] Oh, my gosh. You can keep yelling. It's not going to make it fair. My goodness. You people are ridiculous. Ridiculous. Ridiculous, Mr. Speaker.

A few things to note. In addition to the ridiculousness of this motion, there were just some insane things said over there. Let's start with: they're talking about how this is supposed to solve the problems with bail. That just is a complete misunderstanding of everything, which seems to be the UCP MO these days. The majority of bail is granted by JPs. Judicial interim release is what it's called technically. The next largest chunk is the provincial court, and finally, we have superior courts. Like, the vast majority of the problem that the members are citing is a problem that vests with judicial officers they are appointing. So to suggest that somehow this is the fault of superior court judges would just be – I mean, it's completely insane.

The members opposite have also said straight out loud: we're going to put the province at the forefront. Well, the UCP cabinet, who represents the province, shouldn't be at the forefront. Albertans should be at the forefront. I think this UCP cabinet forgets that they serve the people, not the other way around. They seem to be pretty confused about that, and I don't think that's very good.

We had a point of order earlier today saying, "Oh, well, you can't denigrate the judiciary," but that's all the members opposite have been doing. They've been saying: this is judges' fault; we want to control judges, these awful judges. In fact, they just talked about gaps on the bench, Mr. Speaker. That's wildly inappropriate. I would call it out, but what's the point, right? At a certain point, if you can't understand what's happening on the judiciary, if you don't understand the rule of law, if you don't understand democracy, there's only so much that could be done to explain it to you. I don't really think that it's my job to educate the members opposite. I think it's my job to represent Albertans, so that's what I'm going to stick to doing.

The members opposite also referenced the perception that judges are imposed. There was no perception that judges were imposed until the members opposite started creating that.

Mr. Speaker, I think we've run fairly thoroughly through the arguments, and what is incredibly clear is that this motion isn't designed to solve any problem. It's not designed to solve any problem. It is designed to give the members opposite greater control over the judiciary because they don't want to be held to the same laws as everyone else. They want to be able to take their golden cats and their gifted flights and do whatever they want. They don't want to be beholden to Albertans, to ethics, to accountability. They just want to be able to govern however they want. I think, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of instances in which that is made clear, but none so much so as this.

Mr. Getson: Meow. Meow.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please.

We have a member that's been identified to speak. If there are others that wish to speak, they can go and have their time after the member has completed her time. I would encourage everyone to be here to listen, as well as when it's your opportunity to speak, speak at that time.

Go ahead.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I think perhaps the meowing was a little over the line from the members opposite, although it does bring us back to "settle down kitty cat" that was once heckled at one of our members.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very bad motion. It undercuts the judiciary and the rule of law. I urge members to vote . . .

The Acting Speaker: I will recognize the Member for Grande Prairie, followed by Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Happy to be here in support of Government Motion 36. This is a great motion, one of the very best motions we've seen so far today, calling for constitutional change to superior court appointments. We're going to dive into a topic here today that sits at the crossroads of constitutional law, of federalism, and the evolving conversation about provincial roles in the Canadian judicial system. I think it's a great motion, and I look forward to chatting about this here today.

There are a couple of true statements I just want to make here at the beginning. A true statement is the fact that our government is united in ensuring Alberta is a sovereign province within a united Canada. Full stop. We're going to continue in that.

An Hon. Member: Right meow.

Mr. Dyck: This motion calls for constitutional amendments to the way superior court judges are appointed in this province right meow. This subject's implications to reach deeply into questions about democratic accountability, provincial autonomy, and how the structure of Canada's overarching federal system works right meow, too.

To understand what's happening, let's start with some of the very basics. Under section 96 of the Constitution Act of 1867, superior court judges, including those serving on Alberta's Court of King's Bench and Court of Appeal, are appointed by the federal government. The Governor General makes the appointment on the advice of the federal cabinet. Let's remember that.

Provinces do not currently have a formal decision-making role in selecting these judges. Instead, candidates are reviewed by judicial advisory committees which do not currently have provincial oversight or recommendations that regional committees assess applications and submit nonbinding recommendations to Ottawa. Once again, nonbinding. It's the federal cabinet that appoints. Nonbinding is the key phrase here. The federal government ultimately decides whom to appoint in our current system right meow.

This motion, along with other legislation, has emerged from a growing divide between our province and the federal government. We feel that we have inadequate consultation related to the selection process and the selection process for other federal nominations such as Senate seats, but that's a story for another day, Mr. Speaker. I think we can carry on with just talking about this and this motion. This motion calls for amendments that will require judges appointed to Alberta superior courts to be chosen from a list of candidates recommended and approved by the province. This is key. I think Albertans should be able to choose the future judges for the province.

Alberta would gain a direct say in who becomes a superior court judge, something which is consistent with how other relationships with our federal government also work, with comparable federal systems operating around the world as well. We seem to be an outlier on this. We see that Australia already has a system like this. We see Germany has a system like this. United States has a system like this, where the provincial level has recommendations to the federal system. It's a good system. It works there. I'm not sure why the members opposite are not seeing this, that there's a way for us to be able to suggest things to the federal government. They seem to want us to take a step back as a province and not be able to ever talk to the federal government. I think that's wrong. We should be able to understand who is in our province and who would make a good recommendation.

4:20

This motion doesn't change the Constitution, but instead it would ask both the Alberta Legislature and the federal Parliament to approve the necessary amendments. This is because of Canada's amending formula. Any constitutional change requires multiple levels of agreement depending on which section is being altered. In this case, because section 96, which is what we're talking about here, is part of Canada's foundational constitutional structure, the amendment would require co-operation between the province and the federal government before it could be proclaimed into law.

Now, this motion came from recommendations we heard during the Alberta Next Panel, which was an important panel that happened over this last year, and was further reinforced on March 24 when Premiers from Ontario and Quebec and Saskatchewan and Alberta all issued a joint public statement calling for reform to the judicial appointment process. Once again, four different Premiers from across the province, some pretty amazing heavy hitters across

Canada, also would love to see these changes. Once again, four – four – Premiers right meow are looking for this.

In this statement the four provinces urged the federal government to provide what we described as a formal and meaningful co-operation with provinces in selecting superior court judges. This is a big deal. It's also something that I think is reasonable. Initially, we got a little bit of feedback from the feds, who released a statement dismissing federal judge appointment changes, but we will see. We will continue to stand up for the voices of Albertans and continue to go to bat for them on issues they address with us.

This is important, Mr. Speaker. Right now in this House this is what we're doing, and our combined view right now is that this gives provinces a role in normal federation and, in regard to other federations, too, across the world, aligns with broader principles of federation co-operation here across Canada. Now, I do want to say that it does seem pretty rare that both the interests of Alberta and the interests of Quebec and Ottawa align with those of Alberta and Saskatchewan, but we know that this is really an important issue for Canadians to get right, and this is also why we're doing this collectively, for us to be able to work with and see the federal government work with us on this.

Of course, any discussion about judicial appointments inevitably raises questions about judicial independence. I think that's a fair question. The system right now that Canada uses today was designed more than 150 years ago to create a unified national judiciary insulated from regional pressures. Still a good comment, and it's one of the structural safeguards intended to maintain uniform standards in how the law is interpreted and applied across the country. Now, because of this, proposals to give provinces more influence tend to spark some pretty healthy debate across provinces, both provincial and federal, such as this one, and about representation, the balance between independence and accountability within a democratic system.

Again, we are committed to a strong, healthy, sovereign Alberta within a united Canada, and, if passed, we would submit a formal request for constitutional negotiation, possibly with the other provinces as a joint effort. That would be a big deal for all four provinces.

Continuing on the process, Mr. Speaker, Parliament would then need to agree to the proposed amendments, and all levels of government would have to follow the constitutional process for making this change, which is what we would continue to do. No constitutional amendments happen quickly. It's going to take some time. They require negotiation, a clear legal approach, as I said, process, and often public engagement, which is really interesting as well. It is our goal and hope that the federal Carney government will take this request honestly and give it some genuine thought. If they truly believe in working together for a united Canada, this is something that could show this commitment to the provinces, and I would love to see them take this step.

This motion will also help in the context of Canada's ongoing issues with court backlogs and judicial vacancies. What we're asking them is: help us to help you by collaborating to smooth out this process and the justice system, streamline it for faster processing, making things easier for judges, for lawyers, for victims, and those accused. This is appropriate for us to be able to move this forward.

Mr. Speaker, Canada's institutions have adapted over time. Whether one agrees or disagrees with these proposed changes, we need to reflect on them to ensure that they align and balance regional identity with national cohesion for a strong, united Canada. As this conversation continues, one thing is really clear. The question of how judges are appointed is about more than procedure. It touches on how a federation defines itself, how authority is shared, and how institutions evolve alongside the people they serve. This is key. I mentioned that this was designed just over 150 years ago.

Whether this motion ultimately leads to constitutional discussions or simply sparks broader reflection, it's already opened the door for a deeper national dialogue, and I look forward to this larger story expanding as well. I believe this motion also marks another chapter in the ongoing conversation of how justice is shaped, how to share it, how it is served and stewarded across this country.

This is why I support Motion 36, and I will ask all members of this House to do the same. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Government Motion 36. You know, the fundamental problem with this government is that they actually think that they and they alone represent the voice of Albertans, that anyone who disagrees with them should have no role in our public discourse and certainly shouldn't have any opportunity to serve in any public role. The view of the UCP is that only the UCP can be the arbiters of what represents Albertans' values.

Now, the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that we just heard that from the Premier here today during question period. She was speaking of Senators in the province, and she said,

Mr. Speaker, I mean, technically there are six Senate seats occupied by Albertans, too, but I don't know if any of those would be able to get democratic approval in this province . . . or necessarily reflect the majority view of this province.

Mr. Speaker, who are those Senators? Well, one of them is Paula Simons, a Jewish woman, popular columnist, born and raised here in Edmonton, part of two major teams with the *Edmonton Journal* who won national newspaper awards for coverage of major Alberta events like the Fort McMurray wildfire, the murder of four RCMP officers at the Rochfort Bridge, Alberta.

Mr. Getson: Rochfort.

Mr. Shepherd: Rochfort. Thank you, Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

She was recognized by the Edmonton Historical Board for her work as a popular historian and a champion of heritage preservation, someone who the Government House Leader said that the appointment of was a slap in the face to Albertans.

It shows us where this government is, Mr. Speaker. The only reason the Government House Leader stood and called that Senator – a Jewish woman, a well-respected journalist in this city, an upstanding public figure – a slap in the face to Albertans is because she disagrees with him politically, because she calls out this government on its decisions and its policies. That was enough reason for him to stand here and denigrate that constituent of mine in this House.

Hey, if they don't want to talk about Senator Simons, if they're concerned about the election of Senators, well, how about Senator Scott Tannas, proud son of High River, who took a small insurance company and built it into the largest insurance broker network in western Canada, stood as a candidate in the Alberta Senate election in 2012 as a Progressive Conservative. Perhaps that's why this government doesn't like him, Mr. Speaker, because he was progressive. There's no progressiveness in this government whatsoever. He placed second out of three available positions, and he was appointed to the Senate by Stephen Harper. But the Premier stands here today and says that he does not represent the majority of Albertans.

Why is this important, Mr. Speaker? Well, because of the arrogance of this government in dictating who actually speaks for the values of Albertans and claiming they are the only ones who can do so. The Premier has taken that to judges as well. In a social media post she said, "The appointment of justices to Alberta courts should be non-partisan and reflect our province's legal traditions and

values." Now, the Premier has yet to provide any real definition of what she means by values here, but I think both she and the Government House Leader have made it pretty clear what they mean by it today. For them reflecting their province's values means agreeing with them and them only, their far-right radical agenda that seems to be largely copied from the blueprint for separatism written by the Premier's chief of staff.

That is what they are talking about. They want control over the appointment of judges to ensure that judges have Alberta values, which we have just discovered means judges that agree with them. Partisanship, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

You know, the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka stood and she talked about: well, this is just about improving trust in the judicial system. She said that confidence in our justice system is being tested. Mr. Speaker, we've heard this government use language like that multiple times. You know how they use it? They use it as a smokescreen for pushing through policies and decisions that are rooted far more in far-right ideologies and conspiracy theories than any semblance of fact. It's a pattern. We've seen them do this a few times. What they do is, first of all, they spend their time and public dollars attacking and undermining a key public institution or service. Then they turn around and say: oh, my goodness, Albertans don't trust this thing anymore. Then they come in here with legislation or regulation – whatever – and ride to the rescue to take over more control, to restore the trust that they spent so much time tearing down. It's not about trust; it's about control.

We saw this with the use of vote tabulators and imposing all kinds of new restrictions that interfere with Albertans' right to vote. We've seen them do this with teachers in schools: their book ban and now these new sweeping restrictions on what can be discussed in a classroom. They spend time undermining and attacking teachers and then turn around and use that as an excuse to take more control.

Now we're seeing them do the same with our judicial system. Mr. Speaker, the independence of our courts is an essential part of a healthy, functioning democracy. Of course, we've seen this government isn't much interested in a healthy, functioning democracy; they're interested in one they control. We've seen this. We saw this starting at the end of last year, the Premier going on a bit of a tear about judges in Alberta all over in the media, criticizing their rulings, passing laws to undermine them, saying things like: I wish I could direct the judges. That's a direct quote from the Premier. It got so bad that, as my colleagues noted, the three Chief Justices from all three levels of our court system posted a letter to the front of the Alberta courts web page defending the quality of their work and their independence in doing it.

While the Premier likes to criticize judges and wishes she could give them direction, she sure doesn't like it much when they criticize her in return. I mean, as others have noted, she was found in contravention of the Conflicts of Interest Act for trying to interfere in a criminal court case at the request of a friend, Dr. Dennis Modry, who at that time was the CEO of the Alberta Prosperity Project, the organization that's been the chief proponent for Alberta separatism. Huh. How about that? Or when she changed election laws last fall for the second time to do an end run around the courts after a judge ruled that a referendum question on Alberta's separation was unconstitutional: seems to be a bit of a theme in where the Premier likes to interfere, Mr. Speaker.

Now she says she wants to control the judges that get appointed to the Court of King's Bench. Here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. She and the Justice minister said that if they don't get their way, they won't pay for those judges. They will not pay for judges to work on our court, and that would be catastrophic for our justice system, for

safety in our communities. I say that as our shadow minister for public safety. I've heard from folks about their concerns about safety in their communities.

These members stand in this House and talk about how concerned they are for safety in their communities across Alberta, rural and urban, but their Premier, their Justice minister say that if they don't get their way, they're going to interfere in and stop funding one of the most important levels of our courts. As I said, that would be catastrophic, and that's not just me. The president of the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association said that our courts are under so much pressure already that refusing to pay those judges would cause it to, and I quote him, implode. He said that there'd be a huge increase in Jordan applications, those being the legal motions to dismiss criminal charges because the cases have taken too long.

You know what that would mean, Mr. Speaker? That would mean that we are setting free people accused of some of the most incredibly serious crimes with no trial or scrutiny, all because the Premier and the Justice minister want to have a temper tantrum because they don't get to control the judges that get appointed to serve in Alberta.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, as my colleague the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View, our whip, noted earlier, Alberta already has a say, but, see, the government doesn't like that say because they don't get to control it. There are folks that are appointed by different organizations. There is a person on that committee appointed by the Minister of Justice himself. There is representation. There is say. But what they want to do is take that group of folks, a spectrum of Albertans appointed by a spectrum of different organizations with knowledge and expertise in our justice system, and replace them with their cabinet, so no one gets a say except the government. They say that that's improving the voices of Albertans. That is stripping representation in voices from Albertans.

Again, this government does not have the sole representation of Albertans' voices or their values. You can see that from the Premier's plummeting popularity. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this government does not represent the voices of people in my constituency. They do not represent the values of a vast swath of Albertans. The fact is that now they want to remove the say of people that do not necessarily agree with them, to insist, then, that only they get to have a say in the appointment of the judges that are going to be looking at some of the most serious legal decisions in the province.

We know what the record of this government is, Mr. Speaker, when they have control over appointments. We look back to 2019. There was a committee that was established under our government to help support the selection of provincial court judges. Who did this government appoint to that committee? They appointed a gentleman named Leighton Grey. Now, Leighton Grey, who is now actually a significant figure, again, in the separation movement – again, more connections between this government and the separatists. Mr. Grey ended up having to resign from that committee when it was revealed that he had a number of social media posts that compared a future COVID-19 vaccine to Auschwitz tattoos. Deeply anti-Semitic. He called Black Lives Matter a leftist lie promulgated by Jewish billionaire George Soros. Another post accused Mr. Soros of financially manipulating the European Court of Human Rights.

Those are the sorts of folks that this government appoints when they have the opportunity. That is someone they said: there is a good person to help select judges for the province of Alberta. That's their level of judgment, Mr. Speaker. That's what they think represents the values of Albertans.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that this government can't be trusted with that work. They have demonstrated it time and time again, their vast record of political interference, of self-dealing to protect themselves, to avoid transparency and scrutiny. How many boards

have we had of AHS? How many special administrators? The fact is that we still at Alberta Health Services or Alberta hospital services or whatever they want to call it now have a single individual where there used to be a president, CEO, and a board of multiple people. A single individual, a former deputy minister of the minister of health. This is what they do. They like control. They like to keep everything under their thumb.

We see, similarly, Mr. Speaker, in many, many other areas – I remember the period where the Minister of Finance was the sole director and board member for AIMCo.

This is a government that is allergic to democracy, a government that believes that no one should be able to question what they do, how they spend, and that no one has a right to speak for Albertans except for them. That is the last kind of government, Mr. Speaker, that should be given this kind of significant power over one of the branches of democracy that is meant to keep governments like theirs in check, to protect Albertans from the kind of overreach we see this Premier and these ministers attempting on a weekly basis. That is why I will be voting against Government Motion 36.

Thank you.

4:40

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, followed by Banff-Kananaskis.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to everybody here. I have it under good authority that Artemis II just launched successfully, and we've got a Canadian astronaut going with the Americans up to go orbit the moon, so this is something groundbreaking, you guys. I'll get right back to that very important motion, but I want to be the first one on record to congratulate everyone who's been involved in that process. Outstanding achievement to everybody.

With that, we'll jump right back into why we're here. We're talking about a government motion today, and I listened to some of the fulsome debate that was taking place. It comes down to a couple of key principles, Mr. Speaker, and I think we'll get right into that. This is Motion 36, and our hon. Premier proposed the following motion to "recognize that the Governor General has the power to appoint judges in the superior courts in Alberta under section 96 of the Constitution Act." Now, for those following along at home, we don't pick the Lieutenant Governor. That's appointed by our Prime Minister. That's how that works in the country here. We'll just do a little brief history on this type of stuff as we go through.

Let's see what else. We "recognize that the superior courts of Alberta have, since their creation, consistently demonstrated excellence in their [judiciary] functions." Again, hearing some of the hair-on-fire stuff that's going on over there, we're not saying we're against them. We say that they've been doing a good job, and it's actually right in this motion.

"Recognize the fundamental importance of [the judiciary] independence." Again, keeping the separation between executive, legislative, and the judiciary.

"Recognize that the government of Alberta does not have an equal voice to the government of Canada in appointing judges to the superior courts of Alberta." Again, right now we the elected representatives do not have the authority. Again, I know the opposition gets a little different opinions on this, and I think a lot of that comes down to those that are comfortable with electoral representation versus central control, central command, if you would. From this side, Mr. Speaker, we kind of like being the representatives and making sure the people have their voice in this place and represent the people as much as possible.

Recognizing "that addressing this gap will strengthen public confidence in the justice system and ensure that Albertans have a

meaningful voice in decisions that shape how justice is delivered in their communities.” Mr. Speaker, we’ve heard a ton of things about rural crime. We’ve heard a ton of things about regular old crime. We’ve heard a ton of things about the catch-and-release system, and we’ve heard about a ton of leniency taking place and setting precedent in a number of cases. Again, through you to the members opposite, when they’re suggesting that we’re not hearing any of these needs, I’ve held town halls in Calahoo where 350 people are showing up at one time talking about the issues with our judiciary system, the Criminal Code, a number of things. The fact that we went across the province for the what’s next panel: that was pretty far reaching, and it didn’t just stop in little old Onoway, Alberta. It was in Edmonton. It was in Calgary. It covered off the big centres as well, so again, to simply say that this is just a small voice that no one was engaged with isn’t fair at all.

“Recognize that it is important that the judges appointed to the superior courts of Alberta be selected from the members of the Alberta bar who are recommended by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.” Again, there’s a check and balance.

- (g) Recognize that this approach will bring greater balance to how judicial appointments are made and support a more transparent and accountable process while [refining] judicial independence, and
- (h) authorize an amendment to the Constitution of Canada to be made by proclamation issued by Her Excellency the Governor General under the Great Seal of Canada in [order] with the schedule set forth below.

Again, folks can follow this at home. It’s on the Order Paper today if you want to read along with it, and I’m just going through this to make sure that we can clear the record of what it is. In the order that – you know, I’m not going to attempt the French because I’m pretty bad at English and making sure the pronunciation is correct most days, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the French language and my 10 years in Niton Junction learning how to speak it, I’m going to refrain from doing it here today, so it’ll be in English only.

1. The Constitution Act, 1867, is amended by adding the following after section 97:
97A The judges of the courts of Alberta appointed by the Governor General shall be selected from the members of the bar of Alberta recommended by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.
2. This amendment may be cited as the Constitution Amendment,

and then the year of proclamation.

Back to the matter at hand, Mr. Speaker. When you read through those – I’m not a lawyer by any means. In my experience, I hire lawyers. I try to do the best to obtain them and abide by the law to make sure I’m never in the court systems. God bless those who are in that process and can talk about the technicalities, but the frailty of our system allows for people like me, just common regular folks that maybe had a technical background and did something else, to represent all their constituents, to bring their voices here, and to have those lines of sight. The debate process here is phenomenal, and I do appreciate the members opposite. A number of them are lawyers as well, and they’re getting into it, and so did our folks here on this side that have that background.

With that, you always have to go in between, and part of it is: what was the intent? How did it function before? As legislators we’re supposed to be for the common folk. We’re supposed to be for the folks that aren’t necessarily within that system. When you see things that can be tweaked or improved or do that or have concerns like I cited with some of the rulings that were taking place, the fact that we are growing as a country – I might get a little trouble here. The media will probably grab onto this.

I think oftentimes where we struggle in our country is because we are such a young country. Our Constitution is only since 1982. Heck, I’m older than the Constitution. So to think that all of this stuff is entrenched and thou shalt – it’s not like it’s been 400 years or 1,000 years. Like, there’s no question that we should not have the ability within this House, Mr. Speaker, through you to the opposition members who are – I wouldn’t say they’re yelling because that would be false. They may have asserted that, but I wouldn’t do that, but I would say cocking their eyebrows and looking at me differently. That’s fine. That’s where this debate should take place.

The reason why I’m saying that is that, again, we should tweak things as we go along as a young country. Heck, you know, I go over to Europe or I go over to South Asia; they’ve got outhouses older than our country, Mr. Speaker. Again, when our process is taking place here, we should be able to improve it. I think a lot of this comes down to the mindset.

You know, there’s this old adage out there that says that when you want to catch a thief, think like a thief. Well, I’ve heard what the Marxist group is saying, and I don’t think that’s the extent of it. I don’t think that they would ever want control to be given back to the people of the electoral process, and I think that’s where they struggle a bit. They’re still stuck in this colonist mentality rather than being a country and being an independent province. Like, the independence out here – strong and free it says, right in our whole ethos of who we are. The fact is that we want to take and assert ourselves more based on current conditions in our processes to make sure that there is more of a voice. That voice is extended then to making sure that we have for Albertans that ability to make sure, through the Lieutenant Governor, to have more control and appointment on Albertans’ behest in our court systems.

This is done in other parts of the world. It’s even done in our own country, Mr. Speaker. Down in Quebec they have no problems with it, seems to be working pretty good, again, knowing we’re a young country and moving forward on that.

I’m going to grab a couple of key facts just to make sure I get those in, that I didn’t miss them. And thanks to my LC for jotting these down because I want to make sure we got those on there. On March 24 the Premiers of Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and Saskatchewan sent a letter calling on the federal government to reform judicial appointments and give provinces a formal, meaningful role. Alberta is not an outlier here. If you look at the provinces here – again, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and Saskatchewan – not a surprise. These seem to be the provinces that either pay for the bill, foot the bill, or deal with most of the big grown-up issues in the country. Why would they not take the lead on this again, Mr. Speaker? We’re in good company. It’s not like we’re a massive outlier. We’re well within the pack of the other provinces that are very self-assertive, self-supporting.

Currently judicial appointments are made through judicial advisory committees, which assess and screen the applicants, providing nonbinding recommendations to the federal government. Again, nothing too crazy. If passed, this motion would request a constitutional amendment. Any such amendment would require the approval of the Legislative Assembly and the Parliament before making proclamation into law. Again, we’re right in the middle of it now, having this debate, this conversation about it. Those checks and balances are in place. Again, I would propose, in fairness to our colleagues across the aisle, that maybe it’s one of those things where they don’t realize how much authority they do have in this place.

4:50

We’re supposed to challenge each other for sure, and I’m being a little tongue-in-cheek here and a little cheeky, so I’m going to refrain from doing that going forward here. But the fact is that we should have these debates. We should have these conversations. Those with

the technical prowess and any ability in those areas, please try to convince me otherwise. But so far, when we start heading down these paths of partisanship, it's not really helping me hear your voice as well as I should. When I look at the key basic points here, I'm not really seeing a problem or a challenge with it.

An Hon. Member: That's the problem.

Mr. Getson: And so far my – well, the member opposite says “that is the problem,” and that is the problem. You can't convince me with your arguments because you keep heading down these paths of partisanship. If you can come back and say why doing something a little bit different and why being within the pack of those other big provinces that are seeing and hearing those similar problems – why is that such an issue? So far jumping up and down and beating each other up on whatever record, perceived or construed or otherwise, conversations don't seem to be cutting it. When I go back to my constituents, who have my ear on this, and when they've told me about all these other concerns, I don't see this as a big problem, tweaking the system. I think what it does, Mr. Speaker, through you to the other members in the Assembly: it's part of that maturity process of our country. It's part of the maturity process of our province.

There's kind of this old adage out there. The old commercial folks will remember it, where if they want your kids to move out of your house, then stop feeding them cheese. It's a goofy thing to think of, but you've got to grow up sometime. You've got to assert yourselves more. You have to take more control of your future.

Mr. Wiebe: Who Moved My Cheese?

Mr. Getson: When we're looking at this, you have to think about that.

My member to the left here, Grande Prairie-Wapiti, said, “*Who Moved My Cheese?*” which is another great thing, which talks all about change management. You've got Hem and Haw and itch and scratch, and they run around the little cheese maze at cheese station 9. They're all concerned about just getting fed the same thing over and over and over again. The members opposite are laughing, and I'm glad we can make a little fun here and have that, but maybe that's what they're most concerned about, change. Change of having to do something different and be more assertive for yourself.

As an aviator, Mr. Speaker, we have this. When there are two pilots that are sitting in the cockpit, one has control, and you know you have that authority and that control and you know you're setting that course. That's what we've been put here to do. We've been sent here by those folks that put us in this place to be their voice, to set that course, and to take control and do these things, and here are the items where we're being asked to go forward.

The Premier has brought forward a pretty decent motion, I would suggest. So far I haven't heard any issues with it. Through you to the other members opposite and to my colleagues here: please support this motion. It makes a lot of sense. A few tweaks here and there in the system. It's going to go a long way to help our province and our people we represent grow and maybe settle out some of these issues and challenges we may have been seeing.

Again, very happy to see that Artemis is tracking as it should. Those folks are sitting on a pile of more change and control than we could ever fathom in this place, and somehow they made it through just fine. So I would suggest maybe this little tweak isn't so bad either.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oh, there's just so much to unpack there. It's a little – okay. First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'll just say that I am afraid of change. Absolutely. The change that I'm afraid of is a government that moves away from democracy towards authoritarianism. That's the change I'm afraid of. That is the pattern of decision-making that we have seen from this government time and again. I'm not afraid of change in processes; I'm afraid that the foundations of our democracy are being threatened by this government in many decisions that it has made over the last three years. I think that fear is well founded, and I think Albertans should be afraid of that, too.

I just want to clarify something. The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland commented that – he made a few comments about us being a young country and adapting our processes, and this is just because we're so new and we're learning as we go. Well, I'll just say this. Maybe the UCP government is learning as they go, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we end up debating several bills over and over and over again every single session. They keep introducing pieces of legislation that aren't complete or aren't supported or don't make any sense once they start being implemented. Maybe they're learning as they go, but for us, we actually try to do our homework before we come to the Legislature floor, not during or after.

The Constitution that governs court appointments is from the 1867 Constitution, not the 1982 Charter, so that actually is way older than 1982 as the member insinuated. The problem isn't that we're a young country. The problem is that we value democracy, and the UCP apparently do not value it in the same way. [interjection] Oh, I'll get there. Just give me a couple of minutes, okay? Yeah.

This motion tries to amend the Constitution of Canada for the province to appoint judges to a superior court. This motion erodes judicial independence in our province. This is something that we learn about in social studies, or at least we learn about in social studies maybe until the curriculum is amended to not learn about in social studies. There are three branches of government, Mr. Speaker. The executive branch, which is the Premier and the cabinet, makes policy and implements laws. The judicial branch interprets and applies laws, and the legislative branch, which is us, debates, amends, and passes laws. The legislative branch is elected, as we all know. It is critical . . . [interjections] I love how the members opposite keep interrupting me. I'm trying to teach them a little something about the branches of government here. It is critical that the judicial branch be independent from the legislative and the executive branches. That is a foundation of democracy.

You can't have political forces interfering in the judicial system, Mr. Speaker, because political forces change. Not only that; they have different motivations, right? They might have biases. They might have different intentions and objectives. You can't have that kind of interference. This independence is enshrined in how our democracy is set up. There are times when politicians are biased and can't be trusted. This UCP government can't be trusted because it actually has a strong history of interfering with the rule of law. The largest corruption scandal in Alberta history, the corrupt care scandal: that's happening under this government's watch.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Ethics Commissioner found that the Premier violated the Conflicts of Interest Act. She's the only Premier in Alberta history to have been found to violate the Conflicts of Interest Act. That's also kind of, you know, illegal.

The Justice minister just last fall passed a bill to exempt himself and former Justice ministers from Law Society sanctions, which, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, is wholly inappropriate. We opposed

that and debated that vehemently in the fall as well. You can't have the interference of the legislative branch in judicial processes.

The Premier pre-emptively invoked the notwithstanding clause four times last fall without really any honest justification. Why do this pre-emptively? Why invoke the notwithstanding clause pre-emptively if the UCP believed their laws of forcing teachers back to work and targeting trans youth were constitutional? They're not even giving the courts an opportunity to review those decisions, Mr. Speaker. They invoke the notwithstanding clause when they get scared.

We see a government who wants to make laws that disrespect the independence of the judicial branch, are likely in contravention of the existing Constitution because, when they are, they just invoke the notwithstanding clause. Now we have a motion proposing to amend the Constitution because they just don't really like it. It doesn't really fit with what they want it to do, so I guess we should just change that, too. We'll just change the rules to serve partisan ideologies, not the people of Alberta, not equity or fairness in the treatment of the people of Alberta. They're going to change the rules again because they've got this partisan ideology that is founded in the separatist idea that there are somehow all these biases everywhere that are just stopping Conservative parties from being able to do their best work.

Our best work, Mr. Speaker, is to represent the people of Alberta. Once you become an MLA, your job is to represent your constituents. I tell my constituents this all the time. In this House it's not about furthering political ideologies; it's about serving the people. [interjection] I'm glad you think that's funny.

I find all of these violations of the interference between the judicial system and the executive branch disturbing, Mr. Speaker. Albertans should be very concerned about how this motion and other government decisions undermine the critical foundations of our democracy. This objectiveness and fairness and lack of interference is critical. It's one of the reasons why I keep hammering at the Minister of Energy and Minerals and the interference in the functioning of the AER, because you can't have that interference. It's not how that works.

5:00

Just this week we see the government refusing to rule out a plan to gerrymander Alberta's electoral boundaries. This is a big conversation for us right now, and I want to be clear, Mr. Speaker, that doing anything that isn't accepting the majority report – accepting the majority report is the only democratic course of action here. The majority report of those electoral boundaries is democracy in action. The Minister of Justice said today that the Legislative Assembly needs to be consulted on these boundaries and be allowed to do our jobs to debate and have a conversation, et cetera. I want to be clear. We were already consulted, as were all Albertans. I, just like every other Albertan in my constituency, had a right to go sit in front of the Electoral Boundaries Commission and share my views about my ridings and the community and their needs. I already was consulted.

Also, it is exactly not our job to debate electoral boundaries. That is not what we do here. We debate laws before they are laws, we debate really bad government motions like this one, but we do not debate electoral boundaries. Politicians should not pick their voters; voters should pick their politicians. If this government chooses anything other than the current majority report from the Electoral Boundaries Commission, that could be challenged on constitutional grounds.

Let's piece all of this together here, Mr. Speaker. If the Alberta government also wins a motion to appoint judges and they also create a situation whereby they get to choose their voters and rig the

judicial system to ensure those who oppose that don't have a voice – you see where I'm going here?

All of these things add up together to just further the accusations and allegations of corruption in this government and the reality that they're not serving the people of Alberta. This is incredibly corrupt, how all of these things piece together. They piece together to make sure that Albertans don't trust the judicial system, don't trust democracy, and don't trust this government, and then the government will just pass more laws making people's votes count less and not be as meaningful because they don't believe in the consultation that the Electoral Boundaries Commission already went through. It's another step closer to authoritarianism, Mr. Speaker, and Albertans should be up in arms about this and how all of these things are connected. I find it very disturbing.

The other thing that's really problematic here is that I don't really understand what problem is being solved. This is not the priority of Albertans. I'm not going door-knocking in my riding and people are saying: "You know what my biggest worry is right now? That we're not appointing federal court judges."

Mr. Dreeshen: I hear it all the time.

Dr. Elmeligi: You do not hear it all the time. This is a separatist move. The Free Alberta Strategy back in 2021 said that the government of Alberta should take over judicial appointments.

What I find particularly interesting here is that the Free Alberta Strategy is not a government body or an independent committee; it's a separatist organization. The other thing that I don't think that most Albertans understand is that Albertans are involved in the selection of judges for the federal court. The Federal Judicial Advisory Committee is made up of several Albertans who are experienced and experts in this exact topic, and they create a list of approved candidates to take to the federal minister. The Free Alberta Strategy is neglecting to tell Albertans about that little piece of reality, that Albertan experts are already involved in selecting and recommending who judicial appointments should be for federal court.

Why are we doing this right now? We're already involved. There's already a process in place. It just feels like the government keeps saying that they're not a separatist government but is also just making moves to support separatists and separatist movements all the time. I think that's really confusing. It's confusing for me, and I think it's confusing for Albertans, and eventually the people are going to see through that, Mr. Speaker, and recognize that actually a lot of people in the UCP government are separatists. It's not where the majority of Albertans sit in their love of country and love of province.

This is massive provincial overreach. Again – again – we have a UCP government that just refuses to stay in its lane. Oh, my goodness. Could they just manage and govern the province of Alberta? That would be amazing. I would love it if they would just focus on Alberta and Albertans. What about affordability? What about health care? What about education? What about better tourism management? None of those things really seem to be happening in a way that satisfies the people, but hey, let's spend a whole entire afternoon debating the appointment of federal judges.

I have yet to hear a reason from the members opposite of why we need this motion, why we need it now, and why this is important to the people of Alberta in a way that actually explains why the current system is not serving the people of Alberta. Albertans are already involved in selecting judges. You guys, everybody knows that's true in this room. So why are we here?

The federal government is not appointing judges without the input of key representatives from the Alberta judicial system, but

this government is more focused on being in opposition to the federal government than governing Alberta. They're not separatists, but everything they do is about moving towards building a case for separation. That's kind of separatist. This motion may pass here today, but nothing can come of it unless the House of Commons also passes a similar motion. So we're going to debate and pass a motion, and then we need the House of Commons to debate and pass a motion.

This is just another wedge issue to pick a fight with the federal government. It's another way that this government is tainting our democratic process with their ideologies and really just trying to pick yet another fight with Ottawa and just fuel that fire of separatism even more, Mr. Speaker. It's so disappointing. Mostly it's disappointing because I feel like we could probably do better. I feel like we could do things to actually serve the people of Alberta in a more meaningful way than trying to interfere in a process that is already working.

You know, when it comes to what Albertans actually want from the judicial system, Mr. Speaker, it's addressing the long wait times and access to the judicial system. I haven't heard a single member opposite explain to me how this motion will address that problem. How will this motion help people access and get into the judicial system quicker? It won't. We have to wait for the federal government to debate and pass a motion, and then we have to wait to debate and amend the Constitution. This is not a rapid process here. I also thought: wasn't this one of the referendum questions?

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton – no. The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: There we go. Hi. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. Thank you to the Member for Banff-Kananaskis for her terrific remarks. Now, I have to be honest, though; she did steal a little bit of my introduction. Both of us clearly came up in Alberta during the same era in which social studies and civics 101 was a topic of significant conversation. Really, a lot of what we're talking about today is reminiscent of the things that we learned a long time ago. That is, namely, that there is a very important distinction between the executive, the legislative, and the judicial branches of our system. Those three branches are the legs of a three-legged stool, and simply if you take one of them away, take away the independence of any one of those branches, the stool falls.

On this note, I do have to just give a shout-out to my dad, Ron Eremenko, a career junior high social studies teacher, who made darn sure – hi, Dad; hope you're feeling all right today – that I was going to know those fundamental pieces to liberal democracy, and here we are putting those to work today and exercising them today.

I'd like to start by quoting a public letter dated January 27, 2026, a statement from the Chief Justices of Alberta courts. They said:

Independence of the judicial branch protects the public. It ensures judges can make decisions based solely on the law and the evidence presented. It frees judges from pressure or influence from external sources including the governments that appoint us.

5:10

Now, I'd like to know why any of the members opposite have greater authority to speak to the independence of the judicial branch than the Chief Justices that are quoted in this letter. They are speaking up for the independence and the sanctity of those offices and of our judicial system. They are not speaking up on behalf of constituents. They are not speaking up on behalf of parties. They are not speaking up on behalf of any government of the day. That is the whole point, Mr. Speaker.

With the Premier's Government Motion 36 the sacred tenet of independence is thrown into question, and that is precisely the kind of chaos that the UCP just thrive in creating. It seeks to challenge

the federal Constitution again. How many times do we need to hear this completely conflicting dialogue that is coming from the opposite side? Members wrap themselves in the Canadian flag, they talk about patriotism, they talk about the pride in being Canadian, yet they dismiss the Constitution, that is the very heart of what it is to be Canadian, at every single turn. Where it's not politically convenient for them, they toss through the notwithstanding clause with a kind of glee that we have not seen in Alberta's history or anywhere else in the country.

It provides yet another example of why the UCP love to pick fights with Ottawa, because it's chum in the water for their base. It is stoking separatism that, whether they agree with it or not, is critical to the Premier's political survival. It's a playbook that this government clearly never tires of, but I'll tell you who is tired of it. Maybe, I think, I can speak on behalf of my colleagues; I know we're growing a little weary of this constantly picking fights and never really winning, but Albertans are growing weary of it, Mr. Speaker. They are tired of constantly picking fights and having the government not address the fundamental needs that they've got before them on any given day. The UCP cannot be trusted to make appointments to the superior court. Period. They cannot be trusted. It's not a government who believes in transparency. It's a government that time and time again have applied political pressure and executive interference at every opportunity.

As a side note, I think it's worth noting that the UCP realized that there will come a day when the UCP is no longer in power, Mr. Speaker. That day will come, and they know that one day it will be the New Democrats sitting on that side of the aisle. Imagine the outrage should the New Democrats have the power that they are asking Albertans to grant them, to appoint judges to one of the most critical parts of what it is to be working in a liberal democracy. The reason that it has to be independent is because it's about checks and balances.

Now, again, junior high, this might be grade 9 social studies, so for those – you know, maybe people need a little bit of a reminder. It's the checks and balances that prevent us from sliding down into authoritarianism, and sometimes the judges are going to make decisions that government doesn't like. Boo hoo. It's not a time to stomp your feet and insist that the system is rigged, that the Constitution is a failure, that Canada is broken. No, those are the three legs of the stool, each doing their part to stand up this country to be the incredible place that it is. That is not a failure of any one of the branches. In fact, I think it is a testament to its success and to the exact reason why we need to stand here and defend this with everything we have, because it is worth protecting and it is worth preserving.

Mr. Speaker, the superior court of Alberta hears the most serious and grievous cases. It is the court that typically hears all criminal cases. It is precisely where independence is more critical than ever, but the Premier has stood up and she has said on – I believe it was one of the radio shows that she was on in December, to say, like: what do judges have here? They're not elected. They're not susceptible to recall legislation. Is that what the Premier is suggesting with Government Motion 36, that if the judges should disagree with the legislation that the members opposite choose, they should be susceptible to recall legislation?

I'm pretty sure that the Premier and many members of this government have stood up and said that recall legislation should only apply in the most egregious and potentially criminal acts, that should take back the seat of a sitting MLA. But they're saying that simply when a judge potentially disagrees with their legislation, when a judge disagrees for doing their job and ensuring that the Constitution and that fundamental human rights are being followed, they should be susceptible to recall legislation. It's absurd. It is absolutely absurd, Mr. Speaker. Ultimately, this government is seeking greater power and

influence in the appointment of superior court judges so that they can't challenge their unconstitutional laws. That's it. That is not democracy. That is authoritarianism. It is exercising rights that nobody has granted them in any election. Again, would any of the members be in support of this legislation when the tables turn? I think it is a fundamental question. That is precisely what they are looking to do in changing the Constitution.

Now, in my closing comments I am very pleased to be able to stand today and speak to the value of our Constitution, the value of the process that is collaborative, where Alberta members have full say in contributing to the decision about who sits in the most fundamental roles in our judicial system. Those checks and balances are critical in our job, they are critical in the future of this province, and we have to stand by them. That is our job.

Thank you.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Motion 36, judicial appointments. I just want to clarify on the record something that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland had mentioned. He went through the motion and talked about the importance of the facts that were being presented. When we look at the motion text, fact (f) speaks to "the members of the Alberta bar who are recommended by the Lieutenant Governor in Council." You said that that is an arm's length away. It clearly indicates that you do not understand what the term Lieutenant Governor in Council means, through the chair.

The Speaker: See, you know. Okay.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would not want to imply that you don't understand what that means.

I would like the record to reflect the fact that what that means – and this is from the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta's website. It says [interjection] It's unfortunate he's not listening to the [interjection] Okay.

The Chair: All through the chair.

Ms Goehring: All through the chair.

The Speaker: Both sides should only talk through the chair. And the only one recognized should be talking at all.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "The term 'Lieutenant Governor in Council' appears in many government documents, such as acts of legislation. Legally, it refers to the Lieutenant Governor acting on and with the advice of the Executive Council or Cabinet." That is not arm's length. So for him to stand and say that this, you know, very clearly outlines that it's arm's length away, and it's factual: to not understand that that one statement actually means cabinet is a little bit concerning.

I think when we're looking at, you know, the arguments that the government is using to support this motion, it's some surface-level language. They're not getting into the depth of what it really means. I'm concerned that perhaps not all members, Mr. Speaker, understand what this motion is going to do. Essentially, it's giving this Premier and this cabinet authority to appoint judges, and that is very, very concerning. They should be an arm's-length reach.

5:20

We've seen what this government has done when they're worried about what the courts are going to do. They've invoked the notwithstanding clause. What better way to get around having to do

that again than to appoint people through the Lieutenant Governor in Council cabinet?

I would strongly support that all members understand what this legislation would do and not support it. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in debate today because this is a critical motion, which paradoxically accomplishes nothing. It was important for me to be here today to speak to the House about this because, while it is simply empty virtue signalling that will have no impact whatsoever going forward, it really speaks to who this government is and what this government is attempting to do.

What we have seen over the last many weeks, particularly in this House and particularly in the last year or so, is a government that is increasingly centralizing power, that is increasingly looking to grab power in every way, a government that is increasingly contemptuous of regular Albertans, and who continually pretends that the only Albertans who matter are the Albertans who agree with them. In taking this motion that attacks the very foundation of judicial independence, this tells you a lot about who this government is. They don't want to be accountable to anyone.

We've heard the Premier say on more than one occasion: the government feels this way even though my caucus doesn't. We've heard the Premier say on many occasions: Albertans feel this way, except for the ones that disagree with me. You know, there was a king of France who famously said: L'État, c'est moi; I am the state. This is precisely the kind of authoritarian tendency and centralizing power that we're seeing in the Premier.

Now, the government was not always like this. When the Premier was the Leader of the Opposition, when she was the leader of a defunct party before she crossed the floor that time, she often said that regular Albertans need to have the power, that the power needs to be taken out of this Chamber. I've quoted extensively from her maiden speech in this House, and her maiden speech was about citizens. She talked about how citizens have inalienable – she said unalienable, but it's inalienable – human rights, that no legislator, no matter how much they bray, can overcome those rights, that no legislator or Legislature can ever overrule people's human rights, yet she has presided over a government that has used the notwithstanding clause not once, not twice, not three times, but four times in two weeks to overrule people's human rights.

Over the last few days in question period in almost every question we've heard from the government that they don't care about regular Albertans. They care only about the Albertans who are on their side, who donate to them, to whom they give huge contracts, but they don't care about regular Albertans. Indeed, they speak about them with disdain. Part of those people with whom they speak with disdain are the people who work hard, the legal experts, to appoint judges.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about how the process works right now. Right now, it's not that the Prime Minister swoops down and appoints a judge. In fact, I've been lucky enough in my own life to be a reference for many folks who wanted to be elevated to the bench, so I've seen how the process works. It is extensive. There are unbelievable amounts of interviews and background checks and reference checks. It then goes to a committee made up of Albertans. That committee is the following members: a nominee of the Chief Justice of Alberta, a nominee of the Law Society of Alberta, a nominee of the Canadian Bar Association, a nominee of the Minister of Justice of Alberta, and three nominees from the federal government. If you're doing the math, that means the federal

government has three nominees and other Albertans have four nominees. They do not have the majority. These are all Albertans.

Then that committee sends a list to the Minister of Justice. It has been the practice for many, many, many years that the Minister of Justice federally goes back to the Minister of Justice provincially and says, "Hey, here are the folks I want to appoint. Do you have any red flags? Do you have any problems?" and gives the Minister of Justice provincially the opportunity to have further input beyond the input of his nominee. We know that in all of the nominations to superior courts that have happened in Alberta, the Minister of Justice of this government has approved of all of them. In fact, he has been effusive in his praise of many of these folks in those conversations. So what's going on here? What problem is the government actually trying to solve? I asked today in question period, several times: could the Premier or the Minister of Justice just tell us which judges they don't like, which judges made an approval that they were not happy with, which judges, and why, do they think should not have been approved? And the Speaker very correctly said to me: hey, they're not allowed to answer that question. They could certainly answer it outside this House, and they failed to do so.

They failed to do so because there's no problem to solve here. This is distraction. It is deflection. It is endless virtue signalling, and it's a waste of our time, and here's why it's a waste of our time. Because there is no federal government in the history of Canada or in the future of Canada that would ever give up this power. Pierre Poillievre would never give up this power. The existing federal government would never give up this power because this is how negotiations work, which is something that I think the Premier sometimes forgets. To give something up, you've got to get something in return, and this MOU that failed to pass today – it missed a deadline today – is simply an example of that. The federal government did everything they were supposed to do. The provincial government didn't do anything they were supposed to do.

This is how the Premier thinks negotiations work. She thinks that if the provincial government throws a tantrum, then the federal government will give them whatever they want. She thinks that if she panders to the separatists and she uses the threat of separation as saying, "Give us this; otherwise Alberta will separate," the federal government will give her whatever she wants.

This is never going to happen. It is simply never going to happen. No federal government will do this for such little return because the federal government are not idiots. They know that if they were to give the Premier this power, not one separatist will cease to be a separatist. Not one person is saying Alberta needs to separate. Even the Member for Red Deer-South is not saying that Alberta needs to separate because judicial appointments to three courts are what's in place here. Nobody is changing their mind, so there is no bargaining chip here.

The provincial government is simply virtue signalling, saying: hey, we hate activist judges unless they agree with us. The number of times the Premier has praised judges by saying, "Hey, they turned down this bill that I didn't like. I love this judge, but I don't love this judge," is a very big problem, Mr. Speaker, because it comes to the heart of how our entire system works, the heart of separation of powers. The Premier is not interested in separation of powers. This government is interested in centralizing power in every possible way that it can, and they continue to do this with this terrible virtue signalling.

Let's be clear. This Premier and this government have a strong history of interfering with the rule of law. This Premier was the first Premier in Alberta history to be found in violation of the Conflicts of Interest Act because she tried to tell the prosecutors who to

prosecute, and more specifically, she tried to tell the legal system who to let off. That is not democratic behaviour, Mr. Speaker; that is authoritarian behaviour, and that is not what any single Albertan voted for.

The Ethics Commissioner found that she violated the Conflicts of Interest Act. We've had three Conservative Justice ministers in a row investigated and censured by the Law Society of Alberta. To prevent a fourth one from happening, the Minister of Justice, in this House, stood up and shamelessly moved a bill giving himself immunity. Come on. This is pure interference in the rule of law.

Let's be clear. There is a very long-standing appointment process for provincial judges that has worked well for a long time, but under UCP rule, we're starting to see cracks in that as well. The only judges that have been appointed that have donated to political parties have donated to the UCP. Fully one-third. The wife of the disgraced Justice minister was appointed to the bench. The minister appointed his own law partner as a justice of the peace. This tells you what the pattern is here.

5:30

This government simply wants the ability for the cabinet – and notice they didn't say: the judicial appointments committee. They didn't say: experts. They didn't say anyone else. They said, "the Lieutenant Governor in Council," which means the cabinet, by the way, which means the cabinet will actually make that distinction. There's nothing else in this motion that says any different, so how do we read this other than . . .

An Hon. Member: Your time is up.

Mr. Nenshi: No. I'm the Leader of the Opposition. I can go on for 90 minutes. Settle in. If you're uncomfortable, go get a drink. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Anyway, with all of that said . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you do have 90 minutes altogether, most of which is still remaining. You don't have to do this, but it might be helpful for all of us if you just said to the hon. member, "I'm not going to take your intervention," or else take it because he's proper to keep asking unless you . . .

Mr. Nenshi: Oh, I actually didn't realize that was what he was doing, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No, no, no. I'm trying to be helpful here to the whole House.

Mr. Nenshi: I appreciate it. Thank you.

The Speaker: You don't have to say anything to him, and he doesn't have to stop doing that, but I want you to tell him no. Whether you accept or not: I'm not giving you any advice on that. That's your decision.

Mr. Nenshi: You know, what the heck. Go ahead.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what they say: Christmas only comes once a year, but we're getting it today. Through you to the new member, I've only got one minute, and I'm going to use it well, sir. With that, it is so good to see the new member learning the rules and procedures here. You know, the candid remarks and some of the decorum: a little frightening, to be quite honest, but that's okay. I'm going to take this time.

With this, I think one of the things we put out there earlier was talking about the separation of the executive, the judiciary, and the legislative. Again, getting into the nuances, I'm not a lawyer. I'm

not a professor. I'm speaking for the common man, and the common man is asking: can you tell us specifically, other than what you would do or see how it could be hijacked from your standpoint, how it could actually be good for the system? Again, the comments I was making earlier, Mr. Speaker, was that this process is something that we can tweak and nudge around the edges, and if it doesn't get into partisan items, I'm totally looking forward to being convinced. So far I'm not hearing that from the former professor. I would love for him to educate me.

The Speaker: Hon. opposition leader, just so you know, your time stopped, so you haven't lost any time by accepting that intervention.

Mr. Nenshi: Well, I actually appreciate that question because this is not something where you can say: oh, intellectuals talk about this. This is something that is fundamental to every human being. If you find yourself in trouble with the law or if you find yourself in a civil dispute, the one thing you want to know for sure is that the person in the black robe in front of you is impartial, is learned, and knows what they're doing. That is the most common-man thing you can think of. This isn't about the lawyers, and it isn't about the judges. It's about access to justice for every individual.

We have a government that has continually been stripping away access to justice through their cuts to legal aid, through their raiding of the Alberta Law Foundation, through their attempt to manage the professional body of lawyers in this province, the Law Society of Alberta. This is something that we have seen this government do over and over and over again. And you know that Shakespeare quote that people always use: first we come for the lawyers. You have to think about what the context of that was. That was in the context of a tyrant saying: we come for the lawyers because they're the ones who prevent us from being tyrants.

This government's attack on the rule of law directly hits the common man, that the member was asking about, because that is what you have to be able to trust. You have to have trust in the Legislature. You have to have trust in the electoral process. You have to have trust in the judicial process because, God forbid, if you end up there, you need to be able to trust that process. That is why the kind of politics that we're seeing on the side opposite over there is so very dangerous when you encourage people to not trust politicians, not trust the media, not trust the judges. The Premier has used some pretty strong language saying: these judges are unaccountable; they can't be recalled; they weren't voted in. I asked her at one point: do you think the judges should be elected? It was yet another question that she didn't answer.

The point is that we have a system that has worked really well since 1867. When I asked the Premier today and when my colleague asked the Minister of Justice today, "What problem are you trying to solve? What's wrong here?" they weren't able to answer the question because the system works well. The Canadian constitutional framework is the envy of the world. The Canadian Constitution has been used as the template for newly independent countries for so very long, since 1982, because it's the best system in the world. So why do we change it?

Let's remember what the government's attacks on rule of law have resulted in. We got an unprecedented letter written by all three Chief Justices in Alberta, provincially and federally appointed, where they said:

Independence of the judicial branch protects the public. It ensures judges can make these decisions based solely on the law and evidence presented. It frees judges from pressure or influence from external sources including the governments that appoint us.

This is really important. We're seeing it play out in real time, Mr. Speaker, in the report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. It was very clear, and it was clear in the statements of many members

opposite, that they felt that they had the majority on that commission. We appoint two, they appoint two, but they appoint the chair. When it turned out the judge acted as a neutral judge and acted in a way that you would expect a judge to act, saying no to things that were illegal or, in his words, unconstitutional, the front bench opposite and the entire caucus opposite reacted in shock and horror that a judge actually was a judge.

The real problem here, though, is not what politically appointed judges will do to politicians or what the Premier and the government want to be able to do. The real problem here is politically appointed judges and how they will administer justice for the regular person. This is really the problem here.

There's also a procedural problem. We heard a couple of months ago that the Premier was really interested in Albertans' perspectives on this, so she was going to put in a referendum question asking for this. Now, normally if you say you're interested in someone else's opinion, you stop and wait and listen to their opinion, but not a couple weeks later the Premier wrote a letter to the Prime Minister saying: I want this thing that Albertans haven't yet voted on. Today we stand here on a meaningless, virtue signalling motion asking for the thing that Albertans have yet to vote on. They're always accusing us of not believing in direct democracy, but it's a charade. It's a sham. It's performative. It's a fake. They don't care what Albertans think. They already have their opinion on this matter.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier herself, when I asked her in estimates, "What do you think about the fact that you've already expressed opinions on what you claim is direct democracy in a referendum?" said: "Of course I have opinions. The government has an opinion, but then people can vote on it." That's not direct democracy. That's spoon-feeding your opinion to somebody and hoping that they feed you back. Certainly, that is not something that Albertans voted for.

There is not a single Albertan who voted in the 2023 election who said: I'm voting for separation; I'm voting for judicial appointments. That wasn't in the platform. Indeed, the Premier said in that election, "I am not running on the Free Alberta Strategy," which includes this motion. She said in that election: I'm not running on your pension; no one is touching your pensions. She said in that election: I'm not running on getting rid of the RCMP. Of course, she's done all of those things. This is a disdain for democracy and a disdain for other orders of government and a disdain for Albertans.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, I will give you a great mercy and not go on and on and on, though I could, but I will wrap up here simply by saying that this is about power. This is about a government that doesn't want to be accountable. They don't want to be accountable to citizens. They won't call an election even though they're governing far outside the mandate that people gave them. They have disdain for anyone telling them what to do.

The Premier and I were in school together. We took a class from a former member of this House, Peter Lougheed, and it was largely about the evolution of the separation . . . [interjections] Don't laugh about Peter Lougheed. That's not going to help much. It was specifically about the evolution of the separation of powers in Alberta and Canada. It was specifically about the legislative, the judiciary, and the executive branches and how the executive branch has grown over time. Listen, I was paying attention in that class, and it was very, very clear that the critical piece of this was that simple fact that the separation of powers has served Canadians well, and it is the fundamental bulwark to protecting people's human rights and ensuring people have safe and fair access to justice.

This government is forever trying to centralize power. They're forever trying to figure out how they can exert even more power over Albertans. They are forever taking away people's human rights. They're forever restricting the freedom of speech. They're restricting health care professionals from doing their job. They're restricting

teachers from doing their job. They don't believe in neutrality. They believe in putting forth only the things they talk about.

5:40

The woman who was the Leader of the Opposition in 2014, the woman who sat across from me in that classroom all those years ago said she believed in people's human rights, and this government every single day, like no government in Alberta history has ever done, systematically strips away people's human rights for their own power. What happened to that woman I went to school with? What happened to that woman who stood in this chair as the Leader of the Opposition and talked about who she was? That is certainly not the person who is sitting across the aisle now.

Mr. Speaker, this is performative. It's not going to do anything. The federal government will never agree to it. It's a giant waste of our time, but I'm really happy that the government brought forth this motion because what they say is true. When someone tells you who they are, believe them.

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers?

Seeing none, does somebody want to close on the government side? Seeing none.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 36 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:41 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Jones	Schow
Armstrong-Homeniuk	LaGrange	Schulz
Boitchenko	Loewen	Sigurdson, R.J.

Bouchard	Long	Sinclair
Cyr	Lovely	Singh
de Jonge	Lunty	Smith
Dreeshen	McDougall	Stephan
Dyck	Nally	Turton
Ellis	Neudorf	van Dijken
Fir	Nicolaides	Wiebe
Getson	Petrovic	Williams
Glubish	Pitt	Wilson
Horner	Rowswell	Wright, J.
Hunter	Sawhney	Yao
Jean	Sawyer	Yaseen
Johnson		

Against the motion:

Batten	Eremenko	Nenshi
Brar, Gurinder	Ganley	Sabir
Brar, Gurtej	Goehring	Shepherd
Ellingson	Ip	Tejada
Elmeligi	Metz	

Totals:	For – 46	Against – 14
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[Government Motion 36 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move that the Assembly be adjourned until 10 a.m. – 10 a.m. – tomorrow, Thursday, April 2, 2026.

An Hon. Member: When? At what time?

Mr. Schow: That is, for the members in here, 10 a.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:54 p.m.]

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