



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 15, 2026

Day 46

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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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
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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 15, 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 to his government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is my honour to welcome His Excellency Jean Claude Kugener, ambassador of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to Canada. Hon. members, I understand several ministers have already met with His Excellency this morning, and I look forward to doing so myself later this afternoon. His Excellency is accompanied by Mr. Charles Adrializah, economic and commercial attaché. I ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you two groups of individuals that I highly regard in my constituency. First, I would like to say that my constituency assistant and constituency manager, Juliet Krawiec and Philip Schienbein, are here. Would you please stand. Awesome help that they give.

Plus, I also have a school group from the Cold Lake junior high. This school group, when I asked them what their greatest concern for the area was: highway 28. Near and dear to my heart, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a number of guests seated in my gallery today. I'd like to introduce Neil and Kristen Korotash, who are seated in my gallery. Neil and Kristen both work in public education in St. Albert, and Neil serves on the St. Albert city council. More importantly, they are the proud parents of lead page Kailen Korotash, who after two years in the program will be concluding her time at the Legislature this week. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly, and thank you to Kailen.

Last but not least from me, it is my absolute pleasure to introduce to the Assembly a very important group of individuals who play a key role in the democratic process here in the province of Alberta. They are our constituency staff and are often the first point of contact for people and communities where we serve. Working in a constituency office can be rewarding but at certain times very, very challenging and extremely demanding, and that's mostly when interacting with members. They are here today participating in the annual spring constituency employee learning and development

seminar. This seminar provides an opportunity for staff to learn from one another and receive training on many programs and resources available through the Legislative Assembly Office of Alberta as well as the government of Alberta.

We had a lunch earlier today where we were able to recognize some long-service constituency staff who have served for over a number of years, including two individuals who have achieved 10 years of service, one with 15 years of supporting members of this Assembly and, by extension, Albertans across the province. I would first ask these individuals all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Also, please join me in recognizing Juliet Krawiec, serving the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, on the achievement of 15 years of service; Karen Ruzicki, serving the Member for Calgary-North, on reaching 10 years of service; and Julie Tomm, serving the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, also on achieving 10 years of service. All, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly three great organizations from the Bengali community who are celebrating Pohela Boishakh. Happy New Year. I would ask our honoured guests from the Krishti, Bangladesh-Canada Association, and Alberta Bongo Society to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Lacome-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and to present to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my friend and constituent Dr. Matthew Riley. He holds his masters of divinity from the Canadian Baptist seminary and a PhD from McMaster Divinity. He's currently president of Training Leaders International Canada. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce you to our representatives from the Alberta Motor Dealers Association. They represent new motor dealers across our province, supporting an industry that plays a critical role in our economy, creating jobs, and driving investment. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Oh, well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was not expecting that. I would love to introduce Katie Joosse, who is one of the best humans around, and she just happens to be my constituency manager. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure and honour to introduce two outstanding people from my constituency, my office manager and assistant. I could not have done what I do without them. She's been there 13 years, through three MLAs. Please rise and accept the warm welcome, Alana Gibson and Brenda Berreth.

The Speaker: The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so honoured today to have the two ladies that try their best to keep me out of trouble, my constituency manager and our helper. Pat Godkin and Rose Briand, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Tabitha Burkitt, my constituency manager for Calgary-Peigan. Her commitment, professionalism, enthusiasm, and friendliness ensure the constituents of Calgary-Peigan are well taken care of. Please rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: I am going to ask the House's unanimous concurrence to go for three more minutes to finish the introductions based on who all is here today.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you Devon Langdon and Felipe Garcia. Devon is my constituency manager. Felipe is my constituency assistant. They support my constituents, they support me, and they continue to teach me about politics.

The Speaker: The Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly two amazing members from my constituency team in Spruce Grove and Stony Plain, Lisa Ludwig and Michelle Eastwood. They do a fantastic job helping out the residents, and I'm very thankful for their help. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce one of the finest constituency managers, Natalie Bach. She has been with the Calgary-West constituency for almost 15 years. She's here with her partner, Jason Sallay. If we can give her a round of warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you my amazing team: office manager from Drayton Valley, Cleah Rye, and her husband, Isaiah Rye; and from Devon, Ceili Forchuk. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you the representatives from Whitecourt Youth Advisory Committee. This committee provides important insight to Whitecourt town council to ensure that the needs of youth are represented in our community. Accompanying them are town councillors Bill McAree and Serena Lapointe and youth co-ordinator and family support co-ordinator Emma Harper. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to recognize Lisa Leavitt and Donna Christensen, two of the very best co-workers I could possibly ask for. They are exceptional servants to the constituents of Calgary-Currie. Folks, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Joël Laforest and Valentina Gasca Castro who, along with Signe in our office, provide the best service to the residents of Calgary-Klein. They receive lots of accolades, and they are well deserved. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you two members of my constituency service team, Ashley MacInnis and Nosheen Sheikh, who are both recipients of long-service awards, six years and eight years respectively. I appreciate everything they do.

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you my constituency staff, Ghadia Hamim and Bethany Greidanus, who help me out a lot. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: And I'll make note that my constituency assistant, Kathy Holdaway, is here also.

Members' Statements

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

Bill 30

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The world needs Alberta oil and gas more than ever. We've all heard this a thousand times. Canada often takes Alberta's bountiful resources they have been blessed with for granted, but we shouldn't. We have some of the largest energy reserves on the planet. Our oil and gas fuels our economy; supports hundreds of thousands of jobs in Alberta; drives investment; funds hospitals, schools, and roads. Unfortunately, we've had a decade-long attack on our energy industry. The unholy Trinity of Trudeau, Guilbeault, Singh launched an all-out barrage on our oil and gas while the provincial NDP applauded every step their bosses took in Ottawa.

Speaking of bosses in Ottawa, the NDP's new grand pooh-bah has declared that he will pick up that ill-begotten baton and run with it, fighting to kill pipelines and energy projects to fulfill some socialist utopia that does not mesh with reality. We can all see how Venezuela turned out.

We all know and find ourselves in a hole that has been dug by the malfeasance of Ottawa that reaches far beyond our energy sector and has hammered our productivity, kills jobs, scares hundreds of millions of billions of dollars in investment. Last year alone, Mr. Speaker, \$12 billion in energy capital fled to the U.S. because of the regulatory and approval processes that have been stifling our economy.

We need to rectify this. Our job is to provide an environment that will attract investment, the kind of investment that will drive our economy forward and strengthen our economy and energy security. Bill 30, the Expedited 120-Day Approvals Act, is a big step forward in getting that done. It does not shortcut environmental approvals or constitutionally protected Indigenous consultations, but it does

ensure wonderful major projects, to make sure that we get them done on time. We always will protect our Albertans.

Government Priorities

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, there is a pattern with this government. They promise one thing, but Albertans get the opposite, and nowhere is that clearer than with health care affordability and the future of Alberta in Canada. They promised to fix health care in six months. Instead emergency rooms are closing, health care workers are burning out in understaffed and unsafe working conditions, and families are worried about getting sick without the care they need. Albertans didn't get a health care fix; they got a health care crisis.

They promised affordability, but Albertans are paying way more for gas, more for electricity, more for insurance, more for groceries, and more for just about everything, and the government talks while gambling with people's pensions and pushing risky pension schemes that no one asked for. Life is more expensive in Alberta today, and this government is making it worse, not better. While families are worried about bills and finding a doctor, what's this government focused on? Referendums, pension fights, and political distractions: ideas that put Alberta's future in Canada into question. Albertans want family doctors, good jobs, quality schools, and affordable bills, not political games and risky schemes.

The pattern is clear, and it just keeps repeating over and over again. They promised to fix classrooms, but they took away teachers' rights. They promised to fix health care, but it's gotten worse. They promised affordability, but our bills keep piling up. They promised stability, but now we get risky separatist referendums. The UCP promises one thing but delivers the opposite. Government runs on trust, and right now Albertans are learning the hard way that this government cannot be trusted to do what it says.

Albertans deserve a government that says what it means, does what it says, and actually delivers for the people. That government will be an NDP government.

The Speaker: Chestermere-Strathmore.

Bill C-9 and Religious Freedom

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Religious freedom is one of the foundational pillars on which Canada was built. From the earliest days of Confederation this country has recognized that the freedom to worship, to live according to one's conscience, and to express deeply held beliefs is essential to a free and prosperous society. That principle is not abstract to me; it's personal.

My ancestors were Huguenots, Protestant Christians who were forced to flee France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. They sought refuge in the Netherlands to escape state-sanctioned persecution simply for practising their faith. What is striking about that history is that persecution does not always begin with violence. When the law no longer makes room for sincere belief, ordinary religious expression can be transformed into something suspect and ultimately punishable, and that history remains a powerful reminder of what can happen when governments fail to protect religious liberty.

Mr. Speaker, many Albertans are concerned about Bill C-9 before the Senate, specifically the removal of a long-standing Criminal Code defence that explicitly protects the good-faith expression of religious beliefs and teachings. In my constituency of Chestermere-Strathmore and across the province I've heard directly from parents, faith leaders, educators, and community members who simply want to live according to their beliefs, teach their

children, and worship freely without fear of criminal consequence. They're rightly concerned that this legislation will restrict conversations about their faith and will chill open and respectful dialogue. It raises questions about how scriptural expression or religious teaching may be interpreted in the future.

This legislation passing through Canada's Parliament is a blow to faith communities across the country. Mr. Speaker, here in Alberta we will continue to stand up for fundamental freedoms, for respectful debate, and for the rights of faith communities. History teaches us the cost of getting this wrong, and we must never repeat those mistakes.

Thank you.

Provincial Fuel Tax

Member Batten: Albertans are getting squeezed. Gas costs more – way more – utility bills keep climbing, and now families are hit with property tax increases they cannot absorb. Folks are already at the edge. They cut back on basics. They put groceries and rent on credit. They work longer hours just to keep from falling behind. What makes this worse is that this government could act right now and make life more affordable for Albertans.

Ask anyone who might have recently filled up their tank. They certainly are paying more, maybe as much as 40 cents more a litre, than they did just a few weeks ago. So the answer is no. Albertans need a break. Taking the provincial gas tax off, those 13 cents a litre, would go a long way, and the UCP has the power to change their own legislation today, not next session, not after another review; today. Yet they choose not to. Why? Why is it acceptable to do nothing while Albertans scrape by?

We've seen how fast this government can move when it serves their agenda. We saw how eager separatists were to change the rules to make it easier to break up our country. They rushed bills through, and they rewrote the rules overnight. But when affordability gets in the way of ideology, the urgency disappears. This is not from a lack of options; this is from a lack of will. Getting some relief at the pumps would show that this government is responsive, but Albertans see that's not the case with this UCP government. They notice when their struggles are not being addressed by this government. Every day they sit on their hands tells Albertans who this government is working for, and right now the answer is very clear that it's not for Albertans.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Orphan Well Decommissioning

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in response to a very serious question the minister of energy gave an incoherent and insulting answer, so I'm going to try again today with the Premier. The number of orphan wells in the province doubled overnight, and there is no industry money to pay for their reclamation. Now, the Premier herself is a former industry lobbyist. She knows this file. A simple question: how much are Albertans going to be on the hook for the reclamation of these wells that industry has foisted upon us?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Zero dollars, as the member opposite should know. The Orphan Well Association is funded by industry levies. When a very serious issue happens when a company goes bankrupt and the wells go into that fund, they do increase the

levy on industry. It's part of the reason we're working with industry so that we can address issues of viability. We can address through the mature asset strategy those wells that are at end of life, get them off book so that we can have a viable industry again. But taxpayers are not at risk. We have a polluter-pay principle in the province.

Mr. Nenshi: Of course, the levy went up 7 per cent, but the number of wells doubled. The math ain't mathin' again with this government, Mr. Speaker.

The mature asset strategy talks about public funds being put into this work. The Premier's mentor, David Yager, who both accepts a salary from the Premier and sits on the board of the supposedly independent regulator, has been lobbying this for years. The Premier herself lobbied for public money on this. This particular company: owned by Chinese investors. Again, how much are Albertans really going to be on the hook to bail out these Chinese investors?

Ms Smith: Again, Mr. Speaker, the answer is zero. We have put forward a number of different policy ideas, including one that has come from previous liabilities management advocacy groups, and one of the issues that they proposed was having closure funds attached to each well. We'd like to get to a point where there's no such thing as an orphan well because when it comes on stream, there are dollars put aside that grow over time so it has a liability to cover off the ultimate expense. The problem is that we're dealing with a legacy problem that goes back to 1936, so we're developing go-forward policy as well as ensuring that we have mandated amounts that companies have to pay to close out their liabilities.

Mr. Nenshi: Well, this is not a 1936 problem. This is a 2026 problem; 4,000 new orphan wells added in one day. Something like that doesn't just happen. It means the regulator, this Premier's hand-picked regulator, was asleep at the switch. These Chinese investors took all the revenue from those wells and left taxpayers holding the bag, and this happens because, again, this government doesn't understand how business works. They're so gullible. They will let business foist all of their risk onto the taxpayer. What is the Premier's plan to get the taxpayers off the hook?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, to correct the member opposite, it is the orphan well fund, funded by industry, that is going to be cleaning up these well sites. It is not taxpayers holding the bag.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that we have a flood of gas. We're sitting on an ocean of natural gas, and that's part of the reason prices are so low. One of our policies is to find new ways of using natural gas so that we can develop more opportunities to be able to increase the price so that our companies can be viable again. That's the proposal that we have, and that's what we're going to do.

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

Mr. Nenshi: It is interesting to hear the Premier admit that her policy is to increase Albertans' utility bills even more than they already have. We'll talk more about that.

Provincial Fuel Tax

Mr. Nenshi: For now let's say that even the *Calgary Sun* says that the Premier is wrong. She had the opportunity to give Albertans a break. The federal government did so, but the Premier refuses to do

so. We have to wait until July 1, and to quote Rick Bell: "Until then, suck it up Buttercup!" Why does the Premier dismiss the need for Albertans to get relief on gas tax today?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are the only province that has a program in place that changes and varies based on the price of WTI. When WTI is below \$80, people pay the full 13 cents, and when it's above \$90, then the full 13 cents comes off. I would ask the member opposite to look at the last month. Last month's variation in trading has been a low of \$86 to a high of \$115. We don't know what's going to happen with the war in Iran, but if you look long term, those prices are supposed to go back down to the low or mid-\$60s, and that's what we're worried about, running balanced budgets.

The Speaker: Did I hear a point of order? I'm not sure if I did or not. No, I guess not.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Nenshi: Legislation that doesn't do what it's supposed to do is worse than no legislation at all. Here's the thing. Albertans are in a cost-of-living crisis. One-third of families in Calgary don't have enough to eat, yet the Premier says that she doesn't want to give tax relief because seven bucks a tank is no big deal. Her increase in property taxes has already wiped out the tax relief they purportedly gave last year. People are finding it harder and harder to get by. Does the Premier not understand that Albertans are suffering and she has the power to help?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No. The budget they voted against contained a personal income tax cut especially for this reason. We knew this was going to be a year of volatility. We knew that every family would have their own priorities and their own concerns that they had to address, whether it was gas at the pumps or food costs or the cost of sending their kids to school, and that's why we gave the \$1,500 per family tax relief that they're going to get year after year after year. It's five times the amount of the fuel tax relief. They already had that last year, they're having it this year, and we're going to keep monitoring to make sure that life remains affordable for them.

Mr. Nenshi: So, wait, the Premier knew about the war in Iran that no other industry expert had guessed about? Did President Trump tell her that at Mar-a-Lago? Nah, she didn't really talk to him at Mar-a-Lago.

Now, she's fine with changing the legislation if the separatists ask for it, but she's not fine in changing legislation that could provide immediate relief to Albertans today. Why is that? Is it because we asked for it and they're just being petty, or is it because of the truth; they need the money to cover up their giant deficit? Look, the government is getting a big windfall. Why not share a little bit of it with regular Albertans?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly how our policy works. To share a windfall, you have to get it first. We are 15 days into the budget cycle. We've tabled a budget deficit of \$9 billion. We have to allow for this quarter to play out so that we can give back money that we actually realize. We don't know what's going to happen in Iran. If we end up seeing a settlement there, the prices might plummet overnight. That's the kind of change and volatility that we're managing, which is why we make sure that we have the

dollars in the bank before we share them back to Albertans. But that's our commitment: as of July 1, if these prices remain high, they'll get the rebate.

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

Mr. Nenshi: Of course, earlier this week in this House the Minister of Finance admitted that he's already billions of dollars to the good with this windfall that the Premier doesn't seem to know about. Don't tell her, Minister; she'll spend it on something.

Bill 29

Mr. Nenshi: Yesterday the government claimed that Bill 29 is about increasing diagnostic system capacity, but there's nothing in this bill that actually does that. In fact, the Alberta Medical Association, the Canadian Association of Radiologists, and others, anyone who knows about diagnostics, say that it'll make things worse because of false positives. If you're someone without a family doctor, who's going to interpret those private results?

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition will address his remarks through the chair.

The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll correct the record. The Finance minister did not say that we already had billions of dollars' worth of windfalls. What will happen is that you have to have a quarter of high prices in order to have surplus revenues, and that's what we're monitoring.

I would say on the issue of preventative tests, peace-of-mind tests that I haven't talked to a single person who thinks that that's a bad idea. They think it's a good idea for them to be able to get a peace-of-mind test so that if a serious condition is found, we can get them in for treatment, reimburse the test, and give them a better chance of recovery. That's what it's about, Mr. Speaker, and we're supportive of it.

Mr. Nenshi: No one is asking for this, Mr. Speaker, except maybe some tech bros and biohackers.

What we know is that cancer screening in this province is so backed up that people are not getting treatment on time and they're dying as a result. The ethical concern here is a big one, that people with money will be able to have access to earlier treatment. That's an unfair system. The real question is: why are we doing this? It's not improving health care outcomes for anyone except people who can afford it. Is this just to give Sam Mraiche a new revenue stream?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, there are lots of peace-of-mind tests that people want to get that they may or may not have their doctor give them a prescription for. They should be able to go into a diagnostic testing place, get that peace-of-mind test, and in the extreme, if something terrible happens, they'd be able to get diagnosed so they can get early treatment. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we have an office in Tokyo. One of our staff members went through this, and what did they discover? They had leukemia. They didn't know that without going through this full-service diagnostic testing. That's the kind of thing we want to get. Let's identify serious conditions, and let's get them treated.

2:00

Mr. Nenshi: But, of course, if you're ill, you should have the right to get that service in the public system timely and properly instead of only people who have money to go to the private system, but this government has underfunded the public system, so people don't have family doctors to refer to for those tests. The last time the

government messed with the diagnostic system, we had the \$100 million DynaLife debacle. They didn't learn their lesson. Instead of saying, "We can't do this anymore," they're now introducing more American-style, two-tier, for-profit health care system. What is the government trying to achieve here?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just speaking again of the staff member we have in Tokyo, when they go into the system, they get check-in, all of their fluids, blood pressure, breast, stomach, as well as abdominal ultrasounds, height, weight, breath tests, ECG, hearing tests, eye tests, Pap smears, ultrasound, digital exams, chest X-ray, mammography, cancer marker tests for \$700. They were able to get that full testing, and as a result, discovered they had leukemia and were able to get in for treatment. That's what we're trying to achieve here.

Alberta Energy Regulator

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, yesterday at Public Accounts I questioned the CEO of the Alberta Energy Regulator about his claims that he has implemented the Auditor General's recommendations to improve management of oil and gas liabilities. I asked whether he's created cleanup targets, established timelines to meet those targets, or increased enforcement actions. Instead of answering, he refused to provide details and ignored the questions. To the minister: does he believe it's acceptable for the CEO of the Alberta Energy Regulator to refuse to answer questions from a committee of this Legislature?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of energy and environment – and minerals. Pardon me.

Mr. Jean: I thought I got a promotion there, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

I don't know if it's appropriate, Mr. Speaker, but as a former minister of the Crown is it appropriate for him to have six points of order called upon him and his behaviour? Is it appropriate for him to question the deputy minister's attachment to the public interest? Is it appropriate for him to attack the integrity of the AER CEO? Is it appropriate for him to call a deputy minister and the CEO dishonest and not forthright? These are public servants that work for the people of Alberta. He should be ashamed of himself. They do good work. They're the best regulator in the world, and they take a very complicated . . .

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:03.

Mr. Schmidt: They're public servants who are failing to uphold the public trust.

At that same meeting I asked the CEO to explain how the AER approved the transfer of hundreds of licences to Maga Energy despite the company owing \$200,000 in unpaid municipal taxes to Sturgeon county. The county notified the AER about these unpaid taxes six months before the transfer, contrary to the minister's own order prohibiting such approvals. The CEO claimed the regulator complied with the order but refused to provide any evidence. Will the minister investigate . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I caution us against casting aspersions against staff members who aren't here to defend themselves.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, just like Johnny-on-the-spot, he's a little bit late, a little bit under the weather, but I'll let him know this, that

they were under financial issues. They got some organized repayment schedules done, and they worked with the county to be able to come forward and start making payments – significant payments, I might add – but then the economy happened, bad management happened. Whatever happened, they then had a worse failure, and it does happen to businesses. But the point is that we have a system in place. The system works, and we don't need to scrutinize and punish the public servants about their work.

Mr. Schmidt: It sounds to me like the minister admitted that he's refusing to enforce his own order.

At Public Accounts I asked the CEO whether he met with the minister's office regarding Valory Resources' request to cancel its mine 14 hearing. The CEO admitted that such meetings did take place, raising serious concerns about interference with the regulator's independence. Refusing to answer legislative committee questions, failing to demonstrate compliance with ministerial orders, and compromising the regulatory independence are serious breaches of the public trust. Will the minister do the right thing and fire the CEO today?

The Speaker: You know what? This isn't a forum for dragging public servants through the mud.

Go ahead, Minister. [interjections]

Mr. Nixon: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jean: Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, the people of Alberta fired that member and all of those folks for being the No Development Party and not getting any work done. The OWA is completely industry funded. It has actually tripled under this government, which was set at \$155 million in Budget 2026, their spend. The number of sites the OWA fully closed increased 22 per cent in '24-25. The OWA has actually decommissioned 8,200 wells, received nearly 3,300 reclamation certificates, and there are another 3,500 sites reclaimed and waiting for establishment of vegetation, which, as you know, with snow is a little tough, but we're getting to it.

Mr. Schmidt: Resign. Resign.

The Speaker: Order. You actually had three times to ask your question.

We're at question 4, where there are no preambles on supplementaries.

A point of order is noted at 2:06.

The question belongs to the only one we should hear from right now, Edmonton-Glenora.

Bill 29 (continued)

Ms Hoffman: I was proud to attend the Alberta Medical Association's spring representative forum with other NDP MLAs. The UCP health ministers were invited, too, but none of them bothered to come. If they had shown up, they would have learned that the AMA strongly opposes self-referral for unnecessary diagnostics, or if they pick up a newspaper today, they'd know the same thing. It makes wait times longer for everyone, and it wastes tests that could help patients truly in need. So will the minister finally admit what's clear? Bill 29 is about American-style private health care, and it's going to result in higher patient costs and wasted public resources.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to correct the member opposite. In fact, there are many members that

are AMA members that support Bill 29. In fact, it is about preventative medicine. It is in fact empowering patients to take control of their own health care. It's about making sure that they have choice and access, and I will not apologize for getting better health care for Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: I'll just say that now it's your turn to talk. Please do.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. Given that yesterday, and again she did it just now, the minister responsible said that, quote, people can take care of their own health care – yeah, that's clear, Mr. Speaker – and given that, actually, the UCP health minister's job is to ensure that people, all people, get the right care in the right place at the right time but given that if Bill 29 passes, it will be clear that there's one kind of health care for those who can reach into their pocket and choose to pay out of pocket and the other kind of health care for everyone else, there will be fewer resources in the public system. Why does the minister care more about privatizing tests and procedures instead of fixing the health care system for all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure why the member opposite doesn't want Albertans to have better health care. That member was the minister of health for four years and could have done something, and in fact they did nothing. We've added more doctors, more health care professionals, and we're going to get them more access and more choice. They want to condemn people that have serious issues to be unable to get proper care. I will have more to say in the next answer.

Ms Hoffman: Given that during the last election the Premier promised she wouldn't make people pay out of pocket for their health care but Bill 29 makes patients pay out of pocket for their health care, it's clear that the UCP broke their campaign promise and that they're dead set on breaking the public health care system. If they really want a mandate to bring in private, American-style health care, will they at least do the honourable thing? Call an election and actually run on it. Tell the truth this time.

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The truth is that if a doctor refers a patient for a medical test, that is fully covered, but if – I'll give you an example: a young mother who is in her 30s who had constantly gone back to her physician and said, "I have something wrong with me" and was unable to get the required test until she finally convinced that doctor and then found out she was in stage 3 cancer. That is unacceptable. We can change that, and we're going to. [interjections]

2:10

The Speaker: Order.
Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Bill 30

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Delays and duplication in project approvals have driven investment away from Canada, including \$12 billion in energy investments to the U.S. in 2025 alone. At the same time global demand for Alberta's energy continues to grow. We are the best place in the world to invest thanks to our pro-business policies, low taxes, and skilled workforce. To the Minister of Energy and Minerals: with billions of investment leaving, how will Bill 30 cut through the delays,

restore certainty, and keep Alberta competitive for jobs of the future?

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

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP and the folks out in Ottawa have tried to kill our oil sector for many, many years. They brought in, along with the NDP-Liberal coalition in Ottawa, the nine bad laws. The NDP's new boss Avi Lewis: well, he is the leader of the kill-the-pipeline group, and he's going to be the worst we've ever seen. I'm certainly hoping that with this Premier working so hard to build pipelines and with the opportunities we have right now with the federal government and the geopolitical situation in the world, we can bring our energy to the world and do a great job for the world. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta has some of the largest oil and gas reserves in the democratic world and given that Alberta has an entrepreneurial spirit that cracked the oil sands riddle and it is at the forefront of innovation, one would think that Alberta would continue to be at the forefront of the world's energy and investment production. To the same minister: why do we have so many issues building pipelines and other infrastructure projects that would allow us to become an energy superpower? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Jean: Well, we had problems, Mr. Speaker, but yesterday was a great day. We had introduced Bill 30 to accelerate the approval process for major projects in Alberta. Right up to this date we've been losing out tens of billions of dollars in investment because of roadblocks. Last year alone the U.S. actually received about \$12 billion that we should have received here in Alberta in investment. We're going to push forward with our 120-day approval process. The U.S. does it in 28 days. The federal government expects two years. We're going to make sure that the world gets our oil and gas. They want the oil and gas, and we're going to get it to them.

The Speaker: Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his hard work on this. It is refreshing to see this approach to attract investment and shifting the culture of investment by cutting overregulation and red tape, but given that shorter timelines often mean that corners can get cut and given that Alberta always prioritizes environmental protections and Indigenous consultations, can the same minister tell us how he plans to ensure we reach our goals without sacrificing these important standards?

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're the best in the world, and we're going to stay the best in the world as long as they don't get back in power. I mean the No Development Party. Bill 30 actually strengthens those standards. No project can actually be submitted in the process without completing the environmental impact assessment and the Indigenous consultation, which obviously deals with courts, and we want to make sure that process is dealt with appropriately. If it's not, the project won't go ahead. Rules are rules. All Bill 30 does is say: get those rules done faster. When somebody wants to go on a holiday, maybe they have to make a decision before they go on a holiday. This is about getting work done.

The Speaker: Order.

Alberta Separatism and Economic Development

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, TMX is built. Alberta's exports are up. Our markets are diversified beyond the U.S. because the Alberta NDP government got it done, all while respecting treaty rights, ensuring environmental protections, and even launching a renewables sector while the UCP bans renewables and drags us backwards. This Premier talks pipelines while leading a separatist government, driving away the very investment these projects depend on. How can she deliver a pipeline while her separatist government undermines the very country it has to be built in?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, once again, the only people in this Chamber talking about separatism are the members opposite, and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore thinks that Albertans should not have a say in what's important to them, particularly in having sovereignty within a united Canada. On this side of the House we believe in listening to Albertans, and that is exactly why we have got an MOU signed with the federal government to help get our pipelines and our products to the west coast, unlike the members opposite, who didn't build the pipeline; they nationalized the pipeline. What an epic failure. They nationalized the pipeline. That's not how you do it.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that British Columbia once asked for its fair share of economic benefits and demanded transit fees on Alberta oil but under the Canadian Constitution they simply do not have that power and given that it's only Canada and only its interprovincial trade laws that protect Alberta from those kinds of charges, what is the Premier's plan when her separatist agenda strips away that Canadian protection on Alberta oil, and how much then will Albertans be forced to pay in transit fees to B.C.?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, maybe that's the secret agenda of the NDP. They're the only ones talking about separation in this House.

You know, all they need to do is google Notley and pipeline protests and they can come up, and I can see it on my phone, Mr. Speaker. I'd never use a prop, but I can see Notley is clearly standing in the picture saying: "No tar sands. No tankers. No pipelines. No problem." Well, that is a problem, and that's why the people of Alberta fired those guys, got them out of office, and hired us.

The Speaker: Well, hon. minister, that was the definition of using a prop. I'm sure that you will refrain from doing that again.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the minister continues to obsess with social media on taxpayer money, given that building major projects takes real work, rolling up your sleeves, and building partnerships with industry, workers, Indigenous leaders, provincial and federal partners while actually believing in Canada and given that the Alberta NDP government has delivered, built a pipeline, launched a renewables sector, created jobs, and will build big under the next Alberta NDP government, why would anyone trust this separatist government to build anything when all they're building is division and separatism?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, what a joke. The only thing this government is obsessed with is creating jobs and attracting investment, and we're winning. That's why year over year we've created over 100,000 jobs, leading the country. Now, when it comes to partnerships, we will take no lessons from the members opposite, whose idea of diplomacy is insulting other nations, insulting Saudi Arabia, insulting the United Arab Emirates, insulting the President of the United States, our largest

trading partner. The members opposite have no idea how to build relationships. That side of the House: what an absolute joke.

Government Communications Expenses

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, Albertans expect their tax dollars to inform, not promote political parties or attack critics, yet we're seeing questionable government messaging flow through alternative media, blogs, and influencers, all while access to information declines and communications are centralized in the Premier's office. For a government with nothing to hide, information is sure difficult to come by. To the Premier: will you disclose in full all spending on advertising, communications, sponsorships, and influencer partnerships across all media platforms?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is more than welcome to attend estimates next year, but the government has been fully compliant with divulging documents and making sure that we are transparent and open. It's that mentality that our government has taken, which is being honest with Albertans. It's the exact reason why we are leading the charge with job creation, with investment attraction, and ensuring that this province remains the best place to live, to play, and to work. It is that process, it is that plan that is keeping the members opposite out of government. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given that information is not disclosed and given that taxpayer dollars must never be used for propaganda or to suppress information and given that the Premier and the energy minister repeated derogatory remarks from an obscure online blogger now tied to an RCMP investigation and given that friends of government tied to this individual appear across contracts, appointments, and police search warrants, to the Minister of Finance: will you confirm that not \$1 of public money was directed to that blogger or any other similar partisan media activity?
2:20

The Speaker: Well, we don't discuss RCMP investigations here, but the hon. Government House Leader can answer that if they like.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not quite sure what the member is driving at in this question, but what I can tell you is that on this side of the House we continue to operate in a transparent manner, being honest with Albertans about what we're doing, which is exactly why we've engaged in advertising across the country talking about the importance of Alberta's energy sector, our world-class energy sector, and ensuring that predatory legislation by the federal government doesn't lead to things like rolling blackouts. This is a campaign that everybody saw, billboards in Calgary and across the country. It is that kind of communication that lets Albertans and Canadians know the importance of our incredible energy sector.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given that this information: the public does deserve to know and given that as a former minister I had line of sight into government expenditures and given I raised concerns about partisan use of public funds for promotion, propaganda, or attacks and given that these are serious matters, evidence is mounting, and evidence is being collected by authorities, to the Minister of Finance: are you willing to stand in this House and

clearly attest that no public dollars were used for politically motivated media campaigns?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Definitely emphasize the words "former minister." This is what happens when you break oaths.

What I can say is that on this side of the House we will continue to communicate with Albertans through the public . . .

Mr. Guthrie: We'll see what happens, when you broke the law.

Mr. Schow: . . . and through the media with things like . . .

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Mr. Schow: . . . wildfire awareness, with things like vaccine awareness, and, of course, as I mentioned before, about our world-class energy sector and the important role it plays in Canada. It's that exact energy sector we promote. We've worked on an MOU with the government of Canada to get our world-class products to tidewater and to markets around the world. Alberta is leading the charge, and we're letting Albertans know exactly what we're doing.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to Calgary-East.

Daylight Saving Time

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The twice-yearly shift between standard time and daylight saving time continues to be a concern for many Albertans. Research and public feedback have highlighted impacts on sleep, workplace productivity, road safety, overall health, particularly following the springtime change. To the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction: what is our government doing to assess the impacts of daylight saving time on Albertans and respond to ongoing public concerns about time changes?

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

The hon. minister of red tape reduction.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been dealing with these twice-a-year clock changes for five decades. In fact, we've talked about it as a province in 1971, in 1987, again in 2017, and in 2021. We're committed to taking a fresh look at the research and what we're hearing directly from Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that other jurisdictions have examined alternatives such as permanent extended time or permanent daylight saving time and given that Albertans expect decisions to be based on evidence, consultation, economic considerations, to the same minister: can you please outline what analysis has been completed, what engagement has taken place, and how these findings are informing options for Alberta's approach to daylight saving time?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has been debated in Alberta for more than 50 years, including through both plebiscites as well as referendums. At the same time both British Columbia and Saskatchewan have moved to a fixed time year-round. This raises questions about alignment and consistency across western Canada.

We're reviewing those developments alongside research, and we're listening to Albertans and hearing what they have to say.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that any changes to time observance would affect businesses, transportation, health outcomes in alignment with neighbouring jurisdictions and further given that Albertans value clarity and certainty when it comes to politics that affect daily life and economic activity, can the minister please provide an update on how our government is planning next steps, including further consultation or legislative considerations regarding daylight saving time in Alberta?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the most common questions that we get is: why are we doing so well in the polls? Part of that answer, of course, is because of Avi Lewis, but the other part of that is because we listened to Albertans. Our next steps are going to be guided by what they have to say. We're taking our time, we're looking at the facts, and we're listening to Albertans. We'll have more to say about what we hear in the near future.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to Edmonton-McClung.

Provincial Fuel Tax (continued)

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province could make a simple change to give drivers, including seniors and young drivers, a much-needed break, especially as Albertans face an affordability crisis because gas prices have skyrocketed as much as 40 per cent a litre, but the Premier and her Finance minister won't make a change. They know very well that tweaking the legislation could remove provincial gas tax and help drivers. Why won't the UCP take action to give drivers relief at the gas pumps and reduce the cost of fuelling up now?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I think we all agree that Alberta has done this in a proactive way that makes sense for the province and to give relief to Alberta's drivers when oil is high. We've done this in a way that recognizes the price of oil through a quarter, and then the tax will be adjusted, perhaps come off entirely for the following quarter. It makes a pile of sense for our books, provides appropriate relief to Albertans, and I think they're getting educated about it and understand it. We did run a \$9.4 billion deficit. The questions have changed a lot in about a month and a half, but we stand by this program.

The Speaker: Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that every Albertan is getting educated every time they go fill up at the pumps and given that every Albertan across every corner of the province would stand to benefit from relief at the pumps, given that the federal government will be taking action, just as other provinces have done and even Alberta did in the past, what's the holdup? Why is the government so resistant to giving people relief at the pumps? In the Premier's own words: high gas prices will lead to higher inflation that hurts Albertans and our economy. The only one who needs an education is the Finance minister.

The Speaker: I'm quite certain I didn't actually hear a question there, but you can respond if you choose to, Minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, sure. If I need an education, I'll give a little history class to the member opposite because he's been here long enough. He should remember that the party he signed up with, the eco radical, leave it in the ground pipeline protester activist party, brought in a carbon tax in this House to drive up the cost of fuel to make it more expensive, to change people's behaviour, and then had the gall to tell Albertans that maybe you should walk or ride a bus. That was your policy design. It is shameful to say that you care about affordability. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Dach: Given that families struggling with the high cost of gas could use a break but the Finance minister is not going to change, he says, and given that when the Premier's supporters demand changes to make separatist referendums easier, the UCP is quick to whip up new laws and given that when Sam Mraiche needs an election investigation to go away, the government changes the laws real tout de suite, why won't the government take action when drivers need gas price relief?

Mr. Horner: We're just making a mess, but we'll do it again. This is about having a responsible program that makes sense for the province's books and provides relief to Albertans at the appropriate time. I've explained this many times, and I think that we all should appreciate Alberta's broad-based advantages, a \$16.9 billion tax advantage over the next closest province. Every province in this country has just run a deficit. It is true that no province has the upside potential that Alberta does, but we still have to be responsible, and we can't count our chickens before they're hatched.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to... [interjections] Order. Order.

The next question belongs to Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Trade with Asia

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On my recent trade mission to India I was amazed at how much potential for trade and investment there is in that part of the world. With current geopolitics there is a resurgence in demand for safe, secure food and energy supply. It's vital that Alberta is known as that reliable exporter of these many products to the world abroad. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: what is the government doing to bolster linear infrastructure and west coast ports to increase export capacity to India and the other Asian markets?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreesen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank that member for his work on the Economic Corridor Task Force report, that he spent a lot of time and energy and effort to get through this Chamber. This government is proud to build off that report. It has actually partnered with the port of Prince Rupert as well as with the Industrial Heartland here in the Edmonton region to talk about the economic corridor that would go from Alberta out to B.C. to the Pacific coast, Mr. Speaker. That's a very important economic corridor. We're looking at all the different road and rail and utility infrastructure along that corridor to make sure that we can build it not just for the benefit of Albertans but all Canadians.

2:30

The Speaker: Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to that minister again for all of his hard work getting those MOUs signed and building that consensus across the country. Given the importance of increasing and strengthening our trade relationships with India – and that’s a market of about 1.5 billion people for the record – given that further demand on Alberta’s world-class products already exists over there – we just need the political will to make that happen – to the Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration: what is the government doing to market Alberta, reduce red tape, make it easier for businesses in Alberta to do work over there in India and abroad, and to have those industries and the ability to invest back here?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a strong trade relationship with India with the total trade between us valued at \$873 million. Earlier this year the government led 27 Alberta-based companies to India at Energy Week. Now, this is one of the many trade missions that help businesses grow and reach international markets. It’s those exact same trade missions – my department does 30 to 40 a year. Our job is to bring businesses on those trade missions, unlike the members opposite, whose job is to insult foreign governments rather than actually build relationships. We’ll take no lessons from them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you full well that the folks over . . .

The Speaker: Hold the preamble if you don’t mind.

Mr. Getson: Oh, pardon me. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Given that I can tell you full well that folks over there appreciate us showing up, given that the increased exports to India and other Asian markets will mean an increased demand for Alberta oil and gas and therefore need for more production capacity as well as exports and further given this government’s commitment to simplifying the project approval process, making it easier to get major projects approved and built, to the Minister of Energy and Minerals: how will the proposed 120-day approval guarantee increase investor confidence in the major project development here in Alberta?

Mr. Jean: The world is excited, Mr. Speaker. Bill 30 puts a shot clock on regulators to approve projects in a timely manner. We’ll no longer take multiple years for projects to be approved. Alberta is back in business, and the world knows it. Some of the largest reserves of oil, natural gas, and lithium on the entire planet: the world truly wants what we have, especially in Asia, which we’re so close to. Our goal is to double oil production by 2035. Simple economics: faster approval equals more investment, equals more production, equals a better economy and a better quality of life for Albertans. We’re getting the job done.

The Speaker: Banff-Kananaskis.

Wonder Valley AI Data Centre Project

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier claimed that strict rules under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act will continue to be applied when it comes to Kevin O’Leary’s wonder valley AI data centre. That act outlines how large-scale, complex projects trigger an environmental impact assessment. They’re also meant for projects with potentially significant adverse effects around water. This is proposed to be the

biggest AI data centre in the world. Since this wonder valley proposal meets the criteria, why did the minister of environment not require an environmental impact assessment?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, Alberta’s government continues to protect the environment using some of the highest environmental standards in the world while ensuring responsible development can move forward. Data centres are an industry of the future. We need to secure the investment and infrastructure or risk being left behind as a lone spectator in a changing global market dominated by the U.S. We need to keep Canadian data in our hands, protect our interests, and keep our economy competitive for years to come. That’s why we make sure that we have the lowest regulatory burden in the world.

Dr. Elmeligi: Given that that doesn’t explain why an environmental impact assessment wasn’t required, Mr. Speaker – wonder valley is a massive energy- and water-intensive project – given that an assessment is designed to answer questions like, how much water will be used, where it will come from, and how impacts to communities will be mitigated and that review informs monitoring to make sure the development serves in the best interest of Albertans without impacting their water; given that the project is proposed in a water-stressed part of the province, will the minister of environment share how issues normally addressed in an environmental impact assessment will be considered now?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, all projects are assessed in Alberta. The wonder valley project was reviewed by an independent approvals officer, as required by the law under EPEA. The review found wonder valley is using standard, proven power and water systems that have been safely used in Alberta for decades and determined that an environmental impact assessment is not required in this case. This is a piece of legislation that’s been around for 33 years, not just for our government but for the government when the NDP were in as well. If they had concerns with this, why didn’t they do something about it when they were there?

Dr. Elmeligi: Given that, Mr. Speaker, this development was proposed in December, there’s no way that a thorough environmental impact assessment has been completed in the last three and a half months, and we’re not going to sit here and pretend like that’s even a possibility; given that the chief of Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation said that his community wasn’t consulted and has now sent a cease-and-desist letter to the Premier – the First Nations have traplines in the area, rely on water from the Smoky River, and have already raised concerns about cumulative effects – given that the Premier told O’Leary that she could issue permits for this project and then she’s suddenly whisked away to Mar-a-Lago, were deals made by the Premier?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, like any other new business, a data centre may access water through municipalities’ existing water licences or apply for their own water licence. It is the responsibility of the project developer to select a location that can sustainably meet water needs through a new allocation, a licence transfer, or municipal supplies. If we left it up to the NDP, the reality is that nothing would be built in this province. That is why they’re called the No Development Party.

Provincial Fuel Tax

(continued)

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, gas prices have surged again, forcing Alberta families to cut groceries, workers to pay more to reach their

jobs, and small businesses to struggle daily. The Prime Minister delivered federal fuel tax relief, yet this government does nothing. Albertans cannot wait. Will the Premier suspend the provincial fuel tax immediately and give families the relief they need today?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we've been through the program that exists here in Alberta, why it's defensible and why we're sticking with it. It works for the province. When royalties come in at a stronger rate when oil is higher, relief is provided to Albertans. The next review period will be from May 16 to about June 16, and there'll be potential for it to be changed on July 1. We want to continue to educate Albertans on this program. We think it makes a lot of sense. I'm glad to see what the federal government has done, and they can do more. They still have GST on fuel. The clean fuel standards will take another 10 cents off.

Mr. Deol: Given that gas prices are driving Alberta's affordability crisis and hurting families and businesses province-wide and given that this government offers only excuses and delays by hiding behind reviews, why is this Premier refusing to act? Will she stop the excuses, drop the so-called review formula, and suspend the provincial fuel tax today?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's the second-lowest fuel tax in the country as is. No sales tax on fuel. You know, I think people appreciate that we have a program in place that makes sense, when oil is high for the province to provide relief to Albertans. I am appreciative of what the federal government did, and I would say that they could still do more. There are at least 10 cents in added costs due to the clean fuel policies embedded in fuel, and there's about 8 cents in GST. They certainly know how to tax.

Mr. Deol: Given that cutting the provincial fuel tax is one of the fastest ways to lower costs for families, workers, and businesses, given that Albertans are demanding relief right now, will the Premier finally listen and stop delaying and stop defending inaction? Will she suspend the provincial fuel tax immediately so people can afford to live, work, and run their businesses today?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier said earlier today, this is why we cut personal income tax for Albertans and did that in a way that would impact families to the tune of \$1,500 per family. We have a huge tax advantage in this province. We're the only province that continues to create jobs. I think Albertans are beginning to understand this program. Like I said, we just tabled a budget deficit of \$9.4 billion. I think Albertans expect us to be responsible and diligent with these programs, and we don't count our chickens before they're hatched. We'll see how the year plays out.

2:40

Highway 604

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, residents, municipalities, and agricultural producers in the Lacombe-Ponoka region continue to advocate for improving the long-term reliability of highway 604, a vital corridor for commuters, school buses, farmers, and truckers. Investing in our road network improves safety, economic activity, and the overall driving experience for rural Albertans. Can the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors outline what assessments have been completed and what actions the government is taking to improve this critical infrastructure?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for all her advocacy for this project and so many others. On this project specifically, a tender for the upgrading of the remaining section of highway west of range road 272 to highway 72 is being prepared for delivery for next year. Work will include paving the surface, obviously, and widening from eight meters to 10.3 meters to make sure that this very important road is safe for so many different people that use it, whether it's going out to the beautiful lake country or agriculture, oil and gas. So many that use this road will have a lot . . .

The Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the minister for that fantastic response. Given that highway 604 carries heavy agricultural and commercial traffic year-round, particularly during seeding and harvest, placing added strain on the roadway and raising safety considerations and further given that constituents in Lacombe-Ponoka have expressed interest in future plans, can the minister outline anticipated timelines for maintenance or upgrades and explain how these projects align with the ministry's broader capital planning priorities?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The upcoming work will remove all the road bans that are in that area to make it a market access road for people in that region. The right of way has been required for this project already, and it will have some more utility moves. This government is investing in rural Alberta. It was really interesting to see a report that came out from RBC this month that saw that from 2015 till 2024 \$1 trillion of investment actually fled Canada. That's because of the Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa. That's what happens when you have bad governments. When you have good governments like on this side, we're investing in this province to make . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister for that answer. Given that municipalities and counties have first-hand knowledge of traffic patterns, seasonal demands, and safety concerns along highway 604 and further given that incorporating this knowledge can improve infrastructure outcomes, can the minister describe how local input from the Lacombe-Ponoka region is integrated into technical assessments and engineering decisions and what steps are taken to ensure that this input meaningfully produces outcomes?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, Al-Terra engineering is a consultant on this project, so constituents, obviously, can be engaging with them. This project: we're hoping to make sure that it's on time and on budget.

When you look at the NDP, Mr. Speaker, last year they ran a \$300,000 deficit. They spent \$7.2 million. The NDP leader went from wasting taxpayers' money to wasting NDP donors' money. No wonder the NDP MLAs keep asking for an election. They know that at this rate their NDP leader is going to bankrupt the NDP before the election. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, order.

In 30 seconds we will continue with the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Crime Prevention

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, last week I heard in the Edmonton news of a repeat offender caught with an IED, or homemade bomb, in his vehicle. His previous rap sheet included a second-degree murder charge that was diluted down, and he was sentenced to only 499 days. Another charge for possessing a pipe bomb, and he was given 120 days. If you're a dangerous repeat offender, there should be no revolving door and no sentences given out in this country in days. If you murder innocent people, how about 120 years, not days? If you go on a killing spree or traffic people or rape kids, how about 499 years, not days?

Mr. Speaker, we've seen a disturbing trend of judges handing out lenient sentences to accused criminals because of concerns they would be deported from our country. These judges are just following weak Trudeau-era laws, but they shouldn't be protecting criminals trying to find loopholes to stay in a country that they've already forfeited the right to be in. If Prime Minister Carney is serious about bail reform, then he needs to scrap Bill C-75 and start prioritizing victims and protecting communities, not criminals.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a First Nation and I have a heavy heart for those lost in a world of addiction, and I believe in the Alberta recovery model and compassionate intervention. Family in residential schools, intergenerational trauma, and addictions are not talking points or something I read from a book or an online course. I've lived it most of my childhood, and quite honestly I'm surrounded by it still today. But all societies need laws and personal accountability, too. We need to restore balance between compassion for those who can be redeemed with serious punishment for those choosing to exploit our weak laws and prey on innocent people.

Murderers, rapists, and child molesters should never be released back into our communities. As a politician I don't believe in the death penalty, but as a father if something happened to my daughters, they wouldn't need to worry about prison sentences or being deported from our country because I'd probably take them to the train station myself.

Thank you.

Lethbridge's Electoral Boundaries

Member Miyashiro: Cheater: a person that acts dishonestly or acts unfaithfully to gain an unfair advantage or deceive others. Gerrymandering: the manipulation of electoral boundaries so as to favour one party or class. While the judge and chair of the boundaries commission appointed by the Premier performed like a judge, in a fair and unbiased way, it seems that two of the three UCP-selected members of the commission are cheaters engaging in gerrymandering.

Let's look at Lethbridge.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm going to let you start your statement over again without accusing somebody of breaking the law. You need to start over.

Member Miyashiro: Appears, sir.

The Speaker: No. You're going to start over. You're going to get the whole two minutes, but you're not going to accuse somebody of breaking the law when you're doing it.

Member Miyashiro: Okay. Can I leave the definitions in off the top? Thank you.

Okay. Cheater: a person that acts dishonestly or acts unfaithfully to gain an unfair advantage or deceive others. Gerrymandering: the manipulation of electoral boundaries as to favour one party or class. While the judge and chair of the boundaries commission appointed by the Premier performed like a judge, in a fair and unbiased way, it seems that two of the three UCP-selected members of the commission don't see it that way.

Let's look at Lethbridge. Our two ridings are both average for population size. Since it was a town, Lethbridge's provincial boundaries have only included the boundaries of Lethbridge, and the vast majority of Lethbridge residents who presented at the commission want these boundaries maintained. Elected representatives from rural municipalities spoke against the proposal for a four-seat Lethbridge configuration. They know that their concerns are distinct. Thankfully, in the preliminary report the commission unanimously respected Lethbridge and area residents and kept its two ridings with most of the same boundaries.

So what led me to my conclusions? Well, something changed after the interim report. The UCP's representatives, it seemed, had a job to try to water down Lethbridge voices and rural voices alike. They reversed course and proposed slicing Lethbridge up into four in the gerrymandered minority report. These proposals include extending one seat on the west of Lethbridge all the way to the B.C. border, one that would extend all the way to the Trans-Canada highway, and two that would carve up the city, include rural areas that go all the way to the U.S. border. Ridiculously, the undemocratic minority report also suggests splitting the MD of Taber and Lethbridge county across two ridings. But yeah, better representation. Right.

Lethbridge and the surrounding areas in southwest Alberta are communities of people that deserve proper representation, not being sliced up like a pizza to cheat to create a UCP electoral advantage. But our residents are very smart. They will not tolerate this kind of gerrymandering, and they will do something about it.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you. Proud to present this petition on biological female and cisgender only public facilities, urging the government to "acknowledge the erosion of dignity and privacy [for] biological females . . . of all ages in public-use changerooms and showering facilities in Alberta" and to introduce legislation that, if enacted, will require all public and university complexes in Alberta to provide biological women only changerooms and showering facilities.

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Tablings? Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling with the requisite copies of a table from StatsCan indicating that since the UCP came into government, we've lost 44,800 jobs in rural Alberta.

The Speaker: Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you. Two tablings, both in the *Calgary Herald*: one from April 10, Councillor [Clark] Aims to Reduce Friction between New Residential Construction and Existing Music Venues; and the second, my letter to the editor about that article today about housing, culture, that they can coexist together.

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, I have five copies of a letter of a physician and constituent who outlines her concerns about Bill 18.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of an article today that I read in both the *Journal* and in the *Herald*. The copy I'm tabling is from the *Journal*. 'Further Burden the Public System': AMA Raises Concerns with Alberta's Plan to Allow Patients to Privately Pay for Diagnostic Testing.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mrs. Sawhney, Minister of Indigenous Relations, pursuant to the Metis Settlements Act Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal 2025 annual report.

The Speaker: We are now at points of order. The first one was called at 2:07, I think by the government side if I have this correctly. At 2:03. Oh, pardon me. All right. There it is. Okay. My mistake. The hon. opposition whip.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The point of order at 2:03 was called by me. It was called on the minister of energy. The statement in question was – I'll just read the whole answer because it all plays into it. I don't have the benefit of the Blues; this is from my recollections.

I don't know if it's appropriate . . . As a former minister of the Crown, is it appropriate for him . . .

Pointing and referencing specifically the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

. . . to have six points of order called [on] . . . his behaviour? Is it appropriate for him to question the deputy minister . . . Is it appropriate for him to attack . . . the AER CEO? Is it appropriate for him to call [the DM] dishonest and not forthright? These are public servants . . . He should be ashamed of himself.

What I would start by saying is that specifically the language, "He should be ashamed of himself," but also the implication that the member doing his job is somehow attacking anyone or attacking their integrity or coming after the integrity of public servants is incredibly problematic. The purpose, I think, Mr. Speaker, of the rules in this place – and I will agree with you that many allegations fly back and forth, many people's feelings are hurt, and that is not the purpose of the rules. The purpose of the rules in this place is to ensure that we are able to do our jobs. In this instance, our jobs as the Official Opposition are to hold the government to account, to ensure that things like targets, that things like budget measures and documents and independent regulators are able to operate. I think that it is core to our function to be able to ask government officials about government business.

Mr. Speaker, the member's question to which the minister responded like that was entirely appropriate. He spoke about the Public Accounts Committee, that he questioned the CEO of the AER, that he questioned him about the Auditor General's recommendations, which is the point of the committee. He asked about targets and timelines and enforcement because those are all things that the Auditor General talked about in his report, and it is absolutely within our core function as the Official Opposition to ensure that those things are being enforced because that is the public interest. We may have different definitions of the public interest on

either side, but we have the right to ask about the public interest, and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the right to ask.

His question in the end, Mr. Speaker, was: "Does [the minister] believe it's acceptable for the CEO of the Alberta Energy Regulator to refuse to answer questions from a committee of this Legislature" about his work? That is a question that couldn't possibly be more in order. The member asked questions at the committee. The CEO refused to answer the questions at the committee about a matter that is of significant public interest, that has huge implications for public finances and for the environment that we are all collectively responsible for. For the minister to respond to a question like that by shaming the member is, I think, entirely inappropriate.

I will cite on this matter May 9, 2024. The Speaker, the previous Speaker, obviously, says:

I do have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs said the following: "I'm sure no one in this House supports it, but the only ones that have evoked that painful memory sit across the aisle. Shame on you."

I would reference the fact that the minister specifically when saying "shame on you" referenced the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and not a collective at all.

The challenge here is that I can confirm that the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs was in fact [providing] the member opposite, of which I believe an apology is a reasonable course.

I do think that this is an instance in which a government minister has taken the opportunity to make false allegations about our member, who has great respect for the role of civil servants and was attempting to hold those civil servants accountable for their role, which is, I would say, his core responsibility as a member of this Legislature. I think the remarks were entirely inappropriate and that the minister should apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to disagree with the member on this point of order. Now, for those who are watching at home and those who are in the Chamber who may not be aware of the interaction that the member is referring to, this is referring to an instance that happened in Public Accounts only a day or two ago, where the Ministry of Energy and Minerals department and AER were there. At that time the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar took it upon himself to not ask questions to the officials, not inquire about how they operate but to malign their character and to cast aspersions so far as to call them liars to their face multiple times.

Mr. Sabir: That didn't happen.

Mr. Schow: Now, Mr. Speaker, this is context that I'm giving you for this point of order to understand the frustration that we have on this side of the caucus. [interjections]

The Speaker: Excuse me. Hon. members, we're dealing with bad behaviour in the House. We don't need more crosstalk right now when we're trying to sort out what's already happened. I think we heard – I'm not saying completely silently, but we largely heard – the argument from the opposition. We'll now hear the argument from the government. Thank you.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, while the chair of that committee has noted that he was there in the committee, I'm also happy to note that the committee overruled him as chair because his ruling on this was completely out of order.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the reason I say all this is because, yes, His Majesty's Loyal Opposition has a role in this Chamber to present opposing views, but in this instance that is not what happened. In this instance the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was blatantly

disrespectful to department, government officials. That is completely out of line. It has been out of line for a long time, but it is par for the course. It is not the first time that that member has been accused of such behaviour. It is despicable.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what I'm going to say is that I do not believe that saying "shame on that member" is out of order. I will echo the comments of the Minister of Energy and Minerals, but also say shame on that member for his conduct in this Chamber and in committees as he pretends to represent his constituents honourably. Mr. Speaker, this is not a point of order. The member deserves that kind of language because the member has conducted himself in a manner that is not becoming of a member of good standing in the Chamber. Shame on the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

3:00

The Speaker: Do you have something new and brief?

Mr. Sabir: Yes.

The Speaker: Make it new, please. Make it brief, please.

Mr. Sabir: I think I will point out that the question – arguing a point of order is not an opportunity to say things that you cannot otherwise say, and the Government House Leader's behaviour was, I guess, shameful, the language he was using. He was extending debate: what happened at Public Accounts. The point here is that the minister of energy pointed at another member that he should be ashamed of himself. That is ruled out of order by Speaker Cooper on May 9. That has also been ruled out and cautioned by you many times in this House. I think what the Government House Leader said is not an appropriate way to deal with points of order, and I ask you to also kind of look at that, please.

The Speaker: Okay. First of all, I'll say that it must've been quite a meeting in committee because the debate I heard from the opposition and the debate I heard from the government today both seemed to centre on what happened in a committee that I wasn't at and not necessarily what happened in the House today. It was centred on remarks about what happened in the committee.

So here's what the Blues say. From the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar:

Instead of answering, he refused to provide details and ignored the questions. To the minister: does he believe it's acceptable for the CEO of... Alberta... Regulator to refuse to answer questions from a committee of the Legislature?

From the minister:

Is it appropriate for him to have six points of order called upon him and his behaviour? Is it appropriate for him to question the deputy minister's attachment to the public interest? Is it appropriate for him to attack the integrity of the AER CEO? Is it appropriate for him to call the deputy minister and the CEO dishonest and not forthright? These are public servants that work for... Alberta. He should be ashamed of himself. They do good work.

Sure, there was quite a bit here to get offended about. It is, in my opinion, a matter of debate. I don't preside over the committee meetings. I'm guessing there was probably some – I don't get to do that, but just to give myself some reference, I'll probably review the *Hansard* from the meeting. But as of today this is a matter of debate.

This item is dealt with, and we'll move on to point of order 2.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, 13(2).

The Speaker: Yeah.

Point of Clarification

Mr. Sabir: I would like to understand the ruling. It's a matter of debate what happened at the committee, but pointing on other members that he should be ashamed of himself: is that okay to do?

The Speaker: Really, the remarks, in my view, after reading that, were about – the comment about being ashamed was about the remarks said here, so anyways. Hon. member, you don't have to like my answer, but you have it.

Point of order 2 at 2:07, called by the government side.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief on this because it's a pretty short quote. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time of 2:06 noted, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was responding from a sedentary position, in response to your ruling asking for order, and saying, quote: oh, eff off. Of course, I wouldn't use a direct quote because that'd be unparliamentary, but as I just noted in my last remarks, this seems to be commonplace, to use this kind of language and behaviour in this Chamber, for the member and, I believe, a point of order. I don't know if the ambient mics caught it, but I sure hope they did because I would love this to be called a point of order, and I'd love to hear an apology from that member.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear, and I can't take the Government House Leader on his word, so I will leave it in your hands.

The Speaker: Okay. Just let me look. I'm looking at the Blues. There's nothing in the Blues of the nature reported here. I could tell all hon. members here that I didn't hear anything of that nature, nor did I see any hand gestures of any kind, but generally though not...

Mr. Schow: He's here. Ask him. Ask him.

The Speaker: I'll do this. Thank you.

I generally try to – although I won't ever claim I'm a hundred per cent good at this – look at the person speaking, but there are a lot of other things I have to do here, so I can't always do that. I was not looking at the person who was previously speaking, so unless the hon. member volunteers that these things were said or done, there is no point of order. I don't see any admission or volunteering of that, so the matter is dealt with and concluded. I think we can all agree that if those words were said and those motions were done, it would be radically out of hand and a point of order, but I just don't have any evidence, people.

That takes us to point of order 3 at 2:26, yes?

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Nixon: Just to confirm, Mr. Speaker, because there's a lot going on there, that's the one that I called against the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane at that time? Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). During the question being asked by, again, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane with the hon. Government House Leader, when the Government House Leader was answering, from a stationary position sitting down the hon. member heckled to him: no, that's because you broke the law. On a day where you multiple times have had to caution the Chamber on accusing people from outside the

Chamber of breaking the law, certainly what we do know for sure is that you cannot accuse another member in this Chamber of breaking the law. That hon. member knows that. He's a learned member of this place, and I hope he will just stand and withdraw and apologize.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, you know, I stepped down as minister because of this government's actions and lack of action around procurement. Now, the minister of jobs and economy stated that I was removed because: he broke his oath. Now, this minister can't help himself but make things personal, and that's just it. We've seen it on display here this afternoon. I don't have the benefit of the Blues here, but I do not believe that I said anything that constituted a point of order. I'll leave it in your capable hands.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, I do have the Blues, and this is what they say. Hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, it says here that you said, "We'll see what happens, when you broke the law." I think you and I can both agree that that's a clear point of order, and I will ask you to stand up and apologize and withdraw that remark.

Mr. Guthrie: Apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: That's dealt with.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 27

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 27, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This is a practical bill that delivers on the commitments we made in Budget 2026. It's no secret we're facing a tough year ahead. Families feel it, communities feel it, and government has a responsibility to respond with clear priorities and a steady hand. That's exactly what this bill does. It focuses on what matters most: a stronger auto insurance system that puts care first, focused supports for seniors who need it most, and making sure Alberta stays competitive for investment growth and innovation.

Madam Speaker, I'll start with auto insurance. We're modernizing the Automobile Insurance Act to support a care-first model, one built around people. These amendments include technical changes to ensure the new care-first system will work as intended once implemented in 2027. We're changing the priority of payment so that an injured person gets help fast using their trusted insurance provider. That means more Albertans get access to enhanced benefits more quickly and without unnecessary disputes. We also recognize that no two injuries are the same, so we're providing more flexibility to cover necessary treatment and services even if they're not explicitly listed in the legislation. That's practical, and it puts care first. These changes also clarify roles, strengthen oversight, and ensure the system operates as designed.

3:10

If passed, the Insurance Act amendments in Bill 27 further build on that foundation. They improve clarity, strengthen transparency, and modernize oversight. We are reinforcing the authority of councils and the Auto Insurance Rate Board, improving consistency

in public information, and aligning governance with better practices to better serve Alberta drivers. The goal is simple: better, faster, more reliable care for those injured in collisions, a more stable insurance market, and greater confidence for Albertans. When the system is stable, Alberta's drivers benefit with more choice, stronger competition, and less risk of sudden premium spikes.

Madam Speaker, we're also taking action to ensure senior supports remain sustainable. Today about 865,000 seniors call Alberta home. By 2035 that number will grow to 1 million, and with that growth brings responsibility. We need to make sure programs are there for those who rely on them not just today but long into the future.

This bill ensures senior supports remain targeted and sustainable. The proposed amendments would enact the 9 per cent threshold adjustment announced in Budget 2026 for nondeductible income under the seniors' low-income thresholds. This is about responsible fiscal management. It's about focusing support on those who need it most, and it's about protecting these programs for the long term. If passed, these changes would take effect July 1, 2026.

Finally, Madam Speaker, this bill strengthens Alberta's position in a highly competitive global economy. Alberta is competing every day for investment, for talent, and for the companies that will shape our future. The data is clear. Alberta-based technology companies face a growing shortage of scale-up capital. This legislation enables Alberta Enterprise Corporation and Alberta Innovates to act as minority co-investors alongside trusted private-sector partners. That means sharing risk, attracting more capital, and unlocking larger deals for higher potential Alberta companies.

These changes ensure Alberta can compete on equal footing across Canada but also around the world, and we're doing it responsibly through transparent, merit-based criteria that protect the public interest. This is about keeping Alberta innovation here at home and delivering long-term economic returns for Albertans.

Madam Speaker, Bill 27 is focused, practical, and necessary. It strengthens our auto insurance system, it maintains sustainable supports for seniors, and it positions Alberta for growth. These changes are the right steps forward to keep our province's legislation strong, modernized, and ready to face a challenging year ahead.

With that, I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 27. Thank you.

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

Member Ellingson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Those were indeed brief remarks from the minister regarding Bill 27. There are some elements of this bill that I think deserve a little bit more time and conversation and debate, so I appreciate being able to spend some time today in discussing Bill 27, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. There are, as the minister did tell us, changes to a few different acts here. We have changes to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation Act, we have changes to the Alberta Research and Innovation Act, we have changes to the Seniors Benefit Act, we have changes to the Automobile Insurance Act, and we have changes to the Insurance Act.

I will start out to say, as I have said before, Madam Speaker, that sometimes it's challenging, then, when it comes to voting on a bill. It becomes difficult when you have, you know, elements of the bill that are in no way related to one another and where some elements may be elements where in the opposition we're going to say, "You know what? We're okay with that" and other elements of the bill where we're going to pretty clearly stand up and say: no, we're not okay with that.

First of all, Madam Speaker, I would like to say that it's just the general nature that it is very challenging when it comes to debate and voting on a bill that makes changes to five different pieces of legislation that are not in any way related to one another, so I'll just put that out there.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to talk about two things up front that are near and dear to my heart that are maybe not the parts of the bill that most people are going to spend some time on. I'll just mention those. First of all, the changes to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation Act. I'd like to say, as I said yesterday, you know, that sometimes maybe it's a surprise to members of the government, but there are things that pop up in their bills that we in the opposition actually support. Don't get this confused that we're supporting the entire bill.

The changes to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation Act: as I stand here, I am okay with the changes around investments made by the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. I'm okay with investments in taking equity in companies, as the minister said. I'm very well aware that tech companies in Alberta struggle to get access to capital, so I do respect that the government is making some moves with Crown corporations that we have under the direction of the government, to make some changes in directives for those Crown corporations to be helping tech companies gain access to capital.

There is another element in changes to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation Act that I do want to point out, that was not there before. The original act did not include a clause around directives. This government did find it important to make sure that they included a clause around directives to say that the minister may issue directives that must be followed. I'm not necessarily going to be okay with including language in an act that provides the minister with more specific direction around a Crown corporation. I believe that a Crown corporation should be functioning somewhat autonomously. They should be given a mandate, and they should be trusted to deliver on that mandate.

This particularly becomes sensitive to me after we sat here in this Chamber debating bills like the Provincial Priorities Act, where we have already seen from this government their willingness to introduce legislation and use that legislation to directly intervene in the business of agencies, corporations that are, you know, as they would also use the language, "creatures of the government," including municipalities. For me, this is a bit of a red flag, and I'd like to just put that out there on the record.

Madam Speaker, I'd also like to speak a little bit about the Alberta Research and Innovation Act. Again, there are elements of this bill and the amendments that I agree with. I agree that, you know, we should be pursuing discovery, commercialization, and, as I said previously, access to growth capital. I agree with additional investment clauses and investments in companies through the Alberta Research and Innovation Act. This is the act that governs the Crown corporation that we know as Alberta Innovates.

Again, the government has made a point here of making amendments to reinforce and strengthen the directive nature of the minister and government in how the Crown corporation would function. The Crown corporation, as I said, that this act governs is Alberta Innovates. While the act did previously have clauses with respect to issuing directives and activities aligning with government priorities, the amendments now double down on that and include three more references to statements that state that the actions would "align with Government priorities." It extends definitions and instances where the corporation could be directed by government.

Again I'll say that for me this is a yellow flag. Knowing that we have a government that has already proven that they are very willing to weigh in and impose their ideology and their choices and their directions on a Crown corporation, this is a yellow flag. Will

this be language that will later be used for the minister or through the government and other actions to be determining where funds go with respect to research and commercialization? Is this opening a window that allows the government to decide, you know, where best those opportunities for commercialization lie when, in fact, we should be relying on that Crown corp and their stakeholders and the companies that they work with to make those determinations? It shouldn't be the determination of the minister or people who work in the minister's office. It should be that Crown corp that we have created with the mandate to do that work, Madam Speaker.

3:20

Now, I will also take a moment, Madam Speaker, to talk about Bill 27 and the Seniors Benefit Act. While it's only 10 pages out of the 122 pages of this bill, it might be the most egregious section and the section that we might want to pay the most attention to because what's included here, what the minister just referred to is that senior supports need to remain sustainable. The minister has referred to, you know, the challenges that the government faces in trying to find a path to these deficits that we have really only seen once before and certainly not seen when we have \$13 billion budgeted for non resource renewable revenue.

Madam Speaker, it is not the right decision for the minister or for the government to take to balance the budget on the backs of seniors who are living in poverty or close to poverty. I wholly appreciate that things need to be seen as sustainable and that the government needs to think about how we're taking care of Albertans, but it is not the right path to take money from seniors who barely have enough money to live from one day to the next to balance the budget or to find a path to fiscal sustainability.

Madam Speaker, it appears that the government has missed the memo that Albertans are going through an affordability crisis. Seniors are living through an affordability crisis. Alberta has the highest rate of people in the country saying that they are close to not being able to pay their basic bills. This government's appalling lack of interest in paying attention to the affordability crisis: we can see that in their reluctance to move on the fuel tax. We can see that in their persistence in this bill to keep pursuing a no-fault insurance plan when we know it's not going to save Albertans money. Their appalling lack of interest is seen here in enacting a budget decision to reduce the income threshold for seniors living on benefits.

This bill cuts that threshold by 9 per cent. Seniors who are already living on low income are going to be losing benefits, and this extends to special needs assistance for seniors, seniors home adaptation programs, repair program thresholds for seniors who are still living in their home. Madam Speaker, I'll point out that this government has already increased the amount of copay for prescription medications for seniors, and now we're choosing to go after seniors again, to make life for seniors more difficult in order to find a path for fiscal sustainability. It's just not right.

Why is this government making life more difficult for low-income seniors? Why doesn't this government understand that seniors are better off if they can age in place? This bill makes that more difficult. Why can't this government understand that fiscally the government is better off if seniors can age in place and this bill is making it more difficult for them to do so? If they understand that, they wouldn't be changing the threshold for seniors' benefits, for home adaptation programs, or for repairs to homes for low-income seniors. Madam Speaker, that threshold is now \$32,690, barely more than a person who is working on minimum wage, but this government has been pretty clear in saying that \$15 an hour is enough for working Albertans to live. It is not enough for working Albertans, and it is not enough for low-income seniors. We should

not be supporting it. We didn't support it in the budget, and we are not going to support it here.

Now, Madam Speaker, I still have some time to speak, so I'll now take some time to talk about the 112 pages in this piece of legislation that are about auto insurance and insurance. We already know that the plan for no-fault insurance isn't helping Albertans. We already know that this government is not focused on affordability and trying to make insurance more affordable for Albertans. If they were, they wouldn't have allowed insurers to increase premiums for good drivers by 15 per cent in just the last two years. That 15 per cent equates to hundreds of dollars a year for Albertans, Albertans that are now struggling to fill those cars and trucks with gas given this government's refusal to remove the fuel tax.

Let's not forget, Madam Speaker, that this government also permitted insurance companies to move the goalpost on the determination of whether or not a driver was a good driver. We have been hearing from Albertans that since those changes were made, they're already seeing changes that for what before would have been an infraction that did not move them out of good-driver status, now is moving them out of good-driver status.

Insurers are going to look for any way to make more money. That's what private corporations do. It is not in their mandate to take care of Albertans. It is in their mandate to deliver profits to shareholders, and when they're given the ability to increase those profits for shareholders, they take advantage of it, as they have taken advantage of the ability to move drivers out of being good drivers and making them pay more for their premiums.

If we were really concerned, Madam Speaker, about how no-fault is going to deliver better prices for Albertans, then maybe we would have heard some language from the minister saying: on January 1, 2027, auto insurers are going to reduce premiums by 5 per cent. But that's not what we're hearing. What we're hearing is that maybe we'll see some reductions of dollar amount this, dollar amount that, which has changed and been a moving target and is getting smaller by the day. What we do see in this – when we thought that no-fault was going to be introduced on January 1, this bill has actually changed that language. It has changed that language from January 1 to the date this section comes into force. So now we don't even know when no-fault is going to come into play. It would be nice if Albertans could have some certainty around that, but I guess we're taking that away.

That raises the question, Madam Speaker: are we off track? Are we behind schedule? Are we unable to come to agreement around the regulations so we can't make it come into play on January 1? What's going on behind the scenes that we can no longer meet a January 1 deadline? What is the government's plan later, when insurance companies request an increase for good drivers instead of a decrease? Are the minister and the AIRB going to approve that increase? If he does, I think there'll be something that has to be – he'll have to stand for the questions that are going to come from this House and from Albertans, when he's been promising a reduction.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to refer to some additional notes. We know of some other problems with no-fault. I'm going to refer to an op-ed that was published by the *Edmonton Journal* on April 8 entitled Opinion: Care-first Auto Insurance the Worst Possible Option for Alberta Drivers. I'm going to talk a little bit about how the existing insurance system already has care-first provisions in place. We didn't need to change the Auto Insurance Act and make these changes for, quote, unquote, care-first, which already exists. Madam Speaker, the existing insurance allows Albertans to go after and get fair compensation from negligent motorists, and it's the no-

fault insurance and the changes that are being pushed forward in Bill 27 that take that away.

3:30

Madam Speaker, Albertans needed that because – let's be honest with one another – the provisions that were already there weren't being delivered by insurance companies. They were cutting people off before they got their full benefits, and Albertans had to fight for the benefits that they were entitled to in their insurance. Insurance companies have already proven how they behave, and there's nothing in this bill or previous bills around no-fault that are going to create any increase in assurance that Albertans can trust an insurance company.

What we also know is that now we've taken away the right to go after a motorist that caused the injury. There are a number of things that are still up in the air. There are going to be third-party independent medical assessors. Bill 27 makes it pretty clear how insurers can access those third-party assessors when they think that people are getting too many benefits, but it doesn't really make it clear how the injured can access third-party assessors when they think their benefits don't go far enough. This is a very one-sided piece of legislation, and the whole approach is pretty one sided, Madam Speaker.

We know that there's going to be a tribunal, but it's also not clear who's going to be on the tribunal and how an Albertan or an injured party brings their case to the tribunal. I also want to say that it's not clear how they're going to have representation when they go to a tribunal or how they're going to pay for representation. Madam Speaker, I think, you know, I'm going to give a lot of respect to Albertans in their ability to cover their case and talk about their rights to be made whole after being injured, but it's a lot for them to ask. This is not the first piece of legislation that's amending the Auto Insurance Act. It's a lot to ask for them to read and interpret this to take their case to a tribunal, and we don't even know if that tribunal is going to have the resources to hear all of the cases that are come before them.

Madam Speaker, Bill 27 is not a bill that we can support. Thank you for the time to share my thoughts on where I thought that there were good things but also what we cannot accept.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my honour to speak to Bill 27, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, which amends a few financial statutes, mostly the Automobile Insurance Act. As my learned colleague the Member for Calgary-Foothills has pointed out, there's some stuff that we like about this bill. I'm going to focus a little bit on some of the other stuff, especially the de facto cuts to seniors' benefits.

I was recently at a drugstore getting a prescription filled and there was interested by clearly a senior citizen who was at the pharmacist counter. Usually I keep my distance because this is a private conversation, but the voices got raised where the senior was apparently seeing for the first time what her new monthly prescription drug cost was going to be. The one thing that I remember is this person saying: this government doesn't care about me.

I think that in thinking and defining sustainability how the minister has, he's forgotten the people. When we think about seniors' support and we think about, "Yes, of course, we want benefits to go to those who need them," I would suggest that the benefits going to seniors making sub \$30,000 a year are probably one of the last things that we should touch if we are actually a compassionate society.

It's especially galling when this government has blown \$100 million on a failed lab privatization scheme, when this government has blown \$70 million on Turkish Tylenol, when the Turkish Tylenol guy is still holding \$49 million of that money to walk around with. I think that the people of Alberta should be asking: why don't you get that money back before hitting me? Why don't you get back that \$49 million before raising my property taxes? Why don't you get back that \$49 million before raising my prescription drug prices? Why don't you get that money back before cutting my benefits? Why didn't you get that money back? Why don't you get it back now? I think it's a fair question. I'm really interested in hearing some of the minister's answers in bill debate.

What this government is doing to seniors who are on the line is unconscionable. It is wrong. More importantly, in a democracy it is not what they voted for. Madam Speaker, I would respectfully submit that the government re-evaluate its definition of fiscal sustainability and look at all the little pots of money that are going to all of the friends of this government and decide if that isn't a place to get some money back before digging the people of Alberta.

Which brings us to auto insurance. Most of this bill is about auto insurance. I'm looking at page 8 now, and this is what really interested me right off the hop because over and over again this government's talking point around how it's changing auto insurance is: "Oh, no. This isn't no-fault insurance. Oh, my goodness. How silly to call it no-fault. This is care first because we care." Let's read clause 2 of the Automobile Insurance Act amendment.

(2) Section 1 is amended

(a) in clause (a) by striking out "caused by..." and substituting "arising from..."

Yeah, this no-fault insurance scheme that is not actually no-fault is actually taking out any reference to accidents that are actually caused by people. It's as though nothing causes accidents anymore. They just arise out of a particular set of circumstances. It's not because somebody was ripping through a school zone. It's not because somebody was on the cellphone when they shouldn't have been. It's not because somebody ran a stop sign. It's not because a driver ran over a kid in a crosswalk. No, no, no. That was nobody's fault. It's nobody's fault anymore.

You know, its core legal principle is an absolutely core legal principle that if somebody hurts you, they're responsible to make it right. It's a legal principle that has existed longer than this institution has existed. It's existed longer than Canada has been a country. It's existed before the Magna Carta in 1215. If somebody hurts you, they're responsible to make it right. That's where the word "tort" comes from. It's an old, old, ancient, ancient word. By taking away the right to force the person, to legally require the person who hurt you to make it right, we are indeed joining a number of other Canadian provinces, but we are exposing injured people to immense pain and suffering.

3:40

We often think about Alberta as being special and unique within Confederation, and that is true. We value freedom. I believe that it is correct that we value freedom more than any other province in Canada. I'm proud to be an Albertan because we value freedom, because freedom is important. With freedom comes responsibility. With the freedom to drive means the responsibility to care for the people who you hurt, and this government taking away that responsibility – in fact, not being the last province in Canada to do that. Oh, no, no, no. We're just joining the herd, joining the rest of Canada in slowly making this a province where auto insurance injuries and death are socialized. I don't think that's particularly conservative. I don't think that that's what the people of Alberta

voted for. I don't think the people of Alberta want this. I think what the people of Alberta want is to have lower insurance costs while making sure that those who are hurt are taken care of.

Let's talk about affordability. It's not clear that this insurance act does anything for affordability. Try as I might, through the 112 pages of this legislation I could not find anything about: yeah, this is where your costs are going to go down. Now, the auto insurance companies have often maintained that lawyers cost a lot of money and cost the insurance system a lot in dead-weight costs, to which – that is fair. Legal costs are expensive. But I've always asked the auto insurance companies: "Well, couldn't you put the trial lawyers out of business simply by paying claims without having them forced to get a lawyer? Wouldn't that work? If you hate the lawyers so much, why don't you just pay claims?" You know, I have not actually been able to get a straight answer to that. I don't know. Maybe the minister will stand up and tell me why that's a stupid question, but I just don't think that that's a stupid question.

This bill and this auto insurance scheme that the government is sending us down is – make no mistake – an experiment. It is an experiment in all of North America around having a privately delivered no-fault system. There is a reason why no-fault systems have tended to public insurance, and there's a reason why tort systems have tended towards private, and the reason is very clear. Public insurance systems are very bad at underwriting. They're very bad at measuring risk. Private insurance systems are good at profitability, absolutely, but secondly, private insurance companies are good at assessing and modelling risk, at making people who are higher risk pay more money.

Now, when you have a privately operated no-fault insurance system, it means that your costs of paying claims go down a lot. The premiums might go up or down; we don't know. The delta, the difference between the two, between costs and revenues, goes up. That's profit. The reason why privately delivered no-fault insurance systems don't exist is because they create massive insurance company profitability. That insurance company profitability is paid for by insurance premium payers, meaning the people of Alberta. Basically, what this system does is that it lowers insurance company costs, it changes their revenues potentially up or down – we don't know – but it certainly improves their profitability. I kind of refer to it as the shrinkflation insurance plan, where what you pay for is less. There's no guarantee that rates are going to go down.

To the people of Alberta, to all the millions who are watching bill debate right now, Madam Speaker, I just want to say that, for your affordability challenges, I get it. I talk to so many Albertans every day. I talk to so many of your friends who are struggling under high cost of groceries, high cost of medicines, costs that continue to go up for copays, costs that are now going to keep going up for labs and for imaging that you're going to be forced to pay more for, and your cost of insurance.

Now, Madam Speaker, let me just pull up, if I may. In 2019 the average vehicle written premium according to a report written by Oliver Wyman, which is a government report, was \$1,348. The last written premium amount is \$1,817. It's a \$500 increase since 2019. Insurance and auto insurance costs are just one more thing that have gone up for the people of Alberta. It's just one more thing making life less affordable. It's just one more thing that's making life worse. Frankly, I think the people of Alberta have had enough. I think it's time. Certainly, you know, one thing I do applaud the Finance minister for is taking a run at insurance, trying to figure out how to make its cost lower, but oh, my goodness, the mistakes that he has made along the way. The mistakes that he has made. This isn't going to reduce anyone's costs. This is going to reduce people's benefits.

In the meantime you have to be a good driver in order to have any sort of stability in your rate. If you're a good driver over the last two years, congratulations; your rate went up only by 15 per cent. Good driver: someone who didn't buy a new car. Good driver: somebody whose kid didn't turn 16. Good driver: somebody who is never in a fender-bender.

The other thing that I'm just blown away by is that there were supposed to be regulations published in October – and I believe that that did happen – and now we've got another 112 pages because the government can't bother to do the work to make sure that the initial enabling legislation allows the regulators to do what they want, to do what they need to do in order to get a proper insurance system. Is that why . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that would like to join this debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Appreciate the opportunity to speak this afternoon about Bill 27, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, which, of course, is follow-up legislation to the government's budget, an implementation act of things promised in the budget. Doesn't make them any kinder, but it is the government following through on what their proposals were in the budget. Of course, Albertans are no more pleased with them now than they were when they first saw them in the initial budget.

The Financial Statutes Amendment Act is kind of an omnibus bill that amends five different pieces of legislation and, as my colleague from Calgary-Foothills alluded to, makes it somewhat difficult to debate the bill in its entirety because there may be some elements that are worth while and of support; however, the bill on balance will receive our opposition, Madam Speaker. The particular problem that I have with this piece of legislation is the extra costs and extra burdens that seniors are being forced to carry as a result of the imposition of a reduction of the income threshold by 9 per cent for seniors to access programs under the seniors' benefit.

3:50

It was a real slap in the face, Madam Speaker, to seniors when they realized that they would no longer qualify if they were above a certain income level, and that is a hardship that's hard to swallow. Practically impossible to imagine an individual who had worked all their life in this province and had been eligible for the Alberta seniors' program for a number of years, was enjoying the benefits that they felt that they deserved under the program, and all of a sudden had the rug pulled out from underneath them by the Finance minister and this UCP government, who determined that in order to save some money in their budget, they would do it by harming the seniors they supposedly take such good care of, in their view.

One wonders indeed how much more damage seniors are going to be willing to take from this government in terms of increased cost. The costs that are borne by seniors in many, many programs have gone up, and by definition most seniors are living on a fixed income and, in fact, a dwindling income when inflation is taken into account, Madam Speaker.

One would have thought that this Finance minister, this government would not see fit to on the backs of the seniors try to minimize their budget deficit. Now, they've ended up with a massive budget deficit in the middle of a boom. They've managed to waste that and ended up with a \$9.4 billion deficit, and the Finance minister tries to explain that away and rationalize it. Well, seniors are educating themselves to the need for reasonableness. I don't think seniors are taking a look at it this way, Madam Speaker.

Seniors are super concerned that they are being targeted for the cuts that the government wants to make to minimize its budget.

Their priorities are certainly not those of Alberta seniors, who are heralded time and again in this Legislature as being the foundation of our province, the pillars of our communities, the people who made this province into what it is, yet now in their retirement years we're doing things like what this bill, Bill 27, does. It cuts the benefit threshold to Alberta seniors, which has a result of putting thousands of seniors into financial hardship.

On top of that, a program that I was involved in putting together along with the then minister of housing and seniors from Edmonton-Riverview, the SHARP program, the seniors home adaptation and repair program, was designed to help seniors stay in their own homes by allowing them to access the low-interest loans guaranteed by the provincial government to do home repairs and renovations to accommodate the needs that they found in their senior years to get around their own home and stay in their home longer, whether it was putting in a stair chair or a ramp or some other type of renovation to a bathroom to make their home more accessible so they could stay in their own home.

Yet now what's happening, with this piece of legislation once again, Madam Speaker, is that that program is being culled back. The eligibility for it is something that people, a certain segment of the population, could count upon if they had the equity in their home to call upon and to borrow against, yet this portion of the legislation now changes the grant program. That was a program that was most appealing to those who really didn't have the equity in their home. It was a grant that didn't rely upon a person having equity. That's been clawed back and reduced, minimizing the opportunity for many seniors to actually stay in their own home, which has been shown time and time again to be not only beneficial for seniors' health but, really, beneficial and economic for the provincial government. It costs way more to have somebody in long-term care, away from their own home than it does to support a senior in their own home for the long term.

Short-sighted actions by the government in this piece of legislation are repeated over and over again when it comes to seniors' care and cuts to seniors. I'm really disappointed with the decision by the Finance minister to decide that seniors are not worthy of the respect that we claim to give them in the House all the time, and they remain the target of this government. I think those watching at home or those that are seeing their Alberta seniors' benefit statements come in the mail or those that are actually just cut right off from it are more than aghast and super dissatisfied. I know that when I talk to folks at the doorstep who are seniors, they are in disbelief that this is happening to them. They can't understand why government will have them targeted for these cuts when in fact they rightfully, I think, believed that the Alberta seniors' benefit was something they could rely upon and not have removed from them.

You know, reductions in benefits are one thing, Madam Speaker, but to have somebody declared ineligible and no longer able to receive the benefit is a significant blow that will put some seniors in a position of potentially losing their homes or having to change where they live, relying more on family, if the family has a capacity to do that. I believe the minister and the government probably knew this when this legislation was being considered, but they went ahead with it anyways and plowed ahead, against the advice of seniors organizations as well, who told them that this would be harmful to seniors and would put many, many thousands of Albertan seniors in a very difficult financial position. You know, costs are going up, medication costs are going up, prescription costs are going up. Seniors are already having a difficult decision point to make: whether they can afford food or paying rent. It's seriously insulting to Alberta seniors, and I hear that regularly on the doorstep.

On top of that, Madam Speaker, the UCP has allowed insurance rates to get out of control for many years, after they removed the rate cap that the NDP government brought in when we were in power. Now they're trying to clean up the mess that they've created. We know how expensive it's become for people who want to try to insure their car or renew their insurance or get their first insurance policy to drive their vehicle. It's more than a shock; people think there's a mistake when they look at their invoices that come in. It's unbelievable how high some of the insurance premiums are. It makes it impossible for people to drive a car and young people, in particular, who would like to get their first job. Many times it depends upon being able to drive a car. But the insurance premiums are just out of this world and it's not even in the realm of possibility for them to drive a car, so it limits their employment possibility drastically.

That's something, Madam Speaker, that this legislation probably contemplated when it was being considered, but once again the government decided to simply plow ahead and disregard the pleas of the young people who are looking to try to insure a vehicle and join the economy by getting their first job, which may be a driving job in many cases. I know that many of my early jobs were driving jobs. Whether it was a DATS bus or a taxi cab or a milk truck or a garbage truck, it was all driving jobs. That's a door that is shut by the high insurance costs of the UCP. The individuals who face these high insurance costs often don't even get a driver's licence, and that forces them into employment that is lower pay.

Now, following the removal of the cap, of course insurance premiums skyrocketed. In January 2023 the UCP enacted a rate pause, but in November 2023 they announced an end to the rate pause and instead shifted to a good-driver rate cap, quote, unquote, as a short-term solution in 2024.

4:00

Now, at the same time they commissioned a study exploring scenarios for long-term reforms in the auto insurance system, and the final report came out in April 2024. Based on that report, what the UCP has settled on is a no-fault private delivery model, which is something new, I would say more than relatively untested, and it's a hybrid model that remains to be seen whether or not it's actually going to work. I think it's a gamble that's being taken with the whole insurance industry, and because of its newness and its untested model, I think that there's a probability that it may fail, and it could be a debacle that we would wish that we didn't get into by going this hybrid route.

Now, originally the UCP announced their plan for auto insurance changes in the fall of 2024, and they also at that time introduced the Alberta's good-driver rate cap. The change was effective as of January 2025, but in 2026 in January they maintained the 7.5 per cent cap on good drivers. Three auto insurance companies, Madam Speaker – three auto insurance providers – have already pulled out of the province citing profitability as the issue. It's probable and it's feared that the main driver of these insurance companies leaving is the system overhaul, that more insurance companies would leave. That's something that is probable because of the remarks made by anybody who's been in the insurance industry and listening to the commentary. The indications are that there's a fear that the system will actually fail.

Just to backtrack a little bit on to seniors because, of course, the high insurance rates are something, Madam Speaker, which affect seniors pretty drastically as well as new drivers. The cuts to the seniors' program are expected to save the government about \$23 million. We're looking at a \$9.4 billion deficit, and \$31 million would be saved in '27-28 and beyond. So in this whole scheme of things, the government is looking to save \$25 million to \$30 million

on the backs of seniors. Will it have a huge effect on the operation of this provincial government in their budgetary considerations? Not a lot, but it sure has an effect in the lives of those seniors.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Dach: I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 23 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 23, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. A quote from the Minister of Justice regarding Bill 23: at the same time we continue to refine our democratic process legislation to protect the integrity of our elections and ensure Albertans can have full confidence in our democracy. You know, absolutely it is the job of government to build trust in our democratic institutions. Unfortunately, this government by its words and its actions is repeatedly doing exactly the opposite. What we have seen from this government and, in my opinion, the legislation that's been repeatedly brought forward from this minister is a government that is in fact continuing to undermine confidence in our democracy, a government that continually attacks, undermines, and disrespects our public institutions and their independence.

There are numerous examples, Madam Chair. Let's talk about judges in the province of Alberta, the judiciary, and how many times we've heard this Premier speak against them, others in that caucus speaking against judges simply because they're not elected. They're appointed, in fact, by this government themselves, but they regularly disparage the work of those judges, question their rulings, because they don't like which direction they might happen to go and because they are unable to, as the Premier has mused – she would like to direct judges. When the Premier herself goes on the record railing about unelected judges and a lack of accountability in the judiciary, who should they be accountable to? The Premier? When she does that, she is undermining faith in our democracy, in our public institutions.

We have heard members of this government caucus, Madam Chair, deride and disparage, disrespect officers of the Legislature. I've watched multiple times how these members berated the Auditor General, how they have treated the Information and Privacy Commissioner. How they have acted towards the CEO, the Chief Electoral Officer, both in questioning him at committee and undermining his work, stripping power from him to consolidate it in the minister's office in the hands of government. That is disrespect and that tells Albertans that this government does not trust public institutions and therefore undermines Albertans' trust in their democracy and their institutions.

Public boards and agencies, Madam Chair. We had quite a robust discussion today during question period . . . [interjections] Now, the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is complaining. He's saying

things that our members have said. No, I'm not going to accept an intervention from that member. He's welcome to rise and debate later if he wishes.

The fact is, Madam Chair, that it is our job, yes, to hold folks to account and to ask questions about specific actions, yes. That can be done in a way that actually respects the institutions themselves in which you're holding people to account for how those institutions are operating, which is in fact what I'm doing right now about this government and perhaps why the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is feeling uncomfortable.

Now, the fact is, Madam Chair, that this government continually undermines and interferes in the work of our public boards and agencies as well. There's no such thing as independent public boards and agencies under this government. Again, by their actions, their choices, this government is undermining Albertans' ability to trust in their democracy in this province.

Now, why do they do this, Madam Chair? Well, because like a badly behaved toddler, they're only happy when they are getting their way. The fact is that they are only happy when they get to be in control. You tell them no, and they're going to throw a tantrum, whether it's the Premier in the press, whether it's here in the Legislature when they bring in their bills, whether it's running down the judiciary at their party convention, and of course by coming back here time and time again to change our laws, not to make things better for Albertans, no, not to improve the systems or to build confidence despite the nice words that the Minister of Justice put forward at the press conference. No. They keep coming back here and changing these laws, as they're doing in Bill 23, because they're mad they didn't get their way. Certainly, it seems at times because they want to do favours for or because they're afraid of their friends, their donors, their party members. They feel that they should have more control over everyone and everything in this province. Bill 23 is just another example of that, the Premier and the government coming back here and changing the rules yet again to take more control.

4:10

Now, initially, Madam Chair, the Premier was pretty clumsy about her attempts at political interference. I mean, that's why she got caught and was called out by the Ethics Commissioner for attempting to interfere in a criminal case. She failed because, as reported by the Ethics Commissioner, the Justice minister at the time, Tyler Shandro, understood his allegiance as a minister was to Albertans and the rule of law and not the Premier, and he was ethical enough to act accordingly. Now, in the time since, it does seem the government has learned their lesson. The Premier has found a Justice minister and other ministers who are willing to rewrite laws and change the rules to suit their needs.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

They've gutted transparency, Mr. Chair. Now, originally they just ignored the rules around freedom of information. Then they got tired of being called out for that and challenged, so they just went in and changed the rules to make it far more difficult for Albertans to get information to hold them to account, getting just more and more shameless about rewriting the law to tip the scales in their own favour.

With Bill 23 this is the third time in a year – the third time – that they're changing the Citizen Initiative Act, and it's been abundantly clear why and who they've been doing that for. When asked last May why she was changing the act the first time by significantly lowering the number of signatures needed to force a referendum question, the Premier said, quote, if there isn't an outlet, it creates a new party, speaking, Mr. Chair, about the separatist cause. She said

that she doesn't want to see the creation of another political party like the Bloc Québécois, whose whole focus is on separation, but what she managed to do instead is make the UCP that party, and she would rather that. She would rather that than actually stand up on behalf of Albertans as a proud Albertan and a proud Canadian.

The fact is that what we have here, Mr. Chair, is, yet again, this government coming and changing the Citizen Initiative Act to benefit themselves because they couldn't get it right the first time. They didn't get it right the second time. The judge challenged them that time, so they had to go back and rewrite it again to cut the courts out of the question, cut the Chief Electoral Officer out of the question. Now they're coming in to change it again, and why are they changing it this time? Conspiracy.

Of course, that has been their motivation before. We know that they banned vote tabulators across the province of Alberta at a cost of millions to Alberta taxpayers not because it actually improved any vote integrity. It didn't. They said that it was to increase trust. The fact is that it's them that keep undermining trust by listening to conspiracy theories and promoting them into law, and they're doing it yet again.

Just this past weekend there was an emergency meeting amongst the separatist cause, and one of the supporters there was talking about how they don't trust Elections Alberta to handle the signature sheets. That supporter was saying: "You know, we should not turn those in to Elections Alberta. If we turn in those sheets of the signatures we collected, they will disappear."

The response from Mr. Mitch Sylvestre, a friend of the Premier, leader of the Alberta Prosperity Project, the group that launched Stay Free Alberta – that's the folks who are behind the separatist citizen initiative petition. He responded to that question and that concern by saying: "It's okay. The Premier is already on it." The Premier was introducing a bill to address that concern by doing what we are doing here in Bill 23, giving the folks with the citizen initiative petition the ability to appoint one or more scrutineers who are lawyers to observe the work of the Chief Electoral Officer, because this government, once again, Mr. Chair, undermines trust in our democracy.

What they are telling these individuals, Mr. Chair, is that they agree with him that the Chief Electoral Officer and the folks at Elections Alberta cannot be trusted, that they will complete this process, they hand in those signatures, and that they need to be able to appoint a lawyer to look over the shoulder of the Chief Electoral Officer because he and his staff cannot be trusted to count those signatures and report accurately and fairly. There's no evidence of this. Certainly, they were perfectly happy with the process as it was executed for the Forever Canadian petition that they're now busily sitting on and kicking down the road, but because of this conspiracy theory amongst the Premier's base of supporters, amongst the separatist movement, we once again have them changing the law to suit that tiny minority of Albertans. In so doing, Mr. Chair, they are undermining trust and faith in our democracy. They're undermining the Chief Electoral Officer. They're telling people that you cannot trust anyone in this province except, apparently, they think, the Premier.

There is nothing that undermines democracy more than saying that the ultimate arbiter of every question, of every authority, the only person that should be trusted to do anything is the Premier and her ministers. That is precisely what we see this government doing repeatedly, constantly consolidating more and more power in their own hands, acting as an effective nanny state on every front except, Mr. Chair, with their friends, their supporters, their donors, the people they like, and the people they're afraid of, the people they're afraid would take them out of power. Those folks get anything they want at the cost of the rest of Albertans.

Indeed, it is a significant cost, Mr. Chair. When we are looking at these changes in Bill 23, this new imposition of allowing the appointment of scrutineers not only for a citizens' initiative petition but also for any recall petition under the Recall Act, what this adds is red tape. This creates more work for the Chief Electoral Officer and his staff. This stretches out the process. That makes it more challenging, and that means it's going to cost more.

Now, again, Mr. Chair, speaking about, you know, disrespecting or failing to show respect to officers of the Legislature, I sat and watched members of this government question the Chief Electoral Officer as he attempted to navigate all of this legislation, all of these changes they have foisted on him, and question his ability to do so, question his numbers, question the funding when he was trying to act proactively in a new, undefined space, and here they are doing it again. The thing is that if you want folks to have trust in a system, you need consistency. You need predictability. People need to know that what are the rules today will be the rules tomorrow.

Well, whether it comes to elections law, whether it comes to the electoral boundaries in this province, the map that we're going to actually be voting on in the next election, what this government continues to do is promote uncertainty, distrust, fear, conspiracy, and stacking the deck. There is no one in this province, Mr. Chair, who is doing more to undermine faith and trust in our democracy, in our government institutions and processes than this Premier and her government. That comes at a significant cost for all of us.

We're living at a time when we are seeing incredible levels of anger, division, hatred. We're seeing the extremes of that south of the border. What we are seeing this Premier and this government do is playing with fire and continuing to stoke the same kinds of conspiracies, the same kinds of empty fears that nonetheless drive behaviour. We see them making similar attacks on our institutions, on those who are put in place and trusted to act in our best interests, much as this government was and is continually failing to do.

Bill 23, Mr. Chair, is a continuation of that. I fear it's something we are going to continue and continue and continue to see under this Premier and this government until they are replaced with one that is both ethical and competent. We're ready to bring it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Getson: Louder.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you. Sorry. My mic wasn't on. Do you have bad hearing over there? No one has ever told me I was too quiet.

Mr. Chair, how many times does this government need to amend legislation until it, one, does what it thinks it should do or, two, becomes an effective piece of legislation that serves the public good? Well, the answer to number one is: time permitting, as much as possible until it suits their purpose. The answer to two is: rarely unless their public benefits.

4:20

In that context, let's look at the citizen initiative legislation, that's gone through a number of changes since it was first introduced. Bill 54 made a number of changes to the act that pandered to separatists, reduced the signature requirement drastically, from 20 per cent of total electorates to 10 per cent of total votes cast, not electors, in the last provincial election. That meant the separatist groups need far fewer supporters to force divisive sovereignty votes, and based on the turnout from the last provincial elections referendum proponents

needed 177,732 signatures, around 6 per cent of the population, instead of around 602,000 signatures.

It eliminated the requirement to collect signatures from two-thirds of electoral divisions. This enabled separatist organizations to gather signatures entirely from regional strongholds and bypass the need for broad provincial support. The bill extended the collection time by a full month, from 90 to 120 days, which would give the separatist groups significantly more time to organize and mobilize their base. It also allowed corporate and union funding to open the door for special-interest groups with separatist agendas to bankroll referendum campaigns.

Then Bill 14: strip the electoral officer of the authority to review citizen-initiated referendum questions to ensure they're constitutional. The Justice minister now gets to do that. The Justice minister is now allowed to decide whether a question gets sent to court for review or if it proceeds without any legal check. What does that mean exactly, Mr. Chair? That means that another minister of this government has unfettered authority over a piece of legislation that before was put forward to a nonpartisan employee of the Legislature. Bill 14 also killed all pending cases on the constitutionality of referendums before the courts, so anything that was being discussed: done. Can't have that discussion anymore because they said so.

You know, the day after that bill was introduced, which was December 5, Judge Feasby released his decision saying that the Alberta Prosperity Project's proposed referendum question was unconstitutional. The judge also is cited calling Bill 14 antithetical to the rule of law. It removed a critical safeguard that ensured referendum questions were lawful and within provincial jurisdiction. We should want that. We should want that for initiatives. We should want that for legislation. It also concentrated power in cabinet rather than allowing arm's-length officials to do their job, so once again concentrating power in the cabinet and specific ministers within the UCP caucus. We argued that when the separatists called this bill a win, it was obvious where the UCP stood on this issue.

How does allowing the minister to appoint scrutineers for citizen initiatives respect the autonomy of the office of the Chief Electoral Officer? We need to ask ourselves that question and delve into that. Also, where did the need for scrutineers come from? Did the CEO ask for that? Who asked for scrutineers for some kind of citizen initiative? Did this come more from the paranoia of the people across the aisle that unless they're doing it, it's not done right?

You know, in following with that, I think it's the lack of trust of the office of the Chief Electoral Officer because that office and that officer don't always go along with what this government says or wants. I think they're worried that the CEO, the Chief Electoral Officer, will have to take actions that might hurt them. If you act in a certain way, you shouldn't have that kind of fear from nonpartisan government officials.

How many more amendments does this government plan to do on their own legislation before they succeed at having it only work for their base rather than all Albertans, the people that the citizen initiatives are actually meant for? Are they embarrassed by how many times they've now changed their own act? Don't they realize how bad it looks when they can't come out of the chute with an effective piece of legislation, one that's been vetted, one that's been overseen, one that's been looked at by experts and by people that know what they're doing? Why did the UCP roll back biannual severance reporting to annual, and what problem was that reporting period for them anyway? We need to ask ourselves all those questions, Mr. Chair.

You know, I don't think I need to talk about that anymore. I mean, they're going to do it anyway. They're going to do what they

want to diminish the value of the Chief Electoral Officer, to underfund the Chief Electoral Officer when it needs money to perform the duties and the extra work that this government has put on them. I think I'll just change and talk about something else.

Let's talk about deepfakes. In this legislation and this amendment we talk about deepfakes as something that needs to be addressed in this province. I think we can all agree that the issue of deepfakes is becoming an increasing threat to elections, but just how problematic are they, and how far did this government dig into this problem before they actually introduced this?

Well, with very little research I actually found a paper that was created by CSIS, you know, the federal intelligence service, the one that our Premier wants to get vetted by to see intelligence. Hmm. Interesting. This paper was called *Deepfakes: a Real Threat to a Canadian Future*. I'm hoping that they see that as part of them as well.

Humans process visual data naturally and fluently, and people believe what they see. Moreover, the detailed imagery of deepfakes has the potential to prime psychological proximity. Concrete misinformation, including disinformation, primes participants to think of events as being nearer and more probable, increasing their perceived threat and likelihood of news about them being shared.

There have been a number of reports, and I'm just going to go over them briefly. Lago et al. in 2022 reports that newer AI synthesized images are perceived as real. Synthetic faces generated by the most state-of-the-art generative adversarial networks were judged as more real than actual images, pointing to the potential of deepfakes to simulate reality and circumvent the eerie, unsettling feeling that arises when humanoid robots or computer-generated images are too close to the real thing, what's called the uncanny valley effect.

You know, I'm just going to veer off for a second just to explain that the generative adversarial networks, or GANs, are AI frameworks where you actually have two different neural networks competing against each other. One's a generator and one's a discriminator. This competition between these generators creates realistic data sets as images, videos, or music, and in doing so the networks learn by creating new data from the original training set.

Just imagine this. The generator generates a data set. The discriminator has to determine if it's real or fake. As it's determining it's fake, the generator also generates new data, and they both learn from each other in that conflict between the neural networks. That's how we're getting to the actual training of the networks on themselves.

Now, furthermore, Mr. Chair, Kobis et al. found that people cannot reliably detect deepfakes and that neither raising awareness nor introducing financial incentives improves their detection accuracy. An even more recent study found that deepfake videos are both more believable than fabricated images and text and that people are more likely to engage with them. Rapidly evolving GAN technology will soon render deepfakes indistinguishable from genuine content if it has not already done so.

Societies, companies, and consumers are all potentially threatened by deepfakes. Caldwell et al. ranks fake audio or video content as the single biggest threat posed by AI for applications for crime and terrorism. Europol has warned that deepfakes can be used to harass and humiliate people online, perpetrate extortion and fraud, falsify online identities, and fool know-your-customer mechanisms, sexually exploit children online, falsify or manipulate electronic evidence for criminal justice investigations, and disrupt financial markets.

Deepfakes also pose a threat to our governing structures. The uncertainty deepfakes introduced allows people to live in their own subjective realities, and we see that quite often, enlarging social

divisions and obstructing the democratic process. This is especially dangerous during elections, when deepfakes are likely to be used by foreign and domestic powers to manipulate outcomes. Antagonistic parties may be enticed to subject an electorate to deepfakes long before an election in order to prime future attitudes. Individuals are more easily persuaded and corrected by someone they know. Therefore, societal norms and discourse on deepfakes should be nudged to create a social environment where people are not only skeptical about what they see but also encouraged to challenge each other's informational claims.

4:30

To alter society norms, thought leaders and those central in social networks are the key. Educational resources, including digital literacy training, are helpful tools, especially if directed at influencers. Videos explaining political deepfakes have been found to reduce uncertainty and in so doing can increase trust in media. But norms only really change through collective action. When it comes to drafting and implementing new policies, procedures, and/or legislation, democratic governments are perhaps by necessity notoriously slow moving. AI, in stark contrast, advances and evolves rapidly. If governments assess and address AI independently and at their typical speed, their interventions will quickly be rendered irrelevant.

Collaboration among partner governments, allies, academics, and industry experts is essential to both maintaining the integrity of globally distributed information and addressing the malicious application involving AI. Mr. Chair, is this government actively collaborating with the federal government, tech allies, academics, and industry experts in developing their deepfake legislation and regulations? If not, why not? CSIS insists that this type of collaboration is fundamental to addressing evolving AI. As the federal government is creating reforms to protect against foreign interference, including deepfakes, through Bill C-25, is this government working with the federal government on Alberta's version of the law? If not, then we need to do something immediately, or we run the risk of forever being behind the deepfake AI race. Just because we say we want to deal with deepfakes doesn't mean it's going to happen.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others wishing to speak? The Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to join in the debate on Bill 23 to pick up on some of the places that were left off by the shadow minister of Justice and by other members of the Assembly. You know, the principles at play are what, really, our focus is on when we're talking about Bill 23. This bill is not just about the technical amendments to the Citizen Initiative Act. It's not just about the process. It's about trust. It's about legal certainty, as was so well put by the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. Increasingly, Albertans are asking a very simple question: is this government listening? The answer time and time again is no.

We hear from the government that Bill 23 will somehow strengthen democracy, that it will improve participation. It's a level of doublespeak that we've been catching lately with a lot of the bills that have been coming in this session, that somehow this is improving democracy and strengthening democracy or that it'll improve participation when it feels like it could be the opposite. I plan to address why I think this is going to be an issue with some of the parts of the bill that have been brought forward.

Perhaps this is modernizing our system, modernizing our democracy the way it was modernized when we got rid of voting

machines. That's the kind of modernization and doublespeak that we hear regularly from this government. Albertans have heard promises like this before. What they've learned through experience in the last few years is that when this government talks about improving democracy, what often follows is more control, more interference, and less trust in the people of the province. Trusting the people is a huge part of how our democracy works and how we should operate as governors. Instead, we're turning into this nanny state.

Let's talk about trust. In that last election that we had in 2023, this government made clear commitments to Albertans. I remember it on the doors. They said they would not touch the Canada pension plan. They said it clearly. They said it repeatedly. I felt the momentum shift at the door once the people felt at rest that this government would not be messing with the Canada pension plan, putting their retirements at risk. Yet what have we seen these past few years? Millions of dollars, years of work, endless government resources, studies, panels, all spent on trying to take Albertans out of the Canada pension plan, risking the retirement security of Albertans without a clear mandate, without consent, and without listening to Albertans because this government is certain that they know best. But Albertans spoke. Experts have spoken. Even conservatives across the province have great concerns and great anxiety, and this government has pushed ahead anyway. That's not listening. That's not democracy. That is imposing an ideological agenda on Albertans.

Mr. Chair, the same pattern has also repeated itself in policing. During that last election, again, Albertans told us clearly: please don't get rid of the RCMP. I've brought this up in the House before, but I'll say it again. The RCMP are more popular in Strathcona county than beer. Stats, surveys have proven it. The government said: we're not getting rid of the RCMP. That was a commitment by this government, yet over and over again over these last few years we've seen bills brought in by this government, policy after policy, a steady march towards replacing the RCMP with a provincial sheriff police force: rebranded, repackaged, unmistakably the same idea. Even when municipalities spoke up, even when rural communities said no, even when Albertans made it clear they do not want this change, the government did not listen. They keep going because this government does what it wants, not what Albertans ask for. The UCP think they know best.

We see it again in health care. Albertans were promised there would be no more move towards a two-tier system. That promise was made clearly, but today Albertans are watching a different reality unfold. We're seeing the creeping expansion of private, for-profit delivery, we're seeing access tied more and more to the ability to pay, and we're seeing the early signs of an American-style system take root in Alberta, and Albertans are worried. They have anxiety about this. They're worried because they know what happens when health care becomes a commodity instead of a right. They know what happens when health care becomes a menu item that you can choose when you go to the doctor. They're worried about this because they were promised one thing and now are being delivered on another. We've asked again and again. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora has been so good at saying: if you want to take this to the polls, take it to the polls. Let's have an election on this. Once again, this government is not listening because they think they know best.

Mr. Chair, perhaps nowhere is this failure to listen more clear than in the actions of everyday Albertans themselves on citizen initiatives that are being, apparently, improved through Bill 23. Nearly half a million Albertans, almost 500,000 people, signed a citizen-led initiative to affirm that Alberta will remain a proud part of Canada. They took the citizen initiative legislation, followed the

rules, and brought forward a petition to this House, a petition that, in my knowing, has more citizen signatures on it than any other in the history of Alberta. Half a million voices: that's not noise. That's not a fringe. That is a democratic expression of the will of the people.

Albertans used the very tools that this Legislature gave them. They followed the rules, they organized, they participated in good faith, thinking there was legal certainty in this province, and what has been the government's response? To change the rules for their loud friends and their loud members that want to break up this country. Not once have they changed it, not twice have they changed it but again and again. I think we are on our fourth change to the Citizen Initiative Act since the UCP became a government.

Now, with Bill 23 we see further changes to the Citizen Initiative Act, changes that raise serious concerns about fairness, access, and trust in the government. Mr. Chair, one of the most troubling aspects of this bill is the introduction of enhanced scrutiny in the verification of petition signatures. Now, let's be clear. When someone signs a petition, they're making a public statement. They are standing up for a cause, but there is a line, an important line, between participation and what could lead to intimidation.

4:40

Albertans must always feel safe to participate in our democracy without fear. What this bill risks doing is blurring that line and taking away something that's so critical to our democracy, which is the ability to vote anonymously. By expanding the record keeping and the review of signatures and the role of scrutineers in verifying, potentially challenging those signatures, I'm worried that this could create a chilling effect. Bill 23 could create a situation where Albertans begin to ask: "Will my name be flagged by the separatists? Will I be targeted by the UCP? Will I face consequences for speaking out?" In this province, where many already feel this government does that and does not listen and does try to intimidate anyone who speaks out against this government, a province where many organizations are already afraid to speak out against this government for fear of losing their funding, that kind of fear is deeply damaging in our democracy.

Mr. Chair, it's not lost on me that the Government House Leader obtained his master's in political strategy in Russia or that the Premier has been cozying up to the princes of Saudi Arabia. Russia and Saudi Arabia are not countries to offer people lessons on how to strengthen democracy. It's no wonder that the thought leaders in the government are inspired by Putin and Saudi Arabian princes, that they have brought forward Bill 23, pretending to be strengthening our democracy.

Mr. Chair, at the heart of our democracy is a principle. People must feel safe. They must feel free. They must be respected to participate, whether it's casting a ballot, signing a petition, speaking up at a town hall, speaking up at a hearing for a boundaries commission, speaking out in their community. If people begin to feel that their participation will be scrutinized, will be challenged or politicized, then I worry that participation will drop off. If people begin to feel that their voices are not being heard, then participation drops off. We know that. We are seeing that when this government does not listen, the people's participation in our democracy is dropping off, and it weakens.

It's not happening in isolation. It's part of a broader pattern, a pattern where promises were made and broken. Public input is invited and then easily ignored by this government. Democratic tools are offered and then reshaped, changed when the results are inconvenient for the government. Underlining all of this is an ideological agenda, an agenda that says, "We know best," an agenda that says that the ends justify the means, an agenda that

increasingly looks like an attempt to reshape Alberta not based on what Albertans are asking for, not what Albertans are dreaming for but based on what this government believes it can impose. Mr. Chair, Albertans are not asking for this. They are not campaigning on this. They are doing what they think is best without permission, without a mandate.

What Albertans are asking for is stability, certainty in the law, honesty from a government. They're asking for a government that keeps its words. They're asking for a government that listens, not pretending to listen during an election but every single day, and elected representatives that bring their ideas and concerns and priorities every day here to this Legislature like we do in the Alberta New Democrats.

We've seen it before in the recent Alberta elections boundaries commission. We've seen this with this elections boundaries commission, that the independent commissioners heard from thousands of Albertans at 28 hearings across the province. In addition, thousands of Albertans took time to provide written submissions to the boundaries commission, and the independent commission brought all of these ideas together in their recommendations for the future electoral boundaries without political input from the elected officials who have a vested interest in these electoral boundaries. The government won't commit to accepting the recommendations, a standard practice in this province for over 30 years.

Again, we've seen the citizen initiatives. Albertans have said that they don't want coal mining in the eastern slopes, but this government thinks they know best. They have cost us millions in settlements that have been paid to coal companies from other countries. Protecting water is one of the most important things we are tasked with doing in this Assembly, but the UCP seem to love coal mining more than they love clean water, so now we have a citizen-led initiative by Albertans trying to say to the government: "Will you listen to us? We don't want coal mining in the eastern slopes." Keep fighting to protect the water in Alberta because it's worth it. I wish the UCP environment ministers were as concerned about protecting the waters in Alberta as they are about controlling the population of cormorants.

When we debate Bill 23, we must ask: does this bill build trust? Does it strengthen participation? Does it reflect the will of Albertans, or does it continue a pattern of control, interference, and disregard? Democracy is not strengthened by tightening control over it. It's strengthened by trusting in people: trusting them to speak, trusting them to participate, trusting them to do their job in the classrooms, trusting them to do their job in the hospitals, trusting them to decide. Right now Albertans do not feel trusted by this government. They feel managed, they feel ignored, and increasingly they feel shut out.

That is why I cannot support this bill, because at its core Bill 23 is not about empowering Albertans. It's not about improving our democracy. It's about a government that continues to act despite what Albertans want, to act not because of them but instead of them. Mr. Chair, Albertans deserve better. They deserve a government that listens. They deserve an Alberta New Democrat government. They deserve a government that keeps its promises. Competent, ethical governance. A government that understands that democracy is not something to be managed; it's something to be respected.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 23, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. Albertans deserve to have faith in their democratic institutions. It is really important that people trust

the system that gives them the ability to elect who would be the government in this province.

The current laws require the citizen-initiated referendum to be held on or before general election days. This creates the risk that unrelated, highly sensitive, divisive questions are placed directly on the same ballot as the general election. This is going to distort democratic choice and overshadow core electoral issues. This is a time when Albertans need to make a decision and vote on issues that touch their lives: their health care system, the future of the education system, their democratic processes, their affordability and the cost of living, and their social policies. In general all those things constitute the mandate that Albertans give to their elected government. Any time that you muddle this and you distort this, you're taking away the ability of Albertans to weigh in on who would be an ethical, competent government that will govern the affairs of the province.

Bill 23 responds to a narrow problem by eliminating the requirement that citizen-initiated referendums be tied to a general election. The bill is not retroactive; therefore, it's not dealing with an issue that the province is facing. Existing initiatives, including the Forever Canadian, the separatist, and the corelated petitions, are unaffected by this bill. There is a reason why the government is doing this and not addressing what is on the table for Albertans.

Why does this problem exist? "How did we get here?" is a question that is worth asking. The need for Bill 23 did not arise in isolation. It just didn't come up in isolation. This is a downstream result of broader changes that the UCP have made to Alberta's democratic system in our democracy, the institutions and the processes that shape our democracy.

4:50

Mr. Chair, if this were coming from an opposition, you would be wondering why, and you'd be justified because the opposition was not elected as a government, but this is the same process that elected the government. It's the same process that has enabled them to be in government. They came in changing every aspect of it. Who votes? We have dealt with this in other bills, and we have seen it. It's a key component of who decides who will be a government. How do you vote? We have seen a lot of bills in this House that have dealt with that or that have attempted to make changes to that. Who counts the votes? Oh, the machines: no, we don't trust it; change it. Who oversees the scrutineers, or who picks the scrutineers? Change it. Who finances? Oh, that doesn't work for us; change it. How many contributions do people and corporations make? Oh, it's not going to be enough for the next election; change it.

Every piece that made the current – they should be the first group of people, members who will be saying: keep it the way it is because Albertans have used this system, and they have given us the chance to govern, and let's keep it. But every piece of it is being changed because of these members, and the government members feel that it is not going to work for them.

Those democracy principles and pillars are so important. I say this because, Mr. Chair, I was raised, grew up, and worked in undemocratic countries. I have something to reference in relation to what we have and what we take for granted. It is worth protecting, it's worth fighting for, and it is important that we keep our democratic institutions out of meddling in the matter.

Alberta is one of the only provinces with a stand-alone Citizen Initiative Act. Since its introduction, as I said before, the act has been repeatedly amended over and over. That makes referendums easier: trigger it, simplify it, make it harder because this time it doesn't work for us, the scrutinizers, the process. All of those things

are a way of playing with the system that should have neutrally been left so that people can trust and then people can use those systems.

How did we get here? The threshold of triggering referendums was lowered. It's a good example of that. Bill 54, we all remember, made it easier to force a vote for separatists and significantly reduced the barriers to launch a province-wide citizens' initiative referendum. First, what did we do? Signature requirements were cut in half because it was figured that it wasn't working for a group, so we change the rules from 20 per cent to 10 per cent. It is a reasonable number that will work for a group that wanted to initiate a separation referendum.

Instead of finding a provincial consensus that you collect signatures and petitions across the province so that people in various regions of the province are reflected in the process, the requirement to collect signatures from two-thirds of electoral divisions was eliminated. So organizers now can come from this entirely original stronghold without demonstrating province-wide support that will enable for all Albertans the direction that they want to go.

What else? More time to organize, which enables signatures, specifically for separatists, to collect a window period from 90 to 120 days, giving campaigns more time to mobilize and fund raise. Money is another important thing, so what else did Bill 54 do? Special interest financing allowed, corporate and union funding was permitted, opening the door for well-resourced interest groups, including those promoting separatists.

We have a system that oversees our democratic processes. Bill 14, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, removed one of the last meaningful safeguards in our systems. What did it do? It stripped the Chief Electoral Officer of authority to review referendum questions for constitutionality. It took it away from him, transferred discretion to the Minister of Justice so now he decides whether a question goes to court or proceeds without a legal review. They have made every single change that makes possible in the direction that all the supporters of the government wanted. Then, what else? Terminated all the pending court cases challenging the constitutionality of the referendum questions.

When separatist organizations publicly describe a bill – in this case that is Bill 14 – as a win, it underscores concerns about the government's direction. Members of the government keep saying that we are the only ones that bring up separatism or separation conversation in the Chamber. Of course, it is the Chamber that needs to discuss that and make a decision. We can make it simple. Like, we can all bring a motion. We brought a motion to talk about separation and vote in favour or against it, but the motion was defeated. It could have resolved all the questions and the conversations that are coming out of the members of this side in terms of separation because it's all lining up. That is exactly what the government has enabled, to make changes to the rules and enable the separatists to have a question on the ballot.

Bill 23 is a containment measure, not a correction. It prevents a citizen-initiated referendum from automatically appearing on the general election ballot, because it doesn't work. If it were going to work for the government members, absolutely that wouldn't have been a question.

The bottom line is that Bill 23 addresses one symptom of a much larger problem created by earlier legislative changes by the same government. While it may reduce immediate election day risk, it leaves intact a citizen initiative system that is easier to be exploited, lightly regulated, and increasingly centralized in government hands, in the cabinet hands. This is exactly what's happening in a multitude of bills, pieces of legislation that have been tabled in this Chamber that we have debated show that the government is reluctant or

unwilling to bring issues of importance for Albertans to be debated in the Chamber and decisions of those to be made in this Chamber.

Mr. Chair, I do ask all members of this House to seriously look into this, seriously look into Bill 23. Consider that what makes our province and this country strong, number one, is its people, and the second thing is its democratic institutions. They are worth protecting and fighting for.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others wishing to speak? Seeing none.

[The clauses of Bill 23 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

5:00

Bill 24 **Alberta Whisky Act**

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

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to briefly address Bill 24 before us. I've had an opportunity to speak to it at second reading and read the bill a couple times. I can tell you that a similar kind of thing was done when the Alberta NDP were government with regard to Alberta craft beers. There were approximately five or six that you could call craft beers in 2015, 2014, with a focused attention on that product and really trying to bring support around the brand power that develops when you focus on something like an industry to try and stand it up with members of the industry supporting that. It went from about six craft brewers in the province that were kind of established and known to about 150 over the short period of time of, you know, about three and a half, four years.

It's a good thing to do that. We certainly did it when we were government. I can understand the focus and push by distillers in this province, of which there are about 45 producing whisky, who want to have that same sort of government lift behind them so that they can continue to be known for producing good product. That's kind of evident – happens in Kentucky with bourbon and other places, Scotch whisky in Scotland, around the distillery valley there, which I've had the opportunity to visit as a tourist.

So a good start, but you know what? This doesn't address, obviously, the major issues going on in Alberta right now with regard to what citizens are experiencing, namely affordability issues. This doesn't address that. This doesn't address the fact that our health care system is broken under this government and needs fixing. It doesn't address the fact that the government didn't run on this initiative back in 2023. It came up as part of a minister's mandate letter in the fall of '25.

It's different than what we did as a government. In 2014 and early 2015 we put out our platform. Our platform included working with the craft brewers to stand up an industry because they showed a lot of promise, but the fact that there was no government support kind of held that industry back. If you look at Ontario at that time, if you look at B.C. at that time, they had booming craft beer industries

there. We knew that better could be done. That's what happened under the Alberta NDP in that time period.

I just wanted to give a bit of a shout-out to I think some really great distillers out there that'll benefit from this. Park Distillery in Banff make great whisky now. They're going to no doubt take part in this going forward. Bridgeland Distillery in Calgary is another great distiller, small but powerful, mighty. Of course, Rig Hand in Leduc county is a distiller of note as well. From time to time I've been purchasing products from all of these notable . . .

Ms Hoffman: What was your favourite?

Member Ceci: My favourite?

Member Irwin: Oh, you can't pick a favourite.

Member Ceci: Yeah. It's like children. You can't pick them. No.

I do want to point out that I think what's missing in this act is the fact that there's no sampling committee, and Lethbridge-West and I want to perhaps bring a motion forward to amend this to include a sampling committee that would include us solely.

The other thing I wanted to bring up is that two-thirds of the grain products used in this – I'm not sure why only two-thirds. Why not 100 per cent of Alberta grains is used as a mash for this Alberta whisky? I think there are some views among distillers that if we're going to be creating Alberta whisky, let's go all the way instead of just two-thirds of the grains being used.

Nonetheless, the distillers were involved in this. It's been brought forward. It looks like it's going to assist in brand power, and more brand power means greater GDP and potentially tourism. It means, potentially, jobs, and these are good-paying jobs and mortgage-paying jobs in distilleries and craft brewers, so there's some reason to support all of the things before us.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others wishing to speak?

Seeing none, call the question on Bill 24.

[The clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report bills 23 and 24.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 23, Bill 24.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is so ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 25

An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act, 2026

[Debate adjourned April 14]

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Currie has risen to speak.

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Nice to be able to speak to Bill 25 after what has been just an illuminating afternoon debating some very important legislation that is on the floor today. I'm really pleased to be able to speak to Bill 25. Of course, this is something that is near and dear to so, so many Albertans; in fact, I would argue all 5 million of them, whether they are just little ones getting ready to enter into the preschool and K to 12 system, whether they are Albertans like my own children, who are probably home from school now – I'm sure they're watching at home, just riveted by the content of the conversation today – parents, grandparents. Truly our education system is a cornerstone of our community and of our province large and small, so I'm very pleased to be able to rise.

5:10

In preparation for my debate today, my comments, I thought I would start with reviewing the opening comments from the minister yesterday. Indeed, you know, I think sometimes intent can be lost or a bit muddled in the drafting of legislation. Let's be frank. I reckon most Albertans have likely more important things to do than to read a bill front to back, but I think what they probably have a bit more time for is to hear from the minister, specifically on his intention with the bill, on his interpretation of the bill, on his presentation of the bill to Albertans when we know that education impacts every single one of them in some form or another, so let's start on that front. Yesterday the minister said that "this bill mandates that the provincial curriculum be implemented with a high degree of intellectual integrity . . . that the primary metric for success in our classrooms will once again be the mastery of subject matter."

I certainly dwelled on that "once again" a little bit. I don't know when subject mastery ever stopped being the primary metric for success in our classrooms. Are classrooms different than when the members opposite were in them? Likely. I think they're probably different than when I was there, too. But simply because the classroom might look and feel and be managed differently than when we all sat in very tight rows and, you know, repeated back our times tables to the teacher, just because it might look and feel a little bit different does not mean that our education system has just fully abdicated the mission of mastering subject matter. What, in fact, does the minister think is happening in Alberta classrooms? I would like to know. I'd like to hear of one school, any school that has simply thrown up their hands and said: subject mastery is in the past; no problem.

Certainly, I think the minister and I agree that mastering the subject matter is critical. However, we certainly disagree that it ever stopped being the North Star statement of our education system. I would certainly think, too, that the minister and I diverge on whether or not we care to address the impediments to achieving that mastery. It is a very important aspirational statement, but it is not worth more than the paper it's written on if we are not in fact addressing the pathway to achieving that success. I'm not seeing in

the minister's comments nor in Bill 25 nor, frankly, most content from the UCP in regard to education that there is actually a willingness to have a frank, apolitical conversation about what those concrete impediments are to achieving the mastery and what the concrete plan is to facilitate students coming along on that path.

Now, I know that conversation concerning – careful; the members opposite might want to put their hands over their ears. Diversity, equity, inclusion, systemic barriers, intersectionality: I know that those might be terms that make the members opposite a little uncomfortable. Maybe it gets them a little hot under the collar because they don't like to hear those terms. But you know what? I don't think that they're bad words, Mr. Speaker. I actually think that they are integral considerations that have to be talked about in a nonpartisan, nonideological way, which is exactly what the minister is hoping to accomplish with Bill 25, in order to help every single student achieve their potential.

The minister mentioned in his opening remarks that there are several school boards who dared to create DEI action plans – imagine – or another board that had the audacity to employ an antiracism and equity team. These are the hallmarks of a system in collapse? Is this really the best use of our resources, with all of the infinite resources that this government has to create legislation and to fund programs and policy that will, in fact, make a difference in the lives of Albertans and especially in the lives of the future workers, the future homeowners, the future parents of our province? This, though, is what is really the problem: the antiracism and equity team that a school board created.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite, I don't think these are dirty words. Has the minister ever considered that perhaps by promoting and encouraging diversity, equity, and inclusion, educational outcomes might actually improve? I know, it's shocking to suggest. Should we actually consider different backgrounds, different skill sets, different pathways to learning, mastery of the subject matter might actually improve, if we consider some of these things. We know that there is an abundance of evidence that shows that it, in fact, does, in the same way that there is an abundance of evidence that shows that it does the same in the workplace. How dare those school boards?

Unfortunately, you know, for doing something that I think is really – it's not woke; it's common sense, and I think it is absolutely backed by data and evidence. Unfortunately, some of those school boards who tried to create, now, not welcoming environments but environments where all children could thrive, might now actually be penalized for it. I just don't get it because I think absolutely it maintains that North Star objective, that bold and audacious goal that every child has the potential to master the subject matter.

I have some very specific questions for the minister as well in regard to Bill 25. My first question is that Bill 25 prohibits the flying of any flag other than the Canada and Alberta flags. These are symbols, the minister says, that represent our shared history, our common laws, and our collective future. Indeed, there is nothing quite as inspiring as seeing those flags flying in the wind, but I wonder if the minister did consult with separatists on that front to see if the Canada flag might be, you know, TBD.

Based on the criteria that they represent our shared history, our common laws, and our collective future, what about the francophone flag, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Dach: Ben oui.

Member Eremenko: Ben oui. Maybe the franco-albertain flag? How about the Métis flag, or down in my neck of the woods in

Treaty 7 how about the Blackfoot Confederacy flag? Every day that I have come to work on the legislative precinct, I've seen the Ukrainian flag flying next to Canada's and Alberta's flags, closer to the Federal Building. Absolutely it brings me immense pride, not just because of my Ukrainian heritage, though that helps, but because that is the kind of pluralistic society that the minister talks about in his comments. Very often the Union Jack is flying over the west doors of the Legislature here in Edmonton.

Mr. Dach: That was in my elementary school.

Member Eremenko: Really?

Mr. Dach: Yeah.

Member Eremenko: A very special Union Jack flag, I might add.

Bill 25 says that the process for giving permission to schools to fly other flags will be laid out in the regulations. So who says which flags are going to be okay? Maybe the minister of red tape reduction might like to let us know if the ministry of education gets docked a few points, because this feels like a pretty cumbersome process where every time any school wants to fly any flag other than the Canada and Alberta one, they have to submit some form requesting permission to do so. Truly the requirements that the flags represent our shared history, our common laws, and our collective future: I think that casts the net pretty wide in who ultimately is going to be making those decisions.

My second question is that Bill 25 brings something back that Alberta used to have. That being the requirement for the minister to approve a contract of employment for all superintendents. Now this is something that existed when we were in government, when the Alberta NDP were in government in 2015 to 2019. Then the UCP took it out, and here we are reinstating that requirement for approval once again. Can the minister tell us why? What changed in the last seven years, since the UCP has been in government, that they initially took it out and now they have brought it back in? What has changed in their understanding of the hiring, firing, and work of superintendents in this province that they now want to reinstate this requirement?

5:20

My third question. The minister said that Bill 25 will transform the role of school boards to being legally accountable for the specific academic outcomes of our most vulnerable learners. Now, why this kind of stood out to me, Mr. Speaker, is that, one, the ministry of education was up on Public Accounts a couple of weeks ago, and I had a similar vein of questions for the deputy minister around the literacy and numeracy screener assessments. How are they supported? How are they funded? I had heard from teachers, for example, who said that the printing budget alone simply to administer the literacy and numeracy screeners was presenting a significant burden to the school's annual budget. Now, I'm happy to see in Bill 25 that they're actually going to be amending and kind of broadening the ways in which those screeners can be administered. Maybe they don't always have to be hard copy. I believe some of that is moving on electronically, which is good news.

They said that, at minimum, a screener with a new kid – imagine you've got a kindergarten class full of 30 kids, and you're just getting to know each other. You know, you are literally just still trying to find the bathroom here and helping these little ones get oriented to their very first year in school. But now a teacher has to sit down and complete this literacy and numeracy screener with every single one of the students. I mean, she's probably still just trying to figure out their names at this stage. Every screener takes

at minimum 20 minutes. There isn't any automatic support that is provided for that teacher in order to give each of those students the time that they need to get an accurate and clear picture that is a really integral baseline. There's a lot that's riding on these literacy and numeracy screeners.

Now, the legislation in section 30.51(1) talks about how school boards will be legally required to provide the interventions required based on the screener results, but the minister, in his comments yesterday, said that the school boards are legally accountable for academic outcomes of the most vulnerable learners, which are different things, right? You identify a student who needs some help on whatever it might be or maybe they're going to need help in the future. Bill 25 says that the school board is required to provide some degree of intervention based on those findings, while the minister talked about outcomes. So it's not just about providing the intervention; it's also about assuring that the kid actually achieves progress towards mastery of that subject matter, which are really different things. I'd like some clarification from the minister. Is it outcomes or is it interventions? If this board is legally required to provide or assure one versus the other, those are going to have very different levels of investment.

Okay. So a student has been identified through the literacy and numeracy screener that they're going to need some extra supports. What is the government providing by way of resources to actually provide those supports? It's a bit of a "So what? Now what?" situation, Mr. Speaker. They've been identified that they need the supports.

Thank you.

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

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 25, An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology From Classrooms and Amend the Education Act, 2026. Many times I find myself in this House wondering about what the true aims of this government are when it comes to their legislation. Usually it's the titles of the bills that are a bit of a tell but not in the ways that we'd expect. The title of this bill is antithetical to what it actually achieves and even what the goals that I've seen time after time come out from this government are. Absolutely everything about this bill is political and ideological – shamelessly so – and it comes at a cost to our students now and in the future.

In this bill, amongst many others, we see a government willing to tighten its grip on our educators, our school boards, disrespect our educators, and also willing to impose its own political will and arguably just add a lot more work and burden on the folks that we rely upon to educate our kids. We know that Albertan classrooms are overcrowded, underfunded, and struggling with complexity. That's not a surprise to anyone in this Legislature, and this goes back for as far as when I was working as a CA starting almost 10 years ago, working as a constituency manager and hearing the same from teachers and concerns about classroom sizes.

Now, they've been calling for meaningful action on this for years. In 2020, we remember, the UCP stopped reporting on classroom sizes, bragged about not funding public services to reflect population growth, and then cried surprise when teachers could no longer shoulder the burden that this government was fully able to lighten and made a conscious choice not to do. They had to go on strike and ensure that the UCP didn't miss that message. The calls to action were clear. They did it for our students. They did it because they were tired of the moral injury this government has created. They called for better supports for our students. They called for more per-student funding, for resources in the classroom, and

supports that would follow coded students. Does this bill address any of these real and pressing issues for our kids? Absolutely not.

It's that old – and I've lived in Alberta all my life – Conservative song and dance that has no measurable outcomes because this government refuses to measure what it is wilfully undermining, namely our public education system. Let's not mince words here. This UCP government has had seven years to solve problems in every sphere when it comes to our public services and especially education. Under their watch classroom sizes have ballooned; 20,000 EAs were fired by tweet; FSCD was cut one summer, only to have parents realize in September why their kids wouldn't be getting the supports they needed. Complexity has worsened, and this government has done not a lot more than vilify and disrespect the teachers and school support staff we all rely on. It's deeply disappointing to see a government that would rather rage-bait and talk about our education than roll up its sleeves and do the work that is so desperately needed. It's a dereliction of duty, and it will reverberate for many more generations. It is absolutely shameful.

The fact is that this government went ahead and removed in the preamble "welcoming" and "belonging" instead of, you know, what they could have done. They could have kept that in and added in "a safe and caring environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours." They chose to remove "welcoming" and "belonging," and that is also a manifestation of this government's ideology, one that is obsessed with dividing us, and with multiple dog whistles, about who should be in and who should be out. They are actually obsessed with welcoming and belonging but not welcoming and telling us all who doesn't belong. We hear a lot of phrases from the side opposite around identity politics, ideology, wokeness, and it's all a signal. Diversity, as referenced by the Member for Calgary-Currie – diversity, equity, and inclusion are not dirty words. Intersectionality is not even a dirty word. It is actually just the reality of how we live in this world. It is actually part of a wonderful education when we think about how we are exposed to other people in our classrooms, people who aren't like us, who don't think like us, who don't eat like us, who don't celebrate the things that we celebrate. All of the many different representations of the people that exist in a classroom are the very same way that they exist in our society every day. As professionals – something that I learned in the private sector when I was working in it – it's critical for becoming a competent professional in any area that you choose to work in.

5:30

So all of these signals, all of these moves to remove equity, inclusion, belonging from our schools and from our education system don't actually solve any problems that are existing in our education system right now that we're told about time and time again. It doesn't tackle complexity. It doesn't tackle classroom sizes. It prescribes an ideology, a preferred one. When we're talking about which flags can fly in a school, it is an absolute joy for me to be able to deliver both the Canadian and Albertan flags to all of our schools. That this has to be put into legislation: this is something that schools already do, again, solving problems that don't exist. But then when I think also about the mandate to not present any other flags, again, this is a signal. It's a signal. It is rage-baiting. It signals to a group of people who are quick to anger, perhaps. I don't know.

I don't understand the need to remove flags, and I just think of even, like, a social studies class and having been a school volunteer for my daughter's classes and seeing a map of the world on the classroom wall and each of those students being able to map their own family histories on a map on the wall, being able to see themselves even in that short moment by putting a flag somewhere

on the map of the world and feeling like it matters and wanting to share with their classmates why that's important. That's an add to our kids' education. That makes them interested in their fellow students. It makes them interested in the world around them and makes them realize that the world is not so small as just that classroom or just our communities.

The response from this government consistently when it comes to our education system has been more incendiary than helpful. In talking about the diverse representations in our classrooms, the insinuations and highly questionable math that I have seen from some of the members opposite when pointing fingers at immigrants and what they cost our education system: very destructive and incredibly disappointing. Yes, we have newcomer families who need language support. Yes, there are kids who come from conflict zones and need support. But by and large newcomer kids integrate with good support, and that comes from investment from our governments.

After so many years in power what I've seen consistently is that this government is not interested in being part of their success story. They've been so clearly focused on the us versus them that they have forgotten that each and every one of these children, no matter where they're from, when they came, what their family composition is like, how they identify: they're all precious to us. They all represent the bright future and the potential of our province. It saddens me that we have a government that is willing to shirk their responsibility in helping them meet that potential. They all belong. They all matter, and they deserve so much better than a government willing to serve them up on the altar of division.

My kids have been in classrooms that are incredibly diverse, and it has been to their benefit. When we're talking about supports for students, again we come to the part of the legislation where they talk about the literacy and numeracy supports and the burden that's placed on schools to do that. Again I would offer that this is part of the government's responsibility in properly funding to have the appropriate resources in that classroom. I have an enormous gratitude to the people who are in my life who tell me about their experiences in the classroom, people who are EAs, people who are teachers, people who tell me every day how their needs are not being met by this government. This bill does nothing to address those concerns. It does nothing to strengthen the supports in that classroom. It imposes a lot on our systems, on our boards while also removing their freedom to make decisions. In that I'm specifically referring to appointing superintendents.

Further to the issue of belonging, we know that violence is a problem in our classrooms. I'm concerned about the Premier's comments about earning your way in and out of a classroom, seemingly taking the position that the most important action you can take is to put a couple of lines in a piece of legislation around violence in the classroom. I've heard a lot of harrowing stories. This legislation does nothing to support them. Everyone deserves a safe workplace, but let's be clear. This is not the solution. Funding our public system appropriately, funding the resources that help kids that are experiencing difficulties, making sure that they're not packed in a classroom like sardines as they have been for so many years under this government, and ensuring that they have the attention and support they need: that's the real solution.

In terms of the insinuation that kids would be removed, that is also not solving the problem, and there is a problem. What I would like to know from this government and from this minister is: where exactly does this government propose that students who have earned their way out of a classroom go? Do they not realize, or is it just a matter of no longer respecting that they have a duty to each of these children, to all of the families in our province? They have been shirking that duty and even bragging about refusing to fund

population growth since the early '20s. Education is a right, not a privilege.

And just a quick note on neutrality. Teachers already adhere to a professional code of conduct. It includes that teacher leaders can't take ideological advantage over students, obviously. They're in a position of authority over these students. That is already laid out. Enforcing neutrality through legislation – again, this is not neutral; there's nothing neutral about this – creates anxieties for teachers and lots of questions around how neutrality is defined.

I'll just come to this part of it, the part of the legislation that demands that both sides of the debate be presented. I felt that the Member for Calgary-Beddington did a really good job illustrating what that can look like in a classroom. When we are talking about the transatlantic slave trade, when we are talking about even historic issues like pride and why it came about, the fact that people have their human rights now enshrined in the Charter and why that came about: it came about because of discrimination. It came about because of experience of bias when interacting with all of our government systems.

It also robs our students and our teachers of those exciting opportunities for debate. I had a teacher that would have us engage in debate and present positions and present the debate. What position are you putting all of those educators in?

The Speaker: Seeing no more speakers except the Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to oppose Bill 25, An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act, 2026. I want to start from the very beginning of what I'm hearing from the community members of Calgary-Edgemont. Parents are worried about their kids' classrooms, and teachers are exhausted. Students are trying to learn in spaces that are overcrowded, they're underresourced, and they're being pushed way beyond what they were designed for. Students in the riding of Calgary-Edgemont are learning on stages that were, you know, designated for theatre and performances. Students are learning in their learning commons, now classrooms, not the learning commons, or their libraries. Students are learning in the staff rooms. You know, it's quite annoying.

5:40

It was a very historical moment last fall in Alberta history. I think we can all remember. I know for me it was a very special moment to walk out with my daughter. We walked out and there were the teachers. We walked out to this legislation. But also, before that, I had the opportunity to walk with the teachers around Prince's Island, stood on some bridges, talked with them, and I listened to their concerns. I read the letters from the parents and all the neighbours, all the teachers, and everybody. Yeah. I will not forget walking out into that sea of red and for my daughter to run into her social studies teacher from the year prior and for them to hug. It was so meaningful and so special to have my daughter see also her social studies teacher engaging in her civic duty and standing up for my daughter's rights. I know for me that image and that feeling of the teachers standing up for Alberta students: that's going to stay with me forever. You know, I have to wonder how many of us here went to that powerful rally and listened to those teachers and how all of us will continue to hold that close to our hearts.

One thing for sure is that those teachers: they were very clear, and I think we all need to be clear about what they said because I don't know if people have heard what the teachers have asked for. The teachers have asked for smaller class sizes. They've asked for meaningful and sustainable, you know, complexity supports. They've asked for funding that actually keeps up with the number

of kids in the classroom. That's what they've asked for. They didn't ask for Bill 25.

Bill 25 is just another shortfall. It falls so short of what the teachers are actually requesting and asking for. The bill is being sold as a way to remove politics and ideology from a classroom, but kids absolutely do need to learn about politics. It's exciting. Politics should be exciting and different ideas should be exciting. It brings in collaboration and conversations.

One of my favourite things to do is to actually talk to kids within my constituency about democracy and about representation. I love letting them know, and I think we can all get that great hope when you see a little kid and you can say: "Guess what? You could also be a member of the Legislature. You could be a minister one day." It's exciting when a child is like: "Wow. I can do this?" To talk to kids about representing their constituents and creating policy to help people and to see their excitement: that's part of social studies. You know, I love watching their faces. I love watching their little faces light up that they can do what we are doing right now here in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, maybe not right now but when it's really good and we collaborate and we work together and listen to each other and, you know, have conversations.

Member Tejada: I think they'd be better behaved than some of us are in here.

Ms Hayter: I'm quite sure a lot of children would be way better behaved in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker. Anyways, back to the bill – also, the children of Calgary-Edgemont would sit very politely and respectfully and, you know, they would not get any points of order.

I find it so heartwarming, and when I get to see them at the different events throughout the weekend, they'll introduce me now to their neighbours and their friends and their family members. I've told them that. I said: come talk to me. Politicians should be approachable, and I love that the children of Calgary-Edgemont know that their MLA will read their e-mails and respond and have conversations with them.

Students need to learn how politics work, how power works, how decisions get made, how they can think critically, how to debate respectfully, and how to understand the world around them. Schools should not be partisan and they're not, but Bill 25 blurs that line in a way that is both overreaching and I find it insulting to teachers. It treats teachers like they cannot be trusted to do their job. You know, it's a job that they're already trained and required to do professionally. It treats honest conversations about society, about history, inequality, and current events as if it's a threat.

What does the bill do? Well, in true UCP fashion, it makes something Albertans can be passionate about, frames it into ideology, divisive issues, and then centralizes more power. Bill 25 removes language about schools being welcoming and respectful. This isn't necessary anymore, right? Like, we don't have to say that schools should be welcoming. We don't need to be clear that students and teachers deserve respect. That's all taken care of, apparently. It's done. This bill: it's done.

It also limits what school boards can say about social and political issues. Nothing bad has ever come from people being allowed to speak openly about the real things that happen in our communities. It restricts when flags can be displayed at schools, which I guess is exactly what teachers and parents have been asking for in all those e-mails we've been getting – not – while they try to manage those classrooms with 40-plus kids with complex needs. Of course, this is going to give a minister more control over decisions that used to belong to locally elected trustees. If there's one thing this government is consistent about, it's that decisions are always better when you've made it farther away from people that, you know, it'll affect.

Instead of addressing overcrowded classrooms or funding supports or helping teachers to do their job, we get Bill 25. The reality is that Alberta classrooms are in crisis right now; 80 per cent of our classrooms are dealing with medium or high complexity. Tens of thousands of classrooms have more than 27 students in them. Teachers are trying to support kids with very different needs and often without enough help. Instead of addressing that reality, the government is choosing to focus on flags and political language. Not leadership; distraction.

Bill 25 also tries to legislate neutrality for teachers. I've got some really fun facts today, Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Okay. Let's go.

Ms Hayter: Did you know that teachers already have a professional code of conduct, and it's already required that they don't impose their personal views on students, that teachers already are trained to facilitate discussions, not control it? So what problem is this bill going to solve? What I'm hearing from teachers is that it's not that they need more rules. What I'm hearing is that it's creating anxiety. It's making them now going to have to second-guess how they talk about real-world issues. It makes them worry about doing their jobs properly. Teaching is more than delivering facts. Teaching helps students think critically. It helps them understand the world that they're living in. As we know, sometimes our world is really complicated. Our world is complicated right now. I feel so bad for students right now, like, seeing what's happening. But I love that they're paying attention.

Right now my son is actually in grade 12 social studies. I'm very excited because I'm going to be a parent of a grad this year. But even last week as we were shopping for his suit, we were talking about his social studies class he'd had that day. My drives with my son right now are amazing, besides the family dinners, because we're having conversations about what he is learning in a social studies class. And even my son – we may not always agree, but I love that he is learning and that we are able to have those conversations and that he wants to share what he is learning. I love that he has a social studies that has ignited his passion to learn right now. That's what learning is about and why we go to school, to learn and to be excited to learn.

We ask teachers to cover so many difficult topics. You know, teachers are the ones that are responsible for teaching all of our families around residential schools. They've taught about colonialism, genocide, fascism, and terrorism. They are part of the Alberta curriculum. Again, what I guess I want to ask, and it's a curious question: what does neutrality mean in those contexts? Are teachers now going to be expected to present both sides of residential schools, both sides of genocide? That's where the idea of neutrality is getting really tricky. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission specifically calls for education about residential schools. We should be supporting our teachers to do that work while not making them afraid to do it.

5:50

Bill 25 is also going to take power away from our school boards. Boards need ministerial approval to hire their superintendents. It also gives the minister control of the surplus of school properties. Even the naming of the schools is going to require approval. Our trustees are elected. They're elected officials. Our trustees run campaigns. They put up signs. They get elected by the people that they're supposed to serve. But now, you know, I guess, even though they're elected to represent their communities and to make those local decisions, this bill is going to just sideline them. When you combine that with the recent decisions around school ownership and funding for private, charter spaces, it raises real concerns about

where this bill is at. We hear a lot from the UCP about red tape reduction and small government, that there's a lot of extra government. But you know what? School is not the place, and this would actually not help children. This is just more red tape.

Then we have this flag provision. No flags other than Alberta and Canada unless approved by regulation? I love the Member for Calgary-Klein speaking about the world map and all of the flags because one of the schools in my riding has the same thing. Every child who goes to that school has a flag, and it makes me so excited, especially when they tell me: "MLA Hayter, this is where I'm from. This is where I'm at." So now I have to ask: how does this help children learn to read? How does removing flags teach us how to read? How does it help teachers manage an overcrowded room with complex needs? It doesn't. It's not going to teach those things. But you know what it does do? It sends a really clear message, and for a lot of students it's going to send a clear message about their identity, their family's identity, their friend's identity because they're now political, and they're not welcome.

There is a very real concern of violence in our schools, and classrooms are becoming harder places to teach in and harder places to learn in. I am curious again: does this bill provide funding for staff? I didn't see it in there. Did not see it in there. Nope. Not in there. Does it put a real intervention framework in place? Nope. Not in here either. Does it give meaningful supports to prevent violence before it happens? No. What it does say is that students must refrain from violence, and it must be reported early. Respectfully, people already know that they should not engage in violent behaviour. If simply telling people not to do something worked, we would not be having this conversation. I think a lot of other people in the Chamber would actually be happy sometimes if we actually listened when we were told not to do something.

Teachers already have reporting obligations. They follow them. They are professionals. They are deeply committed to their students and keeping their classrooms safe. They don't want to manage violent situations either. The system is stretched too thin. When classrooms are overcrowded, when multiple students with complex needs don't have enough supports, when there are not enough educational assistants, when there is not enough time in the day: that's when situations escalate. Situations escalate when you are being so stretched thin as an educational assistant. You have one child with a behaviour in that classroom and another child with a behaviour in that classroom, and you miss that moment where that other child needs support because you're down the hall and you miss it. You feel your own guilt because you weren't there seeing what was going on with the students because you were so stretched thin going to so many different classrooms.

This bill is not going to fix this. This bill is not going to stop our classrooms from being unsafe, and nothing in this bill is going to fix any of those conditions.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to all who've risen to debate, especially on this bill, Bill 25. I've heard a lot of chirping, and I continue to hear chirping from the Member for Red Deer-South. You know, if he is so passionate, I would really urge him to get on the record and share his thoughts. He's had multiple opportunities. Same with the member from, you know, somewhere down south. He could also join debate . . . [interjections] I'll just let the Speaker intervene.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it might not be helpful for the speaker to make reference to other people, but the speaker might not feel the need if other people weren't talking on the speaker's time. If you want other conversations, there are places to do that.

For now only the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood should be heard.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will do what I can with my limited time. Fortunately, I'm predicting that I'll have lots of time to enter in fulsome debate on Bill 25. Any time that I can talk about education is a very good time. Having been a teacher and an administrator in rural Alberta as well as somebody who worked on curriculum with Alberta education for a number of years under consecutive Progressive Conservative ministers, might I add, you know, it is an issue that I'm extremely passionate about.

You know, I've spoken many times, actually, in this Chamber about my years teaching in Bawlf school. Any time I can mention Bawlf school, I love it. I think an angel gets its wings every time I mention Bawlf school. I jest a little bit, but I really, really did learn so much in my time teaching in rural Alberta and then being an administrator and then coming back to Edmonton to work on curriculum; in fact, to work on the social studies curriculum, which I'll be talking about in a moment.

You know, I do really wish that I would be using my time in the Chamber today to talk about how this UCP government is uplifting and supporting public education. Unfortunately, that's not what we see with Bill 25. You know what? There has never been a more important time for all of us – Albertans, Canadians, folks around the world – to believe in and invest in public education. Look no further than the most recent Artemis II expedition. Each one of those four astronauts was a product of public education – how fantastic is that? – including Canadian Jeremy Hansen, who did us all so very proud. Fun fact: he was also an air cadet, so he and I share that as well; 526 Barrhead Squadron for anybody who follows cadets. Yeah. Very cool.

Again, I point out that example of Artemis II to just show, you know, that teachers out there in Alberta today in public education classrooms may have future astronauts. They may have future doctors, lawyers, construction workers, whatever folks might be choosing to do in their classrooms. We need to be supporting and uplifting those students instead of whatever the heck this is. Instead, we get this bill.

I know I don't have a lot of time today. I'm going to just quickly focus on one of the most egregious parts of this bill, and that's the part around, you know, not wanting teachers to go beyond. We want teachers to be neutral; we want teachers to engage in both sides of the issue: that's a direct quote from this education minister. As I said, I spent much of my teaching career teaching high school social studies. High school social studies. In high school social studies classrooms all across this province teachers are engaging in critical debate all the time. Look at the social studies program of studies if you will if you haven't in a while. Again, a social studies program developed over many years with thoughtful insight from various stakeholders, again, created under Progressive Conservative ministers of education, might I add, as well.

When you look at that social studies program of studies, that social studies curriculum, it talks about things like perspectives on globalization, perspectives on nationalism, perspectives on ideology. One of my favourite courses, social studies 30-1 or social studies 30-2. I would urge those members opposite who we haven't yet heard from on this bill to talk about how they would teach perspectives on ideology. We're talking about issues like, you know, Nazism. We're talking about socialism in various countries around the world. We're talking about various ideologies in both historical context and in current context.

The Speaker: Hon. member, it pains me to interrupt you, but based on Standing Order 4(2) it is 6 o'clock, and we are now adjourned until 10 tomorrow morning.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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