



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 22, 2026

Day 50

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

McIver, Hon. Ric, ECA, Calgary-Hays (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),
Deputy Premier
Elmeligi, Sarah, Banff-Kananaskis (NDP)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP),
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Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
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(UC)
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Kasawski, Kyle, Sherwood Park (NDP)
Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP)
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)
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Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
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McDougall, Hon. Myles, ECA, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
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Miyashiro, Rob, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
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Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre
(UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Petrovic, Chelsae, Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Progressive Tory: 1

Independent: 1

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Trafton Koenig, Law Clerk

Vani Govindarajan, Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
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R.J. Sigurdson	Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
Searle Turton	Minister of Children and Family Services
Dan Williams	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Rick Wilson	Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
Muhammad Yaseen	Associate Minister of Multiculturalism

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Chelsae Petrovic	Parliamentary Secretary for Health Workforce Engagement
Jason Stephan	Parliamentary Secretary for Constitutional Affairs
Ron Wiebe	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (North)
Justin Wright	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (South)
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Lundy
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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 Ip
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 Rowswell
 Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 22, 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 Guests

The Speaker: We have Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you grade 6 students from John A. McDougall school. I think there are at least six or seven of them. Actually, there are 75 students here with their teachers. I hope they enjoyed their tour. I invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Six or seven, you say.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce members of the Canadian Association of Physician Assistants. I ask that they rise while I say their names: Kirsten, Hannah, Alana, Kristy, and Muhammad. They are here to give us all an opportunity to meet with them, earlier today and some of us later this afternoon. I look forward to learning more about how they're going to help us. Take good care.

The Speaker: Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. You know, in this job, you've got to have your reasons why you're doing it. Sometimes your reason why is standing there right in front of you, like my daughter Neko. Neko, if you could rise, I'd like to introduce you to the Assembly, and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members Jingqiu Shao, a software engineer, an entrepreneur, and, of course, my constituent. She is joined by her parents, Kun Yuan Shao and Da Fang Liu, and her daughter Michelle. She's also joined by our friend and former Edmonton city councillor Jennifer Rice. May I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Fir: Well, 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, if I may say it, one of your favourites, my mom, Josie Fir, and friends and constituents Lyle Rowe and Diana Rowe. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you my brother-in-law, who's visiting the Assembly for the first time. Please stand up and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my dear friend Ken Moesker, a town councillor in the town of Rocky Mountain House. We've been doing it since 1799 out there, 227 years, Mr. Speaker. All that time, almost a quarter of a millennia, this House has been trying to cause trouble for that community, but Ken makes sure they don't, and we're going to keep doing it for years to come.

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you someone who's known me since the day I was born, my older but little brother Jonathan Schow, and my sister-in-law Hannah Schow. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so honoured today to introduce to you and through you Dr. Richard Rabeeh, Dr. Erin Stolte, and Dr. Trishnee Chinniah, and Anita Braun, a mother of two kids who are at the Glenrose right now. They came here to visit us today. These people are proof that angels do walk among us. Please rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: Are there more introductions?

Mr. McDougall: I rise to introduce six members of the team from Building Trades of Alberta, including Executive Director Terry Parker. Building Trades of Alberta is a great partner who advocates for more than 60,000 workers in the construction, maintenance, and fabrication industries. Thank you to them for being here. I would invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other introductions? Seeing none.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The Member for Camrose.

Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government is committed to ensuring that every cancer patient has the support they need. Today our government announced two important initiatives that will strengthen cancer care, improve early detection, and ease the burden on patients and families across our province. Breast cancer remains one of the most common cancers affecting Alberta women, and when it's caught early, outcomes are significantly better. That's why we're expanding access to self-referral breast cancer screening so all women aged 40 and over can access. By lowering the screening age, we are empowering more women to take charge of their health and access care sooner, helping detect cancer earlier, when it's most treatable. Alberta already leads the

country in breast cancer screening rates, and this change builds on that strong foundation.

A cancer diagnosis can be life altering, especially for young patients who hope to start or grow a family. For many concerns about fertility are second only to survival itself. That's why our government is investing \$2.25 million to establish a new oncofertility program led by Cancer Care Alberta in partnership with Fertility Alberta. Fertility preservation focuses on preserving a patient's ability to have children before cancer treatments begin, ensuring that patients have options for their future. This program will provide timely fertility consultations, better patient navigation, and co-ordinated financial support to help Alberta cancer patients preserve their family. It builds on the province-wide oncofertility pathway provided in 2025, which standardized screening and streamlined referrals across the system. Once fully implemented, it is expected to support between 250 and 400 patients per year.

Mr. Speaker, cancer patients should be able to focus on healing, not navigating complex systems or facing impossible choices under tight timelines. These initiatives reflect our government's commitment to compassionate, patient-centred care.

Earth Day

Dr. Elmeligi: Mr. Speaker, it's Earth Day. Globally billions of people will gather to take action and support environmental protection in their local communities, from planting trees and litter cleanup to advocating for better legislation to protect our one and only home. The Earth provides us with everything to survive and thrive: clean air, clean water, abundant recreation opportunities, health and wellness, and, of course, economic opportunities from resource extraction to restoration and beyond.

Albertans love our natural spaces and our parks and have repeatedly spoken in support of them. Nature does a lot of work to support our economy and communities, and we can make choices to maximize nature-based solutions. We can plan forestry and development to maximize carbon sequestration of forests and native grasslands. We can support landowners to steward wetlands and reintroduce beavers to our headwaters to improve water filtration and flood and drought protection. We can support road reclamation, reduce habitat fragmentation and soil erosion because healthy, intact landscapes stabilize our soil, cycle nutrients, and provide abundant wildlife habitat. We can weave Indigenous knowledge within land-use planning and management because the wisdom of effective stewardship since time immemorial is held within Indigenous voices.

The UCP conversely chooses to view environmental regulations as burdensome. They refuse to hold the AER accountable to enforce existing regulations. They cancelled funding for the Alberta Water Council, the Land Stewardship Centre, and the Alberta clean air alliance, eliminating critical on-the-ground programs that made a difference every day. They erased park boundaries for development and then changed the definition of protected areas to make it look like more of Alberta is protected. They repeatedly ignore First Nations who call for better management of lands, water, and air. They are stealthily degrading our environment and parks every day.

The Alberta NDP knows that a healthy environment and a healthy economy are intricately connected. We have the solutions and strategies to foster a strong economy and protect our environment, and we can't wait to share those solutions with Albertans.

The Speaker: Airdrie-East.

1:40

Alberta Spirit

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is truly something special about Alberta. Anyone who has watched the sun rise over the prairies or taken in the crisp air of a clear Alberta morning knows exactly what I mean. Alberta's natural beauty is unlike anywhere else in the world. It's the kind of place that stays with you; the kind of place people work hard to call home. It's what truly makes Alberta amazing; not only the land, but it's also the people who live here.

Across this province, hard-working Albertans rise up early, they stay up late, and they put in the effort it takes to make a good life for their families. In every corner of this province you see people who believe in the value of hard work and in supporting their neighbours when it matters most. This spirit is what built Alberta. For generations people have come here because they believe that if you are willing to work hard, there is an opportunity waiting for you. They saw potential in the land and in the resources beneath our feet and in the communities that welcomed them. Through determination and perseverance, Albertans transform those opportunities into thriving towns, strong industries, and a dynamic economy that continues to create possibilities for families right across this province. Alberta offers something rare, the chance for people to build something meaningful in their own effort.

As a government our role is to support the people who make Alberta what it is. Our focus is on creating conditions where hard-working Albertans can succeed and where families can build their futures. All the things that make Alberta remarkable – the land, the opportunity, the people who work hard every day – are the foundations for our future. By continuing to support those strengths, our government is helping to ensure that Alberta remains not only a remarkable place to live, but the best place in the world to build a life and raise a family.

Thank you.

Food Prices and Affordability

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I followed with interest that this UCP government was meeting with retailers to inform them about the high cost of food prices in Alberta. Well, news flash: food retailers know very well about the high cost of food because they're the ones that are setting the prices. Empowering giant grocery chains to manage the high cost of food is like putting the fox in charge of the henhouse.

All Albertans already know very well that the prices for food are way too high. We are experiencing record food bank use, including on campus. Some of our colleges, universities, and polytechnics report up to 40 per cent of students experiencing food insecurity. Just think about that. This UCP government's affordability plan is to lecture Albertans about their shopping habits: buy bulk, hunt for sales, check to see if the eggs are cracked, eat less food.

The UCP has claimed over and over again that they can't do anything about this crisis. That's not true. A major part of the cost of groceries is transportation. This UCP government could eliminate the provincial tax on gas right here, right now, and the price of food could fall in short order. There are many more measures that we could enact in this Legislature that would help with families' monthly budgets. My colleague from Calgary-Currie will have some practical solutions to share tomorrow.

Albertans know that Alberta's New Democrats are here to make life more affordable for you and your family, to make sure that high-quality public health care is there when Albertans need it, to make sure that every dollar of public money is accounted for and is

being spent to make life better. Better is possible. We have your back every step of the way.

Farmers and Land Stewardship

Mrs. Sawyer: Mr. Speaker, long before there was an Earth Day, there were farmers, and long before stewardship became a policy goal, it was simply a way of life. Farmers were the first stewards of the land because our livelihoods, our families, and our future depend on it, making deliberate decisions today that shape cropland, pasture, and water for years, often generations, to come. Stewardship means thinking beyond one harvest or one season, because when you care for the soil, it cares for you.

That responsibility is why today's farmers are innovators and why modern agriculture doesn't match outdated stereotypes. Farmers use GPS-guided equipment with inch-level accuracy, and modern seed and fertilizer technologies are applied precisely where they're required; no more, no less. These tools and practices allow farmers and ranchers to reduce fuel use, preserve water, strengthen soil health, and ensure Canadians have access to safe, reliable food every single day. This is what growing more with less truly means: sound science, data-driven decisions, and generations of real-world experience working together.

It's because of this that Canadian agriculture is recognized globally as a leader in sustainability and trust, yet too often the picture of Canadian agriculture isn't what people see or hear, and that matters. Elected officials have an important role to play in helping bridge that gap by speaking openly and accurately about the good work farmers are doing and by ensuring urban and global audiences hear those success stories. That is how trust is built. Farms like mine don't last for generations without caring deeply for the land. That responsibility is passed down because this work isn't about one season; it's about legacy.

Earth Day is about caring for the land. For farmers and ranchers, that care is not a slogan; it's our life's work and how we feed the world. We are partners with the land, and we always have been.

Alberta Energy Regulator CEO

Mr. Schmidt: When you suspect a person is breaking the law, you investigate. When you get a confession of guilt, you hold the guilty person accountable unless that person is the CEO of the Alberta Energy Regulator. Confronted with whether the Energy Regulator is upholding its duty to enforce a ministerial order, blocking the transfer of wealth to licensees who owe more than \$20,000 in unpaid municipal taxes, the CEO refused to show proof that he'd followed the law. The minister should enforce his own directive, but when I asked him to investigate, the minister didn't defend the law; he attacked me. I asked whether the CEO had met, possibly illegally, with the minister's chief of staff to discuss an application by Valory Resources to cancel public hearings. The CEO admitted that he had in fact taken that meeting.

But when I asked the minister whether he would fire this CEO, who publicly admitted to conduct that raises serious legal and independence concerns, the minister responded by talking about the Orphan Well Association. Not only did the minister get the agency wrong; he couldn't even get the fossil fuel right. The Orphan Well Association deals with oil and gas. Valory Resources mines coal.

Responsible economic development must be built on the rule of law, strong regulations applied fairly and consistently to protect the public interest. When the rule of law disappears, economic development in the public interest disappears along with it, and the winners are those who have political connections instead of those with the strongest projects.

There's an old saying: a fish rots from the head. When accountability fails at the top, problems spread throughout the organization. The CEO has demonstrated that he's rotten, and the minister must defend the rule of law and restore fairness to development in this province. The minister must fire the CEO of the Alberta Energy Regulator.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

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

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Motion 40, sponsored by myself, which reads as follows.

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 41 and for the duration of the 2026 spring sitting of the second session of the 31st Legislature, the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business unless the Government House Leader notifies the Assembly that there shall be no evening sitting that day by providing notice under Notices of Motions in the daily Routine or at any time prior to 6 p.m.

I also wish to give oral notice of Bill 32, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026, sponsored by the hon. Minister of Justice.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a CBC article titled We Asked Canada's Premiers If They Fly Private. Here's What They Said.

The Speaker: Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of the front page of Tuesday's *Calgary Sun*, which features a full page photo of the Premier with a bold editorial headline Time to Go, and millions of Albertans wholeheartedly . . .

The Speaker: Yeah. You don't get to debate it. You just get to introduce it.

Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an e-mail to the UCP from Parachutes for Pets safekeeping and angel team program calling on the UCP to restore their funding for the vital program.

The Speaker: Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is a news release from Mikisew Cree First Nation titled Health Impact Study Shows [Fort Chipewyan] . . . Sees Extremely High Levels of Rare Cancers.

The second one is the Aboriginal consultation office digital service report on the wonder valley project, which identifies level 1 of consultation.

1:50

The Speaker: Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much. Alberta's edition of the *Globe and Mail*: from Premier Rachel Notley an opinion piece, Possible Changes to Alberta's Electoral Map Put Democracy At Risk.

The Speaker: Okay. There's a bunch more, so we'll come back to tablings after question period.

Oral Question Period

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

Electoral Boundaries

Mr. Nenshi: Mr. Speaker, we know that the UCP wrote the minority report in the Electoral Boundaries Commission. We know that was going too far even for them. It was shameless and it was egregious, and they've now backed down. The Premier now claims that the new scheme her government has cooked up, not at all independent, will somehow not be gerrymandering. But in recommendation 5 that the Premier often quotes, Justice Miller clearly says to leave Calgary and Edmonton alone. Can the Premier commit that her new process will leave Calgary and Edmonton alone?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The intent of going to 91 seats, as was recommended by the judge and commented on by all of the commissioners and commented on even by some of the members opposite as being necessary, is intended to preserve the representation in Calgary and Edmonton without sacrificing any representation for rural. That is the intention. The intention as well is to preserve as much of the majority report as possible. There will be some knock-on effects by adding those two, but we're going to let the committee do its work to be able to sort that out.

Mr. Nenshi: That was a lot of words to simply avoid saying yes.

We need to leave Calgary and Edmonton alone. The judge's recommendation 5 clearly says, in fact, that no changes should be made south of Airdrie, except for a small change to Drumheller-Stettler, and that only a tiny change needs to happen within Edmonton and the Edmonton region. But adding two rural seats and keeping it constitutional isn't that easy. It actually means redrawing the entire map, so why shouldn't we consult the public given that we're redrawing the entire map?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There will be knock-on effects by adding in two additional rural ridings, but the intention and what the judge gave his advice on was how to do that with the minimal impact on the rest of the majority report. I trust that the committee that is going to be represented by both sides of this Chamber will be able to navigate that through and make the right decisions. I trust that the advisory committee will look at the volumes of material that was submitted through the public consultation process and be able to also make that kind of surgical decision.

Mr. Nenshi: The government didn't trust those volumes of material when they were submitted to the independent boundary, and they tried to change it because they didn't like the results. Let's be clear here. The Premier is not trying to solve the problem of rural representation. She's trying to solve an internal caucus problem. One of her ministers and one of her back-row backbenchers will

lose their seats under the minority report. But simply adding back Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland doesn't just have simple knock-on effects, as the Premier says; it requires an entire redraw. Let's set it up, Premier. How much less should a Calgarian's vote be worth: half, a third, or less?

The Speaker: I would just caution us all that we all have titles here and none of the titles here are "back-row backbenchers." "Private members" would be an appropriate thing or even "backbenchers," but trying to add an insult in it is probably a bad idea.

Go ahead, Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The intention of adding two seats is to preserve what the committee determined was the appropriate representation in Calgary and Edmonton without losing two rural seats. There is a mechanism in the act where you can be under or over by 20 per cent from the average. There's the opportunity to do that with four seats. That is clearly what some of the consideration will have to be of the independent committee that is looking at this, with the advisory committee looking at all of the documentation that was submitted through the course of the public consultation.

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

Mr. Nenshi: Well, here's hoping that the UCP nonindependent committee will actually listen to that answer and take the Premier at her word and not try to gerrymander the map again, but we will be watching.

Citizen-initiated Referendums

Mr. Nenshi: Now, let's talk about Mitch Sylvestre. Mitch Sylvestre is a very influential member of the UCP; a UCP party president, in fact. He said that the Premier made him a deal. He claimed that she told him: "Don't worry about those pesky Indigenous court cases. I'm going to give you your referendum no matter what." Can the Premier confirm she had this conversation with Mr. Sylvestre and what promises she made to the separatist leaders?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, clearly we are watching what happens with the court decision. The judge has asked for there to be no validation of signatures until she has had a chance to render her decision, which I think we'll be expecting in a matter of weeks or months. We on this side of the Chamber are going to watch that with great interest, and we'll abide by what we see from the court judgment.

The Speaker: I'll gently, I hope, remind both sides that when you're talking about something before the courts, you're careful not to prejudice the case. I don't think anybody has done that yet, but you've all been warned.

Mr. Nenshi: But what if that court judgment violates the promise that the Premier has made to Mr. Sylvestre and the separatist leaders? How will she handle that then? You know, the Premier has recently changed her word salad. Recently, she said that she favours an independent Alberta within a sovereign Canada. I think even she doesn't know what that means. Last summer she said that she had to pander to the separatists, otherwise she would lose her own political future. Sure, the latest poll shows that the majority of UCP supporters have become separatists. Can we expect that the Premier will not lift a finger to help the remain-in-Canada side?

Ms Smith: Well, the latest poll I saw showed that if an election were held today, we'd get 70 seats and they'd get 17.

Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that there was a question of policy that was asked in that question, but I can say that, yes, we will defend the Constitution. That has been in our founding documents from the beginning, that we support our sovereign, independent, autonomous – whatever term you want to use. We support what the rules are in the Constitution that divide the powers between the federal and provincial governments: sections 91 through 95, if the member wants to refresh his memory on what those are. That's what we're going to continue to advocate for.

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier's confidence in her own popularity would ring a little more true if they weren't trying so hard to gerrymander the next election and to put nondemocratic processes in place. Call an election now, Premier. We're happy to take you up on it.

All of that said, despite the Premier's promises to the separatists, she's also promised this House that she would not put an unconstitutional question before the people. Justice Feasby has already said that the separatist question is unconstitutional. Which question did she promise Mitch Sylvestre he will get his referendum on?

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition knows that all of his comments, not just most of them, have to go through the chair.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure they have enough money to run an election right now. They ran a deficit last year, kind of the way they ran government when they were in power, racking up \$80 billion worth of debt that we're still paying for today.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to watch what the court has to say on this issue. Obviously, Elections Alberta has to wait and abide the judgment, and we're going to be very interested in seeing what that judgment is. Meanwhile there's an independent committee of this Legislature that is looking at the forever Canada petition and deciding what to do with that question as well. [interjections]

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

Mr. Nenshi: Well, I think the Premier has given up her right to lecture anybody on being good with money when she wasted a boom during a boom with a \$9.4 billion deficit and no tax relief.

Surgical Wait Times

Mr. Nenshi: Now, yesterday the minister of hospitals said, somewhat surprisingly, that there are spare ORs in the public system. They're just never in use on the evenings and on the weekends. They've been in power for seven years. This seems like a pretty easy fix if it's true. Hire the staff, schedule the appointments, get Albertans their surgeries. Instead, they're giving private companies millions of dollars to build new ORs. Why don't they fix the system and schedule those surgeries in the public system?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We reduced corporate income taxes. We reduced personal income taxes, \$1.5 billion actually returned to taxpayers. They increased corporate taxes. They increased personal taxes. They added a brand new carbon tax. We'll put our record up against theirs any day of the week. [interjections]

2:00

The Speaker: You know, not everybody's quiet here. I get that, but generally we don't heckle our own question.

Go ahead.

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier seems to have forgotten that she's increased property taxes in Calgary by 50 per cent in two years, but it's a great way to avoid talking about her dismal record on health care.

Yesterday the minister broke some news in the Chamber, as he sometimes does, and he said that they're building a voucher system where people can go to any private American-style clinic to get their surgeries done. Vouchers have never worked outside of right-wing think tank ideology. Is the government actually doing this further privatization, and how will it reduce wait times in the public system?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's remember who raised property taxes 81 per cent in his time as mayor. It's the member opposite.

We announced an incredible announcement today that is going to allow women to self-refer so that they can get early cancer screening, and we're very, very hopeful that more women will take us up on paying for this option because early diagnosis means early treatment. What we're trying to do with all of our preventative health referrals is to allow people that choice so that they can get the care they need, get treatment they need, and get back to . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Only the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: You know, when I left office, Calgary had the lowest property taxes in the country, and this Premier is going to increase them in three years by more than we did in 15, Mr. Speaker.

The real issue here is that she doesn't want to talk about vouchers. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. We don't have to like the question, and we don't have to like the answer, but we are required to hear both of them.

Go ahead.

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier has talked about vouchers her whole career: for education, for health care, just not savings on gas or groceries. We know that centralized intake works. We know that it reduces wait times. We know that sending people all over the province to beg for services and get rescreenings doesn't work. So the real question is: will these vouchers come with the Sam Mraiche loyalty card to get free skybox tickets?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not only did he increase property taxes 81 per cent; he increased his own pay, and he also retired with three pensions. Not one; three pensions.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we actually agree on the point. We actually agree on the point of central intake. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. I tried to protect the question, and now I get to try to protect the answer.

Ms Smith: On the point of central intake, that's exactly what our minister of primary and preventative care is doing. It's our FAST program so that if your surgeon has a long waiting list and you want to get to the first available surgeon, you can go through that and get assigned to a surgeon who will treat you faster. That's the kind of approach we're taking, Mr. Speaker, and vouchers are going to help with that, too.

Citizen Initiative Proposal Review

Ms Pancholi: “The citizen initiative process is meant to be permissive . . . It’s not meant to have any gatekeepers stop them in that process.” That’s how the Premier defends making a separatist referendum as easy as possible. But when it comes to the half million Albertans who signed the forever Canada petition, well, then she loves gatekeeping. First the UCP delayed setting up the committee to review the petition. Then they refused to set the first meeting for six weeks. Now the UCP is slow rolling the work of that committee, all to avoid responding to the petition before the separatists get their referendum. Will the UCP admit that they have no problem gatekeeping the views of Albertans who actually love Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for the question. I’ve said many times that the government believes in direct democracy. We believe in listening to what the people want, particularly on important issues like making sure they have themselves heard when it comes to having a sovereign, independent Alberta within a united Canada. Now, they are very upset because the last time we put the choice to the people of Alberta, they rejected them for a second time in a row. They don’t like listening to Albertans. On this side of the House we’re going to listen, and we’re going to let the process play out.

Ms Pancholi: “Public participation in a democratic process is never a waste of time. I think it’s important that we respect those who are taking the time to go out and to vet these ideas by their fellow citizens.” Again the words of the Premier don’t match her actions. Yesterday the UCP forever Canada committee members delayed the committee’s work again. The petition was tabled five months ago, but the UCP voted against expediting the committee’s work and letting Thomas Lukaszuk present. The chair wouldn’t even set the next meeting date. The UCP is terrified of voting in this Legislature on whether they support Alberta staying in Canada. Why are they wasting and disrespecting the time of Albertans?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, if we’re going to talk about disrespect, let’s talk about the record of the NDP and what they did to Alberta in the four short years while they were in government. They put historic debt back on the shoulders of Albertans. We’re servicing that debt to this day. The reality is that that disrespect translated into an election loss in 2019 and in 2023. Albertans have no time for the nonsense of the members opposite. On this side of the House we will continue to listen, continue to create jobs, attract investment, and do what we were elected to do.

Ms Pancholi: Let’s be clear, Mr. Speaker. The UCP is burying the forever Canada petition because it wasn’t part of their plan all along to push a separatist referendum forward. They’ve removed every barrier for their separatist friends and supporters at every step of the way, and now they’re intentionally delaying the forever Canada petition until after a separatism referendum is held this fall. At this point every time the UCP crows about supporting direct democracy, Albertans should have a good laugh. Why doesn’t the Premier just admit that she only supports direct democracy if it’s to further her favourite cause: separatism?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has said many times that she favours an independent Alberta within a united Canada. The members opposite are concerned about process. I’m happy that we are following the process. The report was tabled. The committee

was struck. The committee has since met. Now we’re waiting for the chair to call another meeting. Now, the members opposite may be frustrated that it’s not happening . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Sorry. I’m going to share a secret. You know, nobody at home can hear anything except the person in front of the microphone, but the rest of us need to be able to hear that person, too.

Go ahead and finish.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All the members opposite know how to do is shout and create disorder in this Chamber. It’s par for the course for them. On this side of the House there’s a process. We’re following it, and there’s more to come.

The Speaker: I don’t think I heard a point of order there, did I? Okay. I heard something; I just wasn’t sure what it was.

We’re past question 4 now, so there are no more preambles on the supplementaries.

Surgical Procedure Coverage

Ms Hoffman: Yesterday one of the UCP health ministers said that they’re going to create a voucher system for health care. That’s right. Just like they’ve been attacking public education and pushing more privatization in schools, now they want to double down and do it to our hospitals. The minister proudly said that he’d shift needed surgeries out of the public system with vouchers to get them done elsewhere. Wait times have gotten worse because of the UCP. If he wants to deal with wait times, we can absolutely help, physician assistants can help, but vouchers: are you serious?

An Hon. Member: I didn’t hear a question.

The Speaker: I did hear a question there. The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Too many people in this country and in Alberta are waiting too long for surgery. What we want to do when you cross the clinically recommended timeline threshold is to send you a letter and say that any surgical provider in Alberta who is accredited by the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta and who’s approved by Acute Care Alberta can do your surgery. We want to connect the patient with those providers, the quickest provider available or closest to them, so they can get that surgery immediately and publicly funded, done within Alberta by Albertans for Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the Premier promised to protect public health care in the election but it’s clear every day that the UCP just wants American-style private health care and given that they’ve already taken away public ownership of our hospitals and jacked up fees that seniors pay for their drugs and given that now the minister is finally admitting that he wants vouchers for surgeries, won’t they come clean about their plan all along? It was to erode public health care. If they want to keep acting like the U.S., admit that they want American-style health care and run on it already.

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you Mr. Speaker. We don’t think an Albertan waiting for a surgery should have to wait for one particular surgeon and one particular facility. If they cross clinically recommended timelines, they should have all options in Alberta available to them

to get a publicly funded surgery by a provider that is accredited by the College of Physicians & Surgeons and approved by Acute Care Alberta. We're going to expand choice, we're going to expand access, and we're putting record amounts of money into surgeries in Alberta. [interjections]

2:10

The Speaker: Are we finished? We only need to hear from Edmonton-Glenora now. [interjections] Order. You know, I'm getting tired of my own voice. You must be getting tired of it, too.

Now we only need to hear from Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the minister just admitted that he wants the public health care system to fail and then he wants people to take a voucher and go somewhere else and given that the UCP is failing Albertans, especially after the Premier promised to fix it in 100 days, because wait times are up, corruption is up, and the UCP is going to court to try to cover it up, and given that following Tyler Shandro's legacy of disrespect and the DynaLife debacle isn't too high a bar – you would think that ministers would be able to outdo that legacy – will the minister of hospitals at least promise to stop his privatization voucher scheme before that boondoggle becomes his legacy?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can confirm that we're going to continue to support a publicly funded health care system at record levels for Albertans, including our largest surgical program in Alberta's history, much larger than under the previous government. Last year we did around 318,000 public surgeries. This year: 332,000 publicly provided. The voucher program that the member opposite is concerned about: publicly funded by the same health care workers for the same Albertan patients. Why is she opposed to shortening wait times and expanding access to Albertans?

Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, with 1 in 2 Albertans expected to be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime, Albertans' government is committed to ensuring that all Albertans have the support they need and have access to essential life-saving programs. Today our government announced new initiatives to strengthen early detection screening and fertility preservation services for patients in need. Can the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services explain how screening and early detection will help improve cancer prevention and treatment outcomes for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of preventative health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is taking action to ensure Albertans have access to several life-saving cancer screenings across the province to support early detection. We also are lowering the self-referral age for women to access breast cancer screening to age 40 and over without a physician referral. This change will allow more than 193,000 additional Alberta women to be eligible for barrier-free breast cancer screening to help detect cancer earlier, often before symptoms appear. I think we all know someone with breast cancer. It's much needed.

The Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister for that great answer. Given that a cancer diagnosis and undergoing cancer treatment can be frightening for Albertans and

can lead to uncertainty about having children and growing a family and further given that cancer patients identified fertility as their second-highest concern due to the significant financial and emotional burdens of accessing fertility treatment options in the province, can the same minister describe what initiatives our government is pursuing to support Alberta cancer patients, especially for fertility and family planning?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the oncofertility pathway was introduced last year to standardize screening and streamline referrals to fertility clinics for cancer patients of reproductive age. Today we announced that Alberta's government is also providing \$2.25 million to Cancer Care Alberta in partnership with Fertility Alberta to create a new oncofertility program to support cancer patients facing urgent fertility decisions. No one chooses cancer, but we want to help them through that process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister for that great answer. Given that many Albertans will be eager to access these new initiatives assisting with early breast cancer screening and cancer fertility and further given that cancer patients often face tight timelines and cannot afford added delays when accessing essential screenings, treatment, and oncofertility services, can the same minister please explain when Albertans can expect this new breast cancer screening age limit to be lowered to the age of 40 and when fertility preservation supports will be available in the province?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 1, 2027, all women aged 40 and older will be eligible for self-referral for breast cancer screening without a physician referral. Until then women aged 40 to 44 can access screening with a one-time physician referral, and women aged 45 and older can continue to self-refer. Additionally, Cancer Care Alberta and Fertility Alberta's partnership to expand Alberta's oncofertility program will be developed and implemented in '26-27. I'm looking forward to adding more to this in the future.

Food Prices and Affordability

Mr. Kasawski: The Premier flies around in private jets. Entitled Conservatives are going to be entitled, I guess, but real Albertans are struggling to pay all of their bills. People buying groceries hope that their credit card won't be over its limit at the till. Given that every week Albertans are cutting back on fresh food, skipping meals, and relying on food banks just to get by, why has this government done nothing while grocery prices have risen 40 per cent in just a few years?

The Speaker: The minister of utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for that question. Our government is putting an all-ministry approach. Everyone here comes to work to serve Albertans and put them first. That's why we've worked on the supply-demand curve on food prices. We have seen production increase, we've seen investment increase, we've seen processing increase, we've seen business investment increase, and we've seen red tape reduction increase. We're serving Albertans. What's happening is that the NDP support the federal policies that drive the prices up on everything.

Mr. Kasawski: Given this government is so out of touch that they failed to notice most grocery prices climbing 40 per cent since the

UCP came into power and given this government thinks flying on luxury private jets is appropriate for the Premier and given this government spent a quarter of a million dollars on new carpet for the Premier's office while they voted against measures to curb high grocery costs, why did the Premier wait until just this week to ask one minister to meet with grocery companies instead of taking on meaningful action to reduce grocery prices?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, it's ironic coming from that caucus that brought in the largest tax in our province's history, the carbon tax. The good news for them is that it worked. It made everything more expensive, and that was their goal, so congratulations. We have a different approach on this side of the House. We're actually meeting with the grocers of this country, and we're having difficult conversations with them and asking them: how can we lower prices for Albertans? They made everything more expensive. We're going to do our darndest to make it cheaper.

Mr. Kasawski: Talk is cheap; groceries are not.

Given that people are actually putting groceries back on the shelf because they cannot afford them and given that Manitoba has launched a province-led grocery pricing study and removed barriers to retail competition but Alberta has done nothing comparable and given the minister has only been tasked to listen to the grocery companies that earn a fortune charging Albertans for their food that they need, when will this government stop pretending grocery prices aren't their responsibility? When will they start to solve the problem and take concrete action?

Mr. Nally: The NDP won't be happy until they have Soviet-style bread lines. In fact, Avi Lewis himself has been advocating for public grocery stores. Well, I've got some news for Avi Lewis. We already have public grocery stores. It's called Co-op. And you know what? Their prices aren't all that much lower. So you know what we're doing? Something they wouldn't think of: we're sitting down with the top grocers. We're listening to them and finding out what we can do to bring meaningful change to grocery prices in this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Maybe it's a good time for everybody to just breathe in and breathe out while we listen to Edmonton-City Centre.

2:20 Citizen-initiated Referendums (continued)

Mr. Shepherd: It seems separatists and the UCP have a lot in common. Yesterday Elections Alberta went to court to force the Alberta Prosperity Project to show just how much they're spending and who's paying for their province-wide separatism campaign. Like the UCP, it seems the APP have a lot to hide from the public. They're stalling, trying to run out the clock, and they might succeed since last year the Justice minister made massive cuts to the time Elections Alberta has to investigate political finance violations. To the Premier: is it this government's policy to change laws to help every far-right con artist and grifter or just the ones who are friends with the UCP?

The Speaker: Now while we're breathing in and out again, we should all listen to the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Conspiracy theories abound. Elections Alberta and the work that they do is fully independent of what government or caucus members in the United Conservative Party do. This is a matter between Elections Alberta and the Alberta Prosperity Project. It has nothing to do with

government policy. It has nothing to do with any of the work or any of the ministries that are sitting on this side of this Chamber. We're going to let the matter play out in court as it should.

The Speaker: Okay. Let's all keep breathing except Edmonton-City Centre.

Well, I don't want you to stop breathing, but you know what I'm saying. We're going to hear from you now.

Mr. Shepherd: Now, given the Premier's close ties to leaders of Alberta separatism is a matter of record, including Dr. Dennis Modry, for whom she tried to interfere in a criminal case, and Mitch Sylvestre, president of a UCP constituency association, and given that's likely why the UCP have changed multiple laws multiple times to help them force a vote on separation this fall with no regard for the cost to the taxpayer, our economy, or the stability of our province, to the government: are there any further plans to use the Legislature or Alberta's tax dollars to support the Premier's friends in the separatist movement?

The Speaker: Only the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The plans are to represent Albertans and the needs of Albertans every step of the way. This is all about direct democracy, and this government supports the ability for Albertans to weigh in on important issues. We've said that time and again. The whole purpose of citizen-led initiatives is to allow citizens to weigh in. Now, the NDP loathe the idea of allowing Albertans to weigh in on things. We support it. We embrace it. We'll do everything we can to make sure that's the case, and we'll continue to support Albertans, unlike the NDP.

Mr. Shepherd: Now, given that this government supports some democracy because given the Premier and Justice minister have repeatedly claimed they had to make it harder for Albertans to vote to protect against fraud in our elections but given they don't seem to have the same concerns with their friends in the separatist movement because given while evidence shows individual voter fraud is virtually nonexistent, separatist leaders brag about meeting with the Trump administration to ask for their help even as they refuse to show who's funding their campaign to tear our province out of Canada, why is it that the Premier and her government trust their separatist friends so much more than everyday Albertans?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP opposition, we have said time and again that our system of governance, that our system of democracy embraces and encourages the participation of Albertans in public debates and public discourse. Every piece of legislation that this government has tabled has been intended to increase accountability, transparency, and making sure that Albertans have unfettered access to vote in legitimate elections that Albertans can feel confident in, and that's exactly what our legislation does. It'll continue to do that.

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

Child and Youth Mental Health Supports

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children are our future, so it's absolutely critical that we support them in all aspects. We have heard stories of children who are struggling with mental health. Often they go under the radar as it can be difficult to seek help. In fact, in my region in the north 25 per cent of those accessing community mental health services are under the age of 17. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: what access to support is available for youth

who are struggling with mental health, specifically those who are experiencing major crisis or emergencies?

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the great question. The mental health of our children and youth has always been a top priority for me and our government. While our goal is to provide support for anyone that is in crisis, young Albertans can access mental health services 24/7 anywhere by contacting 211 Alberta, our Kids Help Phone, or even the 988 suicide crisis help line; 211 Alberta can also help families connect with a range of supports, including more intensive supports for children and youth in crisis. Help is available. Please reach out if you need it.

The Speaker: Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. In the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo about 5,200 people out of every 100,000 people who went to the ER last year went because of mental health or substance abuse issues. This rate is six times higher than the provincial average. Further given that some of these cases require care in very specialized facilities as these issues can be compounded by opioids and other psychological issues, to the same minister: what in-patient child psychiatry units are available for those with extremely complex mental health issues and that are in need of round-the-clock care?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his great advocacy. The Alberta recovery model offers a wide range of mental health supports, including in-patient and psychiatry services for children and youth with severe complex needs. For example, in northeastern Alberta the Northern Lights regional health centre provides acute mental health assessment and stabilization for young Albertans in crisis. In Edmonton the Glenrose rehabilitation hospital offers highly specialized child and adolescent psychiatry care for complex cases. In-patient care is available.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that youth mental health issues can have long-lasting effects that bleed into adulthood and given that healthy and stable relationships positively impact young people's lives by giving them an outlet that they can lean on and further given that some children require ongoing supports and services, to the same minister: how will our government integrate with schools and community services for youth who experience complex, extreme, and comorbid mental health issues?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Early support absolutely can shape a child's future and help them and their families feel supported and connected. Through school-based mental health initiatives such as CASA Mental Health classrooms, the integrated school support program, and the mental health capacity building in schools program, young Albertans are receiving mental health supports in schools. We're also supporting the construction of more CASA houses, which provide live-in and day programming for young people with complex needs. With the help of our partners

young Albertans are being supported to build the foundation needed for long-term recovery and wellness.

Wonder Valley AI Data Centre Project

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, last week the Aboriginal consultation office quietly issued notification to O'Leary Digital Limited for the wonder valley AI data centre. Curiously, they decided that this project, the largest AI data centre in the world, only requires a minimal level 1 consultation. With anticipated increased air emissions and more waste-water discharges from its power generation, transmission, and cooling systems, will the Minister of Indigenous Relations please explain to First Nations and Métis communities how the ACO arrived at this decision?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to answer this question and also to correct some misconceptions that may have arisen. First of all, O'Leary Digital Limited has been engaging with Tech and Innovation with the concierge service, and the Aboriginal consultation office is a part of that concierge service. Ultimately, Environment and Protected Areas serves as a regulator, and it's department officials, not ministers' offices, that are responsible for compliance, for decision-making and approvals under applicable legislation.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that I am curious about that ministry and given that the UCP has serious obligations under the co-operation agreement with Canada to carry out consultation with Indigenous peoples for Alberta projects like O'Leary's data centre and further given that one only needs to look at northern Alberta to see that the province has a dismal record with consultations, emissions, and monitoring, is the minister of environment aware he is violating the co-operation agreement with wonder valley before the ink has even dried on the co-operation agreement, and if not, should the federal government be notified?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times before, the reality is that if there is anything that's new or novel when it comes to water or natural gas, then that is when an environmental impact assessment takes place, but in this situation there was nothing new or novel when it came to water or natural gas, and that is the reason why the environmental impact assessment did not happen. I can tell you that on this side of the House we actually work very closely with our federal partners. In fact, they actually recognize that our environmental impact assessment is far more superior than their impact assessment. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

2:30

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that this project is a novel one and this relationship with the federal government is pretty novel for this government and given that the law is settled that procedural parts of consultation can be carried out by proponents while the honour of the Crown remains paramount to Indigenous peoples and is owed by this government and further given that this government is trying to rush their duty to consult through Bill 30's approval process, that may ignore these constitutionally required protections, will the Minister of Justice please elaborate how the wonder valley project will satisfy the obligations under the honour of the Crown?

The Speaker: The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government recognizes the importance of meaningful consultation where treaty rights, traditional uses, and harvesting activities may be affected. Early engagement with Indigenous communities is essential to building trust, for respecting rights, and ensuring outcomes reflect shared priorities. The correct process is being used. O'Leary Digital Limited is going through the Tech and Innovation concierge service, and all of the decisions made are being made by department officials.

Bill 25

Mr. Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, classrooms should be places where students gain the skills, knowledge, and competencies needed to live fulfilling lives, not where they have to navigate political pressure or ideological division. Our government is strengthening education by investing in classroom supports, renewing curriculum, and reinforcing parental involvement in education. To the Minister of Education and Childcare: why is it necessary to remove politics and ideology from classrooms, and how will Bill 25 help restore trust while keeping the focus on student success?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, ultimately, our classrooms need to be places where students are taught how to think, not what to think. It's important that we develop an environment where students are free to challenge perspectives, debate different ideas. We must also work to ensure that curriculum and other instructional material is provided in a way that's free from any kind of personal bias. It's an essential skill not just for, of course, their academic success but also for their future well-being to be informed and well-productive citizens.

Mr. Bouchard: Given that ideology doesn't always appear through visible symbols or displays and given that it can also show up in how topics are framed, how discussions are guided, and how personal beliefs may be introduced and given that our government has emphasized transparency and respect for parents as partners in education, to the same minister: how will this legislation clearly define expectations for teachers and administrators so classrooms remain impartial, where facts are presented without personal bias and in a neutral manner?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of the amendments in Bill 25 will amend section 33 of the Education Act. Section 33 of the Education Act details the responsibilities of school boards. Some of those changes will ensure, as I mentioned earlier, that the delivery of educational material and instruction is delivered in a way that's impartial and free from any kind of personal bias. This is an expectation that I believe all Albertans have when they send their children to education, to our school system, that they're being taught in an unbiased way.

Mr. Bouchard: Given that maintaining public confidence in our education system requires clear standards and consistent accountability and given that Alberta's government has prioritized safe, respectful learning environments for both students and teachers, to the same minister: how will Bill 25 be enforced in practice, and what accountability measures will ensure school boards and educators uphold neutrality while protecting students' ability to express their views without fear of being penalized?

Mr. Nicolaides: Indeed, Mr. Speaker. The legislative amendments will ensure a strong focus on maintaining responsible and respectful

student behaviours. Furthermore, a student's right to express a diverse viewpoint . . .

Ms Hoffman: Yeah, hate. Just say hate.

Mr. Nicolaides: . . . or challenge a particular perspective is being further enshrined.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Accusing people of hate or any suggestion thereof is just not called for.

Ms Hoffman: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'll not have it.

Take some extra time. Go ahead.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, the NDP gets really upset when we try and take politics and ideology out of the classroom. When they were in government, they tried to do the exact opposite. They actually tried to embed politics and ideology and use our children to create agents of change. We won't have it.

School Construction in Northeast Edmonton

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, my riding continues to experience rapid population growth, yet key elementary remains unfunded. Crystallina, a K to 6, received no funding this year, and it was for 650 kids. Marquis K to 6, set to serve 890 children, also remains unfunded. Families in the neighbourhood are already facing overcrowded classrooms and long travel times because there are simply not enough spaces. To the minister. My constituents are asking for more schools to address the ongoing classroom size demands. Why has the government continued to stall in addressing the increased demand for thousands of children in my riding?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, I hope the member opposite is informing her constituents that the Alberta government is undertaking the most comprehensive school construction program in Alberta history. The schools now program is investing \$8.6 billion to build and modernize schools across the province from Edmonton to Calgary to smaller communities. These programs will create over 200,000 new and renovated student spaces to ensure that we're able to accommodate the incredible influx of new students that we've received over the last few years to ensure that every student has a world-class learning environment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister keeps announcing schools in my riding but they're not funded and given that these large elementary cohorts move forward into junior high, which increases demands and intensifies over the northeast – while McConachie 7 to 9 is funded, the Horse Hill 7 to 12 project that is set to serve 2,410 students in my riding is unfunded – and given without timely investment the system will bottleneck at the K to 6 students transitioning into grades 7 to 9, to the minister: does the government not see that poor funding models are actually overcrowding my elementary schools, my junior highs, and I have no high school?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, if the member has a concern or a desire for a high school in her constituency, she should speak with the Edmonton public school board and/or the Edmonton Catholic school division. We rely on their assessment of priority school projects and award those that, of course, are on the top of their list.

We have, though, approved three projects that are under way in the members' riding, including a new K to 6 school as well as a new junior high school in Pilot Sound, McConachie, and a new K to 9 school in Kirkness.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Manning

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of those are not funded and given the northeast already lacks local high school options – in fact, I have spoken to both my school boards – and given both high school projects required are the Horse Hill 7 to 12 and the Catholic 10 to 12 in Gorman, both high schools and both are unfunded, and given without those schools students will face long commutes, overcrowded classrooms, and reduced access to programs, again to the minister. High school projects are still unfunded in my riding yet still requested. Does the government plan to ensure northeast students have access to local grade 10 to 12 spaces?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year we received over 400 requests for new school projects across the province, so of course it's incredibly challenging to be able to fund every single one of those projects. We are, though, prioritizing projects in Edmonton and Calgary and some of our other fast-growing communities because we've seen a significant growth in student enrolment over the last few years. We do look to our school divisions to provide us with their priority projects, and we subsequently award their highest priority projects. I'll continue to do that over the next year. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Just Edmonton-Rutherford, please.

Fort Chipewyan Cancer Incidence

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Mr. Speaker, in the 900-person community of Fort Chipewyan Alberta Health Services reports 149 cases of cancer. Nearly 20 per cent of the residents of this community have cancer. This is significantly higher than the rest of the citizens of Alberta. Mikisew Cree First Nation has been sounding the alarm because these numbers may actually be underestimated, but the government suggests these are normal. They are not normal. Will any one of the five, six, seven, or however many health ministers there are stand up today and be willing to talk to the public and talk to the First Nations themselves? I'll give you the phone number.

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, AHS has been monitoring cancer rates in Fort Chipewyan since 2009, and they have found adult cancer rates are similar to what we see across the province. This new study that has been done . . .

Member Miyashiro: Why do you hate Indigenous people?

Member LaGrange: . . . we have not seen that study yet. We are going to look at that study. I have been to Fort Chipewyan numerous times, and I will continue to make myself available to the community to make sure that we get to the bottom of it.

2:40

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Given that if 20 per cent of the people in this room had cancer, we'd be lighting our hair on fire and given that this government shows zero regard for health, zero regard

for the environment by giving carte blanche to foreign coal companies to spill selenium in our watershed and given this government prefers people using credit cards for diagnostics instead of funding real preventative health care systems, why won't this UCP government commit to doing the right thing, conduct a joint review, and investigate . . . [A timer sounded]

The Speaker: You're done. Your time is up. Your 35 seconds – you know what, hon. member, folks, my mistake. The bell went off. You've got about another 10 seconds. My mistake, nobody else's. Go ahead. I'm sorry.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Why won't this UCP government commit to doing the right thing and conduct a joint review to investigate the source of what is causing the increased cancer rates in Fort Chipewyan?

The Speaker: Was there a point of order called there?

Mr. Wright: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. All right. I think I was getting information on that. Anyways, it was still my mistake. I own it.
Go ahead, Minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we've been studying cancer rates in that area and actually across the province for First Nations communities as well. We also monitor the water, and we also know that our water is safe to drink. While we have not seen any higher evidence of pediatric cancer, adult cancers, as the member noted, we are seeing that there are some cancers, but they are no higher than the rates that we see in the rest of the province. We're going to look at it.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Given that the UCP policy decisions to pollute our watershed, build massive data centres with no proper environmental assessment, no consultation, and doing absolutely nothing to address the orphan wells across our province are causing real harm to Albertans in northern Alberta and given that private health care vouchers will do absolutely nothing to help First Nations or any Albertan with cancer, will the UCP finally listen to the people of the Mikisew Cree First Nation and do what they actually need instead of thinking they know what they need and ask the people and listen to the people of Fort Chipewyan?

The Speaker: The minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do listen. We continue to listen. In fact, I was up there numerous times when I was minister of education to make sure that they got a new school. As we are talking about cancer rates, I was proud to announce today that we are in fact screening younger, and we are bringing more of our cancer programs into Indigenous communities through mobile units, et cetera. While we have not seen an increase through the data that we have, we will look at the report that the nation has and take action if necessary.

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, we didn't finish tablings. It looks like we've got Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Thank you. I stand to table a published critical appraisal of Centre of Recovery Excellence research concerning, amongst other things, undisclosed conflicts of interest from the lead authors.

The Speaker: The Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have tablings from 12 e-mails from citizens of Lethbridge who are speaking in support of our integrated fire-ambulance service.

The Speaker: Other tablings? Seeing – oh, pardon me. Edmonton-Rutherford.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a notice of record, a constitutional challenge standing in jurisdictional authority from kâpâpâmaskam'kinahk.

The Speaker: Any other tablings? Seeing none.

Okay. We're at points of order. One was called during Members' Statements at or very close to, I guess, 1:48.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Nonmember

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order at the time noted. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was delivering a member's statement. I didn't interject during the statement; I waited to the end, as is protocol. At the time the member said that the CEO of the AER is rotten to the core.

Mr. Speaker, we try to avoid as much as possible making direct assaults on the character of individuals who are not in this Chamber, who cannot defend themselves. This member has taken many swipes, particularly at the CEO of the AER. I think this is a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j) as it certainly creates disorder.

I will also say this, Mr. Speaker. It is commonplace that the member uses the Public Accounts Committee to berate public officials, particularly as they come in and they're serving the public in the capacity they're hired on to do. If this behaviour continues, the government will re-evaluate the nature of PAC and how we send public officials or, rather, who presents at PAC. This will not continue much longer.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, first, I would just like to start off by saying that we just saw the Government House Leader using his authority to threaten the members of the Official Opposition that if we do not represent the interests of Albertans in the way that they deem appropriate, in a way that doesn't challenge the corruption and issues that we have with their government, they will fundamentally change the systems. This is material to me because we've seen that same behaviour when it comes to the standing orders of this Assembly and how work proceeds. The government continues to use its majority to impose upon all Albertans their version of how democracy can work, and I think it's incredibly concerning.

With that comment being said, Mr. Speaker, I specifically would like to reference *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, reference by name to members of the public, although I will note that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar did not reference anyone by name, simply referring to someone by title. "Members are discouraged from referring by name to persons who are not Members of Parliament and . . . do not enjoy parliamentary immunity, except in

extraordinary circumstances when the national interest calls for this." You will find this on page 622.

References to nonmembers have come up many times in this place, Mr. Speaker, and I reviewed the previous rulings of Speakers, including yourself, when cautions have been given. Most of the time a point of order is not found, as an example on May 30, 2018, specifically because if it is a matter of debate, if it is a matter of public interest – like, for example, whether the Energy Regulator is upholding the duty to enforce ministerial orders, something that is in the public interest – the Official Opposition's ability to ask these questions, to challenge when we believe there is wrongdoing that may be occurring.

Very specifically, the member's statement referred to the minister holding accountable when legal and independence concerns have been raised. This entire thing was about government business. It was about the organization of the Energy Regulator and how things are running. It does continue a debate we've had in this place, Mr. Speaker. We are mindful in the Official Opposition of our responsibilities and of our privileges. In this case we did not name anyone, but we are asking the important questions. Particularly in light of the public interest and the previous rulings Speakers have made, I don't think this is a point of order. I think this is an important matter of debate.

I'm very disappointed that through this point of order the Government House Leader is threatening the Official Opposition to take away accountability measures like Public Accounts. I would disagree with his characterization of the work that our committee members do at that committee. I think we work very hard to hold public servants and this government accountable by asking factually based questions.

That is my submission to you, Mr. Speaker. I think that this is an important matter of debate. We did not name anyone individually. We are talking about something that the minister is responsible for, and we should not be punished for that.

2:50

The Speaker: Okay. Yeah. What was said, I think the pertinent parts:

The CEO refused to show proof that he'd followed the law. The minister should enforce his own directive . . . when I asked him to investigate, the minister didn't defend the law; he attacked me. I asked whether the CEO had met, possibly illegally, with the minister's chief of staff to discuss an application by Valory Resources . . . when I asked the minister whether he would fire this CEO, who publicly admitted to conduct that raises serious legal and independence concerns, the minister responded by talking about [orphan wells] . . . The CEO has demonstrated that he's rotten, and the minister must defend the rule of law and restore fairness to development in this province.

There has been quite a bit said, including recently and probably including recently by me, about how we talk about members that are not in this House and consequently not in this House able to defend themselves. I'll refer you to chapter 13, page 528, the rules of order and decorum.

Members are discouraged from referring by name to persons who are not members of Parliament. Although there is no rule prohibiting this practice, Speaker Milliken has, in the past, strongly discouraged members "from using names in speeches if they are speaking ill of some other person because, with parliamentary privilege applying to . . . anything said that is damaging to . . . the reputation of the individual . . . is . . . liable to be published with the cover of parliamentary privilege and the person is unable to bring any action in respect of those claims." The Speaker has ruled that members have a responsibility to protect the innocent not only from outright slander but from slur directly or indirectly implied.

I would say that in this case the person under scrutiny, I suppose – some would say “attack;” I’ll say “scrutiny” to be polite – whose name wasn’t used – that’s helpful. It seems to me that it wasn’t a pleasant description of the person. It falls short of accusing them of breaking the law. It’s not helpful, hon. member, but it falls just short, in my view, of a point of order.

Again, I think we should always discourage talking negatively about people that are not in this place and, consequently, not able to defend themselves. I think there might be just a little more latitude to describing the work done by somebody who activates government policy but not unlimited ability to negatively describe them. I’m going to provide a caution to all members of the House but particularly to the member that made the statement to be cautious. It won’t be a point of order today. This item is currently dealt with.

The other point of order, if I have my notes close to accurate, was about 2:41 p.m., I think on the government side.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time you mentioned, the hon. caucus whip stood up and called a point of order. I will argue it on his behalf. Simply, this rises on 23(h), (i), and (j). Off the record, from a sedentary position, the Member for Lethbridge-West was commenting to the minister of health as she was answering a question and saying, “Why do you hate Indigenous people?” On the record, off the record, standing up, sedentary position: that kind of language is absolutely abhorrent, has no place in this Chamber. I believe it’s a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). I hope the Blues have caught that remark, but if they didn’t, I hope you caught it. If you didn’t, I hope that member sure looks internally and says that that kind of comment is absolutely inappropriate in this Chamber and shouldn’t be used any further. It should be followed by an apology and a withdrawal.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My intent was not to insult the Member for Red Deer-North. I was trying to say: the collective you. However, I will withdraw and apologize because I know how it came out.

The Speaker: Okay. That’s how we do it here. When we say something not parliamentary, we apologize and withdraw. Thank you.

This item is now dealt with and concluded.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Third Reading Bill 24 Alberta Whisky Act

[Debate adjourned April 16: Member Arcand-Paul speaking]

The Speaker: The floor belongs to the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take the time right now to just acknowledge the amazing time that we’re in right now and here in Edmonton specifically. I want to say: “Go, Oilers, go. Let’s do this. Let’s get that cup.”

I also failed to mention in my remarks in talking to the bill about the wonderful distillery that actually is in Edmonton-West Henday. I want to thank the amazing family-owned Hansen Distillery, owned by Shayna and Kris Hansen. They’ve created Edmonton’s first whisky. I got so excited about creating a trail with the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland to enjoy this wonderful whisky made right here in Alberta.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

With that, Madam Speaker, I want to thank you for putting forward this bill. I look forward to where this goes.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Perfect. Any other members to the bill? Seeing none.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. If I may ask for unanimous consent from the Assembly to move to three-minute bells for the remainder of the afternoon. Asking for unanimous consent for three-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Bill 18 Safeguards for Last Resort Termination of Life Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and keeper of the Great Seal.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I’m pleased to rise and move third reading for Bill 18, the Safeguards for Last Resort Termination of Life Act.

Now, I recognize that MAID is a sensitive matter for patients and for families all across Alberta. That’s why our government took a considerable amount of time to study this issue and engage with experts and everyday Albertans, Madam Speaker. In fall of 2024 we conducted an engagement with health care professionals across this province. We also talked to regulatory bodies, to academics, and to others with experience or interest in MAID, disability, and mental health.

Now, some of these groups included the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Centre for Suicide Prevention. We spoke to Inclusion Alberta and Inclusion Canada. We spoke to Indigenous Disability Canada, Alberta Health Services, and AHS clinical ethics. We spoke to the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta, the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, and, of course, Madam Speaker, the Alberta Human Rights Commission. The government of Alberta also put out an online survey which was available at the end of 2024 that allowed Albertans all across the province to share their views on MAID oversight and processes.

I want to make it abundantly clear for everybody in this Assembly and everybody watching at home. Our government fully consulted experts, and we fully consulted Albertans on this important issue as well. Now, a lot of work has gone into this legislation, and I’m very grateful for all of the feedback that we’ve received from all across this province, from the public and from the countless experts and organizations who have weighed in on this topic. Now, Madam Speaker, I’ve watched with great interest the debate on this bill that’s happened thus far, and to be frank with you, it’s not entirely clear where members of the opposition sit on putting in more protections

and more safeguards and more accountability around medical assistance in dying.

3:00

During second reading the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall said that “insofar as this bill addresses the disability community concerns with track 2 MAID . . . I fully support . . . that aspect of the bill,” and I commend the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall for standing up for what is right. The Member for St. Albert, however, referenced how “the United Nations has been very clear . . . about their concerns around track 2 MAID” in Canada, and says that she doesn’t disagree with them, but the member got up in this Chamber and said, “I will always support ending track 2.” Then the Member for Calgary-Varsity had very different views, and spoke at length about why we should remove important protections of this particular bill.

It doesn’t add up, Madam Speaker. I hope the members opposite stand up and support this bill or at least clarify their position to Albertans, because Bill 18 includes very important safeguards that protect vulnerable Albertans, and that includes getting rid of track 2 MAID.

Yesterday I tabled in the House a letter that we received from Inclusion Alberta, and they’ve been very supportive of Bill 18 and ending track 2 MAID. I want to thank them for their support, and I want to read a short excerpt from that letter.

MAID for mental illness is a threat to people with intellectual disabilities as 45 per cent of individuals with intellectual disabilities experience lifetime mental illness and face barriers to accessing mental health supports. Extending MAID in these circumstances could lead to the preventable deaths of an even greater number of persons with disabilities who are not dying than those already being euthanized by Track 2 MAID.

Madam Speaker, our approach to MAID is rooted in compassion and in caution. Bill 18 puts a clear focus on protecting vulnerable Albertans from accessing MAID, but our government is also laser focused on investing billions of dollars of supports to help vulnerable people.

Now, let me read a few of the numbers for the benefit of the people in this Assembly: \$2 billion from the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction. That’s their largest budget to date. In March my colleague the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services announced a historic investment of \$3.7 billion to help people with disabilities. Now, that’s a year-over-year increase of nearly \$100 million, and through Budget 2026, Madam Speaker, \$525 million through the Acute Care action plan to deliver 50,000 new surgeries over three years. There’s also the \$30 million investment to expand services at community health centres serving highly vulnerable people, and \$12.7 billion to support primary and preventative health care in this province.

I tell you that, Madam Speaker, because it’s incredibly important. Not only does Bill 18 ensure that there is a consistent process and oversight to help protect vulnerable Albertans, but we’re making sure that every single vulnerable Albertan in this province has the right supports at every stage of life so that they can live, and they can live healthy, fulfilling lives.

There is no turning back from end-of-life decisions, and I believe that this legislation strikes the appropriate balance to protect Albertans while allowing MAID to proceed for people whose death is reasonably foreseeable. Now, that was the purpose of MAID. That was the intent of MAID, and that was what MAID was always intended to be. I think we can all agree in this Assembly, despite the differences of opinion, Madam Speaker, that there is nothing more important than protecting vulnerable Albertans, and Bill 18 would accomplish exactly that.

With that, I urge all members to support this crucial piece of legislation. I move third reading of Bill 18, and I will say once again: hope should always be easier to access than death.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the hon. Minister of Justice for this piece of legislation that he just read in for third reading, and I rise today to speak on Bill 18, Safeguards for Last Resort Termination of Life Act. This is arguably one of the most important pieces of legislation that I have ever debated, because it is a direct consequence of life and death. Ten years ago the federal government brought in its first legislation to legalize medical assistance in dying or more technically known as assisted suicide. I opposed it then. Bill C-14, brought forward in 2016, created an avenue for adults with reasonably foreseeable death to pursue doctor-assisted suicide, or medical assistance in dying. Whether or not you agree with this topic is not up for debate today, though I do have very strong feelings on it. What we are here to talk about today is whether assisted suicide is expanding too fast, and whether or not it has proper safeguards to protect vulnerable people.

Now, for those who may not know, the number of deaths happening through MAID has increased by 109 per cent in the last four years alone. That is a horrifying statistic. Through the system there are different types or tracks of medical assistance in dying: track 1 and track 2. Track 1 refers to those whose deaths are reasonably foreseeable, and starting in 2021, track 2 refers to those who are not. Between ’21 and ’24 the number of track 2 deaths increased by 226 per cent, Madam Speaker, another staggering and frightening statistic. Today MAID has become one of the leading causes of death in Canada. Horrible. More Canadians are now dying of euthanasia or medical assistance in dying or assisted suicide than from liver disease, diabetes, or pneumonia. Consider this: in 2016, the first year of assisted suicide when it was legal, there were just over 1,000 reported cases. By 2022 that number had surged to over 13,000 cases, just in six years. No other country has seen that kind of growth rate.

Madam Speaker, a program that is literally designed to end lives should have checks and balances and appropriate oversight. Most concerning is the fact that the federal government has passed legislation that will make it legal for someone who has mental illness as their sole underlying condition to access assisted suicide. This was made possible by legislation in 2021. Although implementation is currently paused, there is a plan for it to resume by the federal government next year. This is a clear example of a program that has gone too far. Even today there are groups who advocate for medical assistance in dying to be accessible to minors. Assisted suicide for minors: like, put that into context. There are those who would advocate that we should allow minors under the age of 18 to access medical assistance in dying. If that doesn’t turn your stomach, I don’t know what else will.

Now, let me be clear. Our government is not going to allow assisted suicide to be an easier option than for someone to get treatment and recovery. We have proven that before, and we will continue to prove that mental health needs our attention. We’re putting resources behind it. It needs to be accessible, and it certainly must be far more accessible than medical assistance in dying. When it comes to mental health, we’re going to keep our programs in place so that the suggestion of ending your life should never be one at all. This is one of the reasons we brought forward Bill 18, because the federal government has shown again and again that they are not willing to stand up for vulnerable people. They are not willing to invest in health care and treatment that can save lives, but we are,

and there is no dollar value to be placed on someone's life. Despite what the CBC reported on medical assistance in dying as a cost saver, this is not the way that we look at things on this side of the House. We don't put a price on a life. Madam Speaker, I'm going to support Bill 18 and hope all members of this Assembly do for other reasons as well.

3:10

Bill 18 also will prohibit physicians and nurse practitioners in Alberta from making referrals for individuals to receive MAID eligibility assessments outside the province. It'll also introduce mandatory sanctions on physicians and nurse practitioners where a regulatory college finds that they have violated Alberta's MAID legislation. We will also enshrine in provincial law the right of physicians and nurse practitioners to refuse to assess or provide MAID. This is a critical line that protects rights of conscience. We had this debate several years ago, some of the members may recall, in 2019, about protecting conscience rights, Madam Speaker. It is essential that they are protected. This is what Bill 18 is going to do.

I'll simply close by repeating some of the remarks I've already made. They are worth repeating because the value of life is that important. We will be protecting the vulnerable. We will make sure that access to mental health supports is far more easy than access to medical assistance in dying. Our government values life, our government values mental health and supporting those who need access to it, and our government values conscience rights. I urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 18, because life is that important.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to express my strong support for Bill 18 as well, the Safeguards for Last Resort Termination of Life Act. This legislation reflects a careful and compassionate approach to medical assistance in dying. It restores MAID to its original purpose, as a last-resort option at the end of life. It strengthens protections for those who are most vulnerable and upholds the conscience rights of health care professionals and facilities.

When MAID was first introduced in 2016, Madam Speaker, it was meant to be narrow in scope and limited to those nearing the end of life. Since then, however, the program has rapidly expanded, as we have heard here this afternoon. This raises serious ethical concerns. Individuals whose natural death is not reasonably foreseeable, known as track 2 cases, are now eligible. At the same time, we hear growing concerns that MAID is sometimes becoming more accessible than proper treatment, support, and care. The statistics are alarming. Within just five years of legalization MAID now accounts for more than 3 per cent of all deaths in Canada. In Alberta track 2 MAID deaths increased 136 per cent between '21 and '25.

As a government we can no longer sit by idly as we see these trends, especially on a matter as sensitive as MAID, which carries irreversible consequences. We believe hope should always be easier to access than death. That is why with Bill 18 we're working to ensure that proper protections are in place for MAID so treatment and care are the prioritized path and that we're not faltering in our responsibility to care for our most vulnerable. Bill 18 achieves this by restoring clear limits around when MAID can and should be considered. It explicitly prohibits track 2 MAID when a person is not approaching the end of life, requiring that a natural death be reasonably foreseeable within those 12 months. If Albertans can continue living healthy lives with the right supports in place, that has to be the starting point.

A belief in recovery and the preservation of life is the mindset that has guided this government and continues to with this legislation. Although mental illness as a sole condition is not currently an eligible ground for MAID under federal law, it is a planned future expansion that has been paused. Bill 18 draws a clear line here by prohibiting mental illness as a sole ground to be eligible.

Albertans living with mental illness deserve hope. They deserve dignity and access to effective treatment, not a pathway to death. Because MAID is irreversible, Bill 18 strengthens consent requirements by ensuring individuals have the capacity to consent at the time it is administered. Advance requests are prohibited, and minors are excluded from MAID, of course, recognizing that young people do not yet have the emotional maturity required for such a grave and permanent decision and can be particularly impressionable or vulnerable during times of distress.

Oversight is also strengthened with Bill 18. MAID assessors must make reasonable efforts to consult a primary care provider involved in an individual's care within the previous 12 months and must review relevant medical and personal information. This ensures decisions are informed and made with a full understanding of an individual's circumstances. Those assessing and providing MAID will also be required to meet education and training standards so they understand available alternatives and can recognize coercion or pressure.

Bill 18 makes clear MAID should never be offered casually or prematurely. Health care professionals are prohibited from initiating discussions about MAID unless the patient raises the topic first, reaffirming that MAID must remain a last resort. To ensure safeguards are not bypassed, the bill prohibits referrals outside of Alberta for MAID assessments and introduces mandatory sanctions for those who violate the rules. Accountability is essential on an issue of this magnitude.

Madam Speaker, MAID decisions affect more than just the individual patient. They affect families and loved ones, who live with the consequences long after. That is why Bill 18 requires a family member to witness the administration of MAID unless one is not reasonably available. The bill also respects the conscience rights of health care providers and facilities, allowing them to refuse participation while ensuring patients are directed to appropriate information and care.

Madam Speaker, Bill 18 restores balance and humanity to MAID. It prioritizes care over death, safeguards the vulnerable, and upholds responsibility and compassion. For these reasons, I am proud to support Bill 18 at the third reading, and I urge all members here to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the colleagues here as well. For those following along at home, we're on Bill 18, Safeguards for Last Resort Termination of Life Act, so the MAID program. I received a number of calls into my office as well. Some folks that were considering the program were concerned about maybe some of the items that we were taking that were changing the federal program. We had lengthy conversations on it.

Also, full disclosure: my father-in-law, Dr. Mychail Onischuk, was a former airborne captain. He was the chief of staff for Lac La Biche hospital. He had used the program a couple of years back, when he had a cancer that got away on him. Spending that time with my father-in-law in his last stages was interesting. You've got a person who's very strong. He was also the mayor of Lac La Biche for a time, a very strong-willed gentleman, very well respected in

the area, and he was more of a father to me than my dad ever was. Spending that time with him and seeing what he was going through, he knew full well what his medical consequences were. We were fortunate enough to have Mike at our place for about three or four months before he had to be moved into the hospital.

He chose his date. As family members going through that, respecting the choice of a man, I get it. I understood it, and he was fully cognizant and fully aware of that circumstance that he was in. He was surrounded there with his family. The process made sure that he had that tap-out moment right up until the very end. That was his choice, and he chose what it was.

He did confide in me one night. He was worried about what we might think, if he was a coward for going through this. I said to him that as an officer and a gentleman and as a doc, he knew what the circumstances were more than anybody else, more than I could afford. I told him that I wouldn't lose any respect for him, but if he wanted at the last moment, if he gave me the nod or the tap, I would call it all off for him. So in that circumstance I get it. I really do. I understand the intent of the program. The fact that the feds are looking at expanding it to someone with mental illness, for underage people, doesn't make sense.

3:20

We have another family member. I'm not going to mention his name. He has Parkinson's, and I highly respect this gentleman as well. He's in his mid to late 80s, and he's been in decline for a number of years. At a family function he actually kind of laid it on me and asked if I would sign off on his documents knowing that he was of full cognizant ability. Again, I'm not in the will, not in any of those things. Those safeguards are in place.

I'm not going to lie to you, Madam Speaker. It kind of feels like being the Grim Reaper a little bit here, but growing up it was kind of the same thing. When for whatever reason the good Lord puts this stuff in front of you, you're kind of counted on to do the tough things. Again, talking to my relative, understanding where he's coming from, you know, that makes sense, and I respect his wishes.

Part of that legislation on the track 1 and the track 2 are the safeguards for knowing your end. It's a foreseeable end in that track 1, and it's something that is a medical condition that you have no way out of. It's all foreseen conclusion at that point. It's far different than this thing that they're calling track 2. I just want to find it here for folks so they understand at home what this is about. Track 1 refers to an individual whose natural death has been determined by a physician or a nurse practitioner as being reasonable and foreseeable. This bill would define reasonable and foreseeable as likely to occur within 12 months, that one-year event horizon. Track 2 MAID refers to individuals whose natural death is not reasonably foreseeable.

You know, we get a lot of stuff coming through social media and otherwise, and we get these reports, right? One of the reports that came out was on people's satisfaction in the country, the happiness level, the happiness index. We used to be right near the tippy top of that. The last report that came out is that we're behind Kazakhstan if you look at overall happiness.

My concern, again, as a legislator in understanding this is that I can't help take that second pause, that sober second pause. There are a lot of people that are going into this program that, you know, tongue in cheek, is highly successful. It took Belgium 20 years to get to the ability of where we're at for how many people are taking this uptake. Potentially in other places you would call some of that coercion, essentially, giving people this offer.

Somebody had mentioned that CBC was talking about what a great cost-savings measure it was. When that type of language and that type of mindset starts being used, it is very concerning to me.

People are going to go through financial difficulties, hardships, all those types of things, sadness and depression. I do believe that everybody deserves a sober second thought on that and that that should never be the circumstances, especially when they're healthy by all regards.

I had a constituent. He called in. We had a really good conversation, really good gentleman, a technical background as well. His concerns were that he had seen what happened to his parents, what their health had degraded down to, and his concerns were that we were changing the legislation to not allow someone to foresee that, and I had to go back to the minister and get clarification. Essentially, that still exists in the federal acts. We're not changing anything there. You can't preplan your exit strategy 10 years out, but keeping it within that timeline and respecting people's wishes.

As a legislator it's tough. I've got my own personal beliefs. But I do believe that this bill strikes a balance between what we've seen with what the intent was and for people that are vulnerable, whether they're underage, whether they've got a mental deficiency or illness along those lines, that that is not meant as a method. Humbly, Madam Speaker, I think the balance has been struck here.

Again, to the folks that reached out to me in my office: I get it. I get it on a personal level, too, and I've seen both sides of it. You've got to make sure that the medical community isn't forced into this, either. There are a lot of conscionable choices. Again, getting that from my father-in-law. He took an oath to protect and save life, not to end it. But understanding that we've all got a start and a beginning and a season for everything, having the options out there for those that have a good state of mind and know that family supports are there: I think that is an option that we're not going to interfere with for that legislation, but we're putting these safeguards in place to make sure that folks in a bad circumstance don't necessarily get caught up in it.

With that, I humbly request everyone support this bill. I thank the minister for striking a balance. I know this is a difficult conversation to have, but it's one of the best ones I think we can have in this place.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 18, and I do agree with the members who spoke in this House that it's a pretty sensitive topic, and I do agree with them that we need to have a safeguard. That's a different thing. Whether this bill adds safeguards or not is debatable. I do thank the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland for sharing his personal experience with MAID.

As was said many times, people should be able to access hope rather than death. Those were the kind of phrases used by the minister as well. I think fundamentally people as individuals, as free individuals should be able to live with dignity and be able to make choices in how they live their lives and also be able to live and die with dignity, end their life with dignity as well, if I may say that. That was the matter before the Supreme Court in the case. The name of the case escapes my mind, but that was the case that asked the federal government to make changes to the Criminal Code of Canada and paved the way for those changes.

We have said before, and I will say it one more time: the government initially portrayed this bill that they are bringing forward, this piece of legislation, in response to the concerns raised by the disability community with respect to track 2 MAID. They claim that they have met with Inclusion Alberta and they've fully consulted with experts. I can say that we have also met with Inclusion Alberta. We have met with many different organizations.

We have met with experts as well, and we have heard from ordinary Albertans on this very topic. I do want to recognize that my colleague the MLA for St. Albert, my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud, my colleague from Calgary-Varsity have been proactively reaching out to all these organizations to make sure that we get this right and we get our position right.

I want to say as a matter of record, as a matter of our caucus position on it, that insofar as this bill addresses the concerns raised by Albertans with disabilities with track 2 MAID, insofar as this bill addresses those concerns, we are supporting that community. We are in favour of that, and we will always stand with the disability community in their advocacy, be that their concerns respecting MAID legislation, be that their concerns respecting accessibility legislation, and be that their concerns relating to access to services that are needed to live a dignified life.

I think it's incumbent on this government that when they talk about making hope accessible, they should also take the disability community's concerns with respect to delayed services, with respect to accessibility seriously and take action on those fronts as well. That will certainly give that community hope and give that community means and supports to live a dignified life.

This bill does way more than that. This bill is not just about track 2 MAID. It's making a lot of other changes that have not been thought through, that have not been consulted on, that are not being supported by the medical community, that are not supported by even ordinary Albertans. Although today the minister claimed that he has fully canvassed, consulted experts, one of the experts sits among us. The Member for Calgary-Varsity comes from a medical background, brings a lot of experience, a lot of clinical practice, a lot of expertise.

3:30

When the member was making comments on this bill, the Minister of Justice got up and characterized some of the medical professionals who disagreed with the minister's bill as activists. That's what this government does. When they disagree with a judicial decision, they characterize judges as activists. If they disagree with medical practitioner and clinician judgments, they characterize them as activists. I think the minister should be very much ashamed of himself for making those comments, be that about judges or be that about medical professionals.

I also want to kind of outline what we did to make this bill a better bill. We suggested a number of amendments, Madam Speaker. Some of the safeguards that are already there include that there needs to be an assessment by two medical professionals within a given certain time frame, independent medical professionals. Again, when those medical professionals are making that decision, no one understands better than them and the person asking for their decision what life and death means. They do make those assessments knowing full well, looking at the circumstances of the person asking for it, what their assessment means for that person.

Those safeguards are there, and those professionals are governed by their respective colleges. They do have a code of ethics, they do have a code of conduct, they do have professional obligations, and they do make those assessments within confines of those obligations. So I don't think that adding a requirement for them to reach out to their primary care provider and everyone that person has interacted with was adding any safeguard. That was adding more delay in that process where, I guess, those decisions may need to be made in a timely fashion. I will talk a little bit about advanced directives in a bit as well.

I think the government is also putting in a limitation that a physician or a doctor cannot initiate those conversations. What doctors can do and cannot do: that should be left to the doctor and

the patient. Government was again inserting itself in a space where they don't belong. That's why we tried to remove that as well.

Then the government was establishing a UCP care co-ordination service within the minister's office. I think there is a care co-ordination service in Alberta Health Services. That's where that co-ordination service belongs, not in a politician's office. Again, the government was inserting itself in a way in the patient-doctor relationship that is not appropriate, and we tried to remove that as well.

And then the government was creating exclusion zones around public facilities. We recognize that conscience right. If some physician doesn't want to provide that service, we recognize that person's right, but at the same time these are public facilities. If one person cannot do that, then I think that institution has a responsibility to arrange for the care, arrange for the service that the person is looking for. The government, instead, was creating those bubble zones around those facilities just to protect, I guess, their hospital administrators. I don't think that was adding any safeguards to the person seeking that service. Rather, it was putting in more obstacles for that person seeking that service around public facilities.

As was mentioned, there are two different so-called tracks for MAID, and the government is now adding a 12-month life expectancy, the reasonable foreseeability of death within 12 months. We also have talked to medical professionals. We have heard from those professionals, and when there is a certain disease that is not curable, that cannot be remedied, in clinical judgment, they may give you a timeline that may or may not occur, but that's, again, a decision that will be made by a health professional based on all the circumstances before them. Again, the government adding that 12-month limitation in front of the federal bill doesn't add anything. It, rather, interferes with doctors' ability to make their judgments free from any kind of interference from politicians setting an arbitrary limit of 12 months upon them. So we did try to change them.

Then there was another requirement added that a family member who's available must witness the MAID process. We heard concerns, and people have raised concerns, that no other medical procedure for an adult requires having another adult witness that procedure, so why are we treating these individuals differently? We tried to remove that amendment. The government, again, didn't listen.

Also, we tried to clarify that when a practitioner refuses to provide MAID, and they have a conscience right objection to it, we respect that objection, but we tried to clarify that that practitioner must connect that person with a facility that is offering that service. That's only fair – and not just vague language but information. We have seen how it has played out in other jurisdictions where the requirement was to provide information and not actually the relevant and needed information about the service they are seeking.

So these were all the amendments that were moved by us, that were supported by evidence, that were backed by feedback from Albertans – professionals and health experts – but all of them were shot down by this government. I think that these amendments would have helped at least to make this bill a bit better.

A couple of things were mentioned by a couple of speakers from the other side, that this bill will exclude minors from accessing MAID. I think if the government side is trying to give the impression that somehow MAID is available to minors, nothing can be further from the truth. Federal legislation makes it clear that it's not available to minors, and there is currently a mental health exception in that federal legislation that is due to expire next year. I think there will be some consultation or some work that will go into it before making any decision on that, and I hope that the

government will consult with Albertans and represent Albertans on that decision-making table.

One last thing. I do want to say that the federal legislation prohibits advanced directives, but there was a recent survey that almost two-thirds of Canadians – if we're talking about democratic expression – do support advanced directives. They want to be able to make those directives when they are able to make the decision and not reach a point where they are unable to make that decision. Again, the idea behind this legislation is that people should be able to live with dignity, and they should be able to make dignified decisions around at what point they want to exercise this right under this legislation. I want to put on record that we have heard from many concerned Albertans who would want this government to look into advanced directives, because they want to be able to make decisions.

In short, this government is putting way more . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any others to join this debate on third reading of Bill 18?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:40 p.m.]

[Three minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Deol	Goehring
Arcand-Paul	Eggen	Ip
Brar, Gurinder	Ellingson	Metz
Brar, Gurtej	Elmeligi	Sabir
Chapman	Eremenko	Wright, P.
Totals:	For – 44	Against – 15

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 27

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

[Adjourned debate April 15: Mr. Dach]

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

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Happy to stand and speak to Bill 27 in the second reading. This is a financial statutes amendment act. It touches base on a number of different pieces of Treasury Board and Finance, significant portions toward auto insurance, but my esteemed colleagues have done an excellent job of speaking to the very damaging changes to the insurance system that are going to be costing Albertans a great deal of money in the years ahead.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I'm not going to spend my time talking about auto insurance. I'm going to spend my time talking about section 5, which addresses the Seniors Benefit Act. In a word, Madam Speaker, changes to the thresholds for the Alberta seniors' benefit in Bill 27, as was kind of previewed in Budget 2026, are an insult to seniors, who deserve to live with dignity and respect.

Before I get into it, let's look at a few of the numbers on this front. Currently in Alberta 210,000 seniors receive the Alberta seniors' benefit, and it's not making anybody rich. Nobody is buying new cars off the Alberta seniors' benefit, but you'd better believe that it makes a significant difference when it comes to being able to make ends meet but certainly a diminishing impact as a result of the increasing cost of living. Seniors know this better than most families, I would even argue, because they're on a fixed income. What those few hundred dollars mean to the recipients of the Alberta seniors' benefit, to the 200,000-plus seniors who receive that, really is life changing.

As a result of Budget 2026 and the changes that Bill 27 introduces when it comes to increasing the income threshold by which individuals can receive the Alberta seniors' benefit, it means that an estimate of 5,800 to 8,000 seniors will lose or see a reduction in their Alberta seniors' benefit. Let's look at what the change in the threshold is going to bring. Where once if a single senior was making \$28,150 a year they would qualify to receive this additional provincial benefit, the number is now going to increase to \$32,690 for a single-person household. For a two-person household where the threshold was once \$45,720 a year, it's now going up to \$53,800.

3:50

So we're saying that a senior earning less than \$33,000 a year is fine; they don't require any additional income supports. That could amount to 8,000 seniors losing the benefit, Madam Speaker, and I think it is an absolute affront to the people who built this province, that we're saying: you're good. And what does it save in Budget 2026? How many millions of dollars is it worth to this government to force seniors into deeper food insecurity and deeper income insecurity and deeper prospects of looking at homelessness or further housing precarity? It saved them about \$25 million in a year. I would argue that if they went after Sam Mraiche and the \$49 million that he continues to owe this government for Tylenol that we paid for, that taxpayers paid for but was never delivered, maybe we could save a little bit more dignity and provide a bit more assurance to the seniors who built this province. It's shameful.

In Calgary-Currie, Madam Speaker, I have a tale of two seniors organizations that are right across the street from one another. One of them is just an absolutely fantastic organization called Bow Cliff Seniors. I'll take this opportunity to give a shout-out to John Yannitsos and his wonderful team at Bow Cliff Seniors, who provide countless opportunities for seniors to come together, you know, to break bread. They have wonderful luncheons. They have amazing card games and lotteries and bingo. I'm due for a bingo call probably once session adjourns here. They just do so much, and they do so much with so little. It is a low-cost, low-barrier opportunity for

seniors to come together, to break the social isolation, to connect, to talk about things both heavy and light. It is a real community that they have created there at Bow Cliff Seniors.

Right across the street is a subsidized housing complex called Spruce Cliff Downs. Madam Speaker, Spruce Cliff Downs is run by Calgary Heritage Housing, a wonderful organization that runs hundreds of subsidized units specifically for seniors. Spruce Cliff Downs is facing a bit of a bittersweet future for the next couple of years because the 55 townhouses are going to be torn down and replaced with a multistorey housing development. That will still be run by Calgary Heritage Housing; it will still be offered at a subsidized kind of nonmarket rate. But to accomplish the task, the 55 seniors who currently live at Spruce Cliff Downs are going to be evicted.

At the end of June they will have had to have found an alternate place to live. Significant effort was made to try and find other units where they might be able to move to, still subsidized, still provided by Calgary Heritage Housing, but it was not guaranteed. It was not an assurance. So for many of those seniors living at Spruce Cliff Downs, who've lived there for five, six, 10, 12 years, they suddenly have to find a new place to live on a deeply fixed income. I'm receiving correspondence from constituents of mine who are saying: "I have to leave at the end of June. My house is going to be torn down. Where am I supposed to go?"

Maybe there are barriers to why they can't move into some of the other units that are available, so they have no other option but to look at just the regular rental market, and if you are making \$2,000 a month, well, easily 50 per cent of that could go towards housing costs. It speaks to the incredible gap and the really scary shortage in affordable housing and affordable rent in Calgary and Edmonton, but I know that this is an issue across the province.

Everything is so expensive, Madam Speaker – housing, food, medication, transportation – and for this government to suggest that now is the time to increase the income thresholds by 9 per cent, putting income security at risk for up to 8,000 seniors in this province, is absolutely shocking. It is inexcusable. It is cruel. And, again, for what? This is not how we're going to recover. This is not how government is going to recover from its \$9.4 billion deficit. If they think that they're going to recover from that deficit on the backs of seniors, who should be enjoying their retirement with some dignity and some security and some health, then I think that they are sadly mistaken.

A study in March, just last month, from the Calgary Food Bank paints a pretty damning picture when it comes to what seniors in Alberta are actually experiencing. It says, quote: of the older adults using the food bank, nearly two-thirds had not faced any food insecurity prior to retirement. Further coverage goes on to say that seniors 65 years and older have historically been the least likely to experience food insecurity according to the study.

It attributes the shift – the shift being more and more seniors requiring food bank support – in need among older adults to a combination of factors such as the increased cost of living, something that I know we can all attest to; limited private savings like an RRSP or TFSA, something that particularly impacts senior women because we have bigger gaps in our employment record as a result of staying home and raising kids or for whatever reason – you know, maybe women came into the workforce a little bit later, so we don't have the same kind of personal savings that men do – something, limited private savings, that really does impact women more than it does men later on in life; and lower Canada pension plan contributions.

It really highlights that this has been a pile-on that seniors have had to bear from this UCP government for seven years. Just point to the Canada pension plan, for example, and the incredible anxiety

and stress and fear that it is putting in the lives of seniors or people who are soon to be seniors who will have to rely on that Canada pension plan for their income security in the long run.

In closing, I want to just quote a couple of constituents that I'm so thankful have reached out to me. They are seniors. One being:

What is being done to meet the needs of the ever-increasing population of seniors, including the range of needs such as affordability and subsidies? . . . Where are the policies to deal with this . . . issue? . . . what about those of us who have contributed to building this society for the past 50 years? What is our destiny to be for the last 20-30 years of our lives? Does anyone care about this issue?

Another constituent wrote: to my MLA. This was also CCed to the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services. The constituent writes:

I am appalled at your obvious lack of empathy. Seniors in our province have helped to build this province. Many of us are third generation Albertans whose grandparent homesteaded here.

Changes to the Alberta seniors' benefit are cruel, and it is a very cruel action to take on a vulnerable section of our population.

She goes on to quote the National Institute on Ageing that "shows that 1 in 5 Alberta seniors experience poverty conditions on at least two fronts (. . . Food insecurity, healthcare inaccessibility, housing costs), and [the] proposed changes" from the UCP government "will only make this worse."

I think we need to hear from this government and why they think that the gestures in Bill 27 and highlighted in Budget 2026 should be acceptable to anybody: to seniors, to the people who care for them, to the people who love them. Increasing the income threshold for the Alberta seniors' benefit by 9 per cent excludes people from that program who desperately need the top-up that it represents to be able to meet the most basic needs of their every day. I think our seniors deserve a whole lot better. They built this province, and this government is abandoning them.

Thank you.

4:00

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

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 27. This bill is an omnibus of a whole bunch of things, and there's lots to unpack here. Let me actually begin by saying that there are parts of this legislation that I'm okay with. I'll start there before I perhaps focus on, I think, the more problematic pieces of the bill, specifically the provisions dealing with the Alberta Enterprise Corporation and Alberta Innovates, which would allow these entities to act as minority investment partners and expand tools to support growth, capital, and commercialization. These sections are part of a broader economic development discussion, and while I have questions about governance and ministerial direction, I can say that these are not the most troubling elements before us.

Bill 27 and the government's own fact sheet say that these changes are meant to allow Alberta Enterprise Corporation and Alberta Innovates to take minority equity positions, participate in partnerships, and support commercialization and intellectual property activity. On that front, Madam Speaker, I generally support this direction, but that is not the heart of this bill. The heart of this bill and the elements that I think are most troubling and the reasons that I cannot support the bill in its entirety: it's two things. My colleagues on this side of the House have expressed many of them, but I'll reiterate it for the purpose of debate. First, it's that this government has chosen to balance its political priorities on the backs of seniors and to continue forcing Albertans to live with the

consequences of the government's own failure in auto insurance. Those are the two areas I'm going to focus on. One is what this bill means for seniors in Alberta and also for auto insurance.

Let me begin with seniors. Now, section 5 of Bill 27 amends the Seniors Benefit Act. It lowers eligibility thresholds for the Alberta seniors' benefit, the special needs assistance for seniors, and the grant portion of the seniors home adaptation and repair program. The bill changes the allowable income threshold to \$32,690 for single seniors and \$53,800 for couples, and those changes are set to come into force on July 1, 2026. Now, the government often will say that this is just an adjustment. The government seems to suggest that seniors across Alberta have it better than the folks in other jurisdictions, but really how seniors across this province will in fact experience it is that it is an effective cut for them, especially in an affordability crisis. Budget 2026 also shows that the government expects to save money from these changes. The fiscal plan states that the reduction in the seniors low-income threshold is paired "with corresponding reductions for Special Needs Assistance for Seniors, and the . . . Seniors Home Adaptation and Repair Program," and the government projects savings in the tens of millions over the fiscal plan.

Now, to put it in context, the same budget documents also confirmed that Alberta is running a \$9.4 billion deficit this year, so effectively this government is saving money on the backs of the most vulnerable Albertans, seniors on fixed incomes. As my colleague from Calgary-Currie has already mentioned, all of the seniors in Alberta have paid their dues to our society. All of them have spent decades building our country and our province, and this government is, frankly, making it harder for seniors in Alberta to live a life of dignity. Budgets are about choices, and this government decided that they're going to run a \$9.4 billion deficit and, essentially, save money on the backs of seniors. That's a choice, and I think that tells you a lot about the government's values.

You know, on the other side of the House this government often says that these are just relatively minor adjustments, that Alberta still has comparatively high thresholds, but we also know that for so many folks across this province affordability is an issue. I think this bill shows how disconnected this government is with the everyday needs of Albertans. A senior on a fixed income does not buy groceries or pay rent with these comparisons that the government likes to refer to. The reality is that seniors who need help will lose access to the help that they need. Many seniors who are already on the brink, who are already on sort of that threshold, who have to carefully budget every single nickel and dime, will now be pushed further into a precarious situation where they may not be able to afford a utility bill or be able to eat three square meals a day. This is, I think, the reality of what this government is doing, and this is, in my view, absolutely unconscionable.

Now, the government's own 2026 business plan says that Alberta's "seniors financial assistance programs . . . support more than 210,000 seniors with low income." This government also knows that the senior population is growing quickly, and government projections show the number of seniors is expected to exceed 1 million by 2035, meaning close to 1 in 5 Albertans will be seniors within the next decade. So at the very moment when more Albertans are aging into retirement and at the very moment when rent, utilities, and groceries remain unaffordable for too many people, the government is moving the threshold in the wrong direction.

Madam Speaker, frankly, we've seen this before. The government takes from Alberta's poor and most vulnerable. What Budget 2026 also did is that it changed the Alberta caregiver credit so that people caring for noninfirm senior parents or grandparents living with them will no longer be eligible for the new credit. That

is explicitly set out in the fiscal plan. What does this mean? It means, at the end of the day, fewer supports for seniors, fewer supports for family caregivers, and a lot of these financial costs are downloaded on to households who are already doing everything they can.

Let's not forget that it was this government that pushed through the clawback of Canada's disability tax credit from AISH recipients, again, you know, taking away from poor Albertans on fixed incomes.

I think that's really the crux of this bill. That is why this bill cannot be supported. What we're seeing is that we have vulnerable Albertans who, frankly, are trying to live a life of dignity getting the rug pulled from under them. You know, these are not folks living large on the taxpayers' dime. They're asking for help. They're asking for a basic standard of living that I think every Albertan and every Canadian is entitled to. These programs help vulnerable Albertans keep a roof over their heads, food on the table. They help many seniors live independently for a little bit longer, a life of dignity that we all deserve, particularly for Albertans who have spent decades helping build our communities and our province.

4:10

I also want to bring attention to the fact that this is a pattern. Over the past several years seniors have already been asked to absorb higher prescription copays, loss of coverage for drivers' medical exams, the elimination of the office of the Seniors Advocate, and other changes that have made it harder to navigate aging in Alberta. This is the record of this government. This is what they have been doing precipitously, consistently, but very, very deliberately, taking away from seniors who have served our province. They're being asked to carry more with less support. That not only is unfair; I think it is fundamentally un-Albertan and un-Canadian. You know, oftentimes you can judge how equitable, how just a particular society is by looking at how they treat their most vulnerable folks, particularly their elders, particularly their seniors. This government is, frankly, again, trying to take away and to balance their books, if they'll ever get there, on the backs of seniors.

Now, I just want to also take a minute or two to talk about auto insurance. Madam Speaker, I've said in this House before, and folks in this Chamber know, that Albertans are paying some of the highest auto insurance premiums in the country. Ratehub, for example, drawing from the Alberta Automobile Insurance Rate Board, reports that the average Alberta premium reached \$1,835 as of June 2025, making Alberta the second-highest province in Canada for auto insurance rates. You know, we all know how we got here. It was this government that removed the cap on premiums. It was actually the Alberta New Democrats that implemented that. After this UCP government removed it after taking office, premiums then climbed shortly.

Madam Speaker, there is so much more to say, but I want to give my other colleagues an opportunity. I encourage all to vote against this bill because, frankly, I find it unconscionable that they are taking away from seniors. I think they can do a much better job. I encourage all to vote against Bill 27.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy to rise and take some time to speak to Bill 27 and, in particular, the changes to the Seniors Benefit Act, which, of course, are buried deep beneath it, way back on page 113, I think, with about three pages left in the bill

itself. Quite frankly, because in the last couple of years I've lost both of my parents, some of the issues that I find with this bill are extraordinarily personal for me. Like many other folks out there in Alberta and, in fact, across this country these days, I found myself very much part of that sandwich generation, being a mom to sort of young adults and also sometimes feeling like I was a mom to my elderly parents as well. So some of the consequences of this bill are, as I say, extraordinarily personal to me, and I do find it actually quite distressing.

The parts of this bill that deal with seniors and deal with the lowering of the benefit thresholds I actually find quite distressing. They reveal a choice that this government has made, which really is a choice to claw back support from seniors in the name of sustainability but also in the name of not wanting to be an outlier. We've heard many ministers and folks across the aisle talk about fiscal pressures and responsibility and how the budget needs to be sustainable for the future. We've also heard many folks from the government itself wax poetic about the contributions of Alberta seniors, how important seniors are to the building of this great province, how important seniors are to the history of this province, how many seniors today were the builders of the past, yet this, Madam Speaker, is the way that this government chooses to treat them. Words are important, but as I always said to the kids I taught, it's also important to make sure that those words are followed by actions that indeed will engender trust.

Seniors should not be expected to bear the consequences of choices made by this government. In my view it's wrong, Madam Speaker, fundamentally wrong for this UCP government to try to balance its books on the backs of seniors like my parents. It's even more wrong when many seniors are already living in poverty or hovering just above it, and we know this to be true. There's a reason why the CPP was established. It was established because particularly in the 1960s and early 1970s there was a whole host of women who were widows who were absolutely impoverished. They didn't have access to any sort of pension. That's one of the reasons why, when we don't have a good system of pensions and that sort of thing, seniors will often find themselves in these sorts of situations.

Again, because I've talked about my parents, these are not just simply abstract numbers or statistics that appear on a spreadsheet or a CSV file. These are folks who spent decades working here in this province, contributing to the province, paying taxes, perhaps paying into a pension, raising their families, contributing to their communities, maybe sitting on school boards, perhaps being a part of their community league. They followed all of the rules, Madam Speaker, and following retirement many of them may have qualified for the seniors' benefits that we are talking about right now. They relied on those benefits to be able to have a somewhat dignified retirement. They relied on those benefits much like they now rely on things like guaranteed income supplement or the old age security, whatever monthly payment it is that they're lucky enough to get from CPP to get by. The fact of the matter is that we shouldn't just have seniors who are simply getting by from month to month. They should be able to live a retirement that is filled with dignity.

Even though I know it seems like it's a tiny little amount, lowering the threshold here or there by \$3,000 or \$2,000, but in very real terms that could be \$100 to \$200 a month, Madam Speaker, and that makes a real difference. That makes the difference between whether or not you can afford that bus pass. It makes a difference between whether or not you can afford to pay your utilities, or you can even just go for coffee with a friend that you've had for 50 years. The fact is that by lowering the threshold even by what seems like a somewhat minuscule amount – although, as I just said, it isn't

– there will be many more, as my colleague from Calgary-Currie talked about, an estimated 8,000 or so seniors who will no longer qualify for this benefit. That's moms and grandparents and great-grandparents and dads and perhaps brothers and sisters.

This line in the sand that this government has decided to draw equates very, very closely to what minimum wage will equate to over the course of a year. I defy anyone in this House to try living on \$30,000 to \$31,000 or \$32,000 a year. It's incredibly difficult – incredibly difficult – and certainly doesn't speak particularly well of a government that says it values seniors. It says exactly the opposite, because that's the action that we're faced with right now, Madam Speaker.

Seniors are being asked to accept this explanation in the name of fiscal responsibility. They're being told to be reasonable, but I've got a few folks in my constituency who are not exactly feeling like they need to be reasonable at this moment. They're feeling, Madam Speaker, a sense of betrayal, and in fact they are seeing this government as one that simply cannot be trusted.

There's a constituent of mine who finds himself in a situation that many Albertans are in at the moment. Again, much like I was a few years ago, that total sandwich generation, a person kind of in middle age who's also taking care of an aging parent. Here's a little bit about what they shared with me. Their dad is in fact a benefit recipient. He receives some of these benefits because, of course, his income is not at all that great. Things are not easy because my constituent themselves is not particularly wealthy. They're a normal kind of north Edmonton person, work really, really hard, but things are difficult, as I say. They and their father are both "disturbed by the news," and I'm reading from an e-mail that we were sent a week or two ago. They are "disturbed by the news that the Alberta Government is using seniors and their caregivers who are in poverty to help balance the budget," and they note that they themselves don't even receive the caregiver allowance. In fact, they doubt that they'd even qualify. Even though they don't make that much money, they're just sort of assuming they'd be over that particular threshold.

4:20

They go on to note, Madam Speaker, that

Alberta is the richest province in Canada and the Provincial Government who represents my father and I are taking away benefits from the people like my father who worked very hard to build this province and country.

In fact, in this instance – I found this actually quite interesting – one of this constituent's father's first jobs was to clear brush and cut down trees for the power lines that were going up in the province with snow up to his torso, my constituent notes, for a grand total of 75 cents an hour. They say in their e-mail, "physically my father worked hard to build a better Alberta and Canada."

They also note, Madam Speaker, that

Seniors are now not able to afford transportation, not able to do urgent upgrades to their homes even if there are programs to help them [because] they still have to pay a portion and being in poverty means they have no money to pay the difference. They are also unable to take their necessary medications due to financial hardship and are having difficulty trying to feed themselves regularly.

[They feel as if they] are being punished because they are poverty stricken and elderly.

They and their father are wondering if they are being punished and if this government wants our life expectancy here in Alberta to compare to the U.S.'s or other countries with a lower life expectancy.

They finish off their e-mail to me, Madam Speaker, by saying that seniors worked hard to assist Alberta; why not assist them instead of taking things away from them?

Now, I'm sure, Madam Speaker, that many of my colleagues have also received some very similar e-mails, and if they haven't, part of the reason is probably because families like these, especially that sandwich generation, are extraordinarily busy. A child caring for an elderly parent without the means: days are hard and perhaps not exactly the day-to-day life many of us would envision when we talk about the glorious *Golden Girls* retirement years.

It's not just individual Albertans who are concerned, Madam Speaker. It's also folks who work with or who advocate on behalf of seniors' issues. The president of Unison, which is a nonprofit which operates out of both Calgary and Medicine Hat, is also concerned. One of the things that their president says is: the reduction in the threshold makes me fairly nervous because between the centres we deal with all income ranges, and we offer specialized programs targeted at low-income seniors. Moving the threshold to \$32,000 for singles and \$53,000 for couples, he says, is a change that he finds troubling. If you are making decisions between buying prescriptions that you need or buying groceries, that's a big number. He notes that more than 210,000 Alberta seniors need financial support of some kind, and that's a lot of people.

As I said, these are folks like my mom and my dad. These are folks that are our great-grandparents and our grandparents, and it is horrifying to me that these are decisions that this government is making seemingly without consequence. Of course, though, we know it will be with consequence. We shouldn't ever be balancing a budget on the backs of people who have worked so very hard to contribute so very much to this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and I take advantage of this opportunity to speak to Bill 27. As my colleagues have pointed out, it has quite a number of, you know, sort of disparate elements to it. As you can probably see, the main two issues that we have concerns around are in regard to the auto insurance change and proposal and then the reductions to the seniors' benefits here in the province of Alberta, raising the threshold for individual seniors to begin receiving the benefits to \$32,000 and \$53,000 for couples, saving approximately \$26 million for the government.

You know, it's noted that this is a budget that the UCP brought forward that had a \$9.4 billion deficit built into it, very unprecedented and surprising considering the windfall royalties that are coming in from the energy industry and so forth, and a growing economy, a growing population, which also helps to grow the economy, Madam Speaker, of course. Yet, number one, this government managed to still, you know, end up with a \$9.4 billion deficit and a \$26 million cut to seniors' benefits at the same time.

I don't have to explain to anyone here or in the province that, of course, we are in an affordability crisis here right now in the province of Alberta. As I had mentioned earlier in my member's statements, the price of food crisis has struck far and wide, and that includes seniors as well, of course. Prices for food products going up at a record rate here in the province of Alberta have led to more people than ever using food banks and assistance in that emergency sort of way. I think as well it's affecting the health of our Alberta population, especially vulnerable seniors who can't afford the healthy food that they might need to carry on.

I mean, I don't like to talk about cuts to seniors and so forth and anything else, but, you know, just a singular moral compromise, to suggest that you would put more seniors into poverty as a result of a government decision, when there are so many other decisions we

could have made that would allow those more than 8,000 people that are going to be directly affected by these cuts.

We can talk about numbers, we can talk about anything, but, certainly, a dollar being taken away from this vulnerable population – I would say that it's more like 10,000 or 11,000 seniors in Alberta – will end up costing the province of Alberta far more in ancillary costs in regard to health care, in regard to emergency services, in regard to, you know, couples losing a partner – right? – through dying from the different elements or different effects of poverty, people choosing to not use certain medications that they can't afford anymore, and a whole question around houselessness and food insecurity, as I said before.

When we get emergency calls into the Edmonton-North West constituency from people that need help, it's most often now people that are seniors. They've lived in their homes for most of their lives. Life is just getting exponentially more unaffordable. They are having their utilities cut off, or they are looking for ways to seek emergency food, or they've lost transport and so forth. It's not like everyone has a big network of care that they can count on with children or, you know, neighbours or whatever. I mean, those things can be there for some people, but they're not there for everyone. Everyone is in the same situation with an affordability crisis.

As a result, way out of proportion from the rest of the population, seniors are suffering. People are cutting back on the food that they're eating. They're cutting back on the transport. They're cutting back on the health care that they need to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The whole thing is quite depressing. All for savings of, as I said, approximately \$26 million.

You know, you have to prioritize these things. It's like triage – right? – Madam Speaker. You have to triage according to the areas of greatest need and the greatest potential compromise for humans. Certainly, the easiest place to look, of course, is our vulnerable seniors population. They're the ones that will have a negative effect on their lives by having a reduction in their income during one of the highest rates of inflation that we've seen in a generation.

Madam Speaker, you know, this is only just an addition to a number of cuts we've had to seniors' programs here in this province of Alberta since this UCP government has taken power. We've seen copay increases, each prescription increased by \$10 for seniors. We've seen drivers' medical exams no longer being covered for seniors. We've seen the entire office of the Seniors Advocate eliminated – right? – at the very time when there are more people than ever that need this kind of advocacy for themselves and for their families.

4:30

We've seen the special needs assistance allowance cut by \$9 million. This is for things such as foot orthotics, emergency personal response systems, laundry. These are all programs that have been cut since this UCP government has been in power.

We've seen the Alberta seniors' benefit deindexed, right? Again, indexing is based on the consumer price index and inflation, and of course we've never seen such a high increase to these things. What a time to take the indexing off. In other words, increases that will be commensurate with inflation: gone in the province of Alberta.

We've seen more than 40,000 seniors kicked right off of the seniors drug insurance program in the last seven years and just at the very time when we have an increasing population of seniors in the province of Alberta. As we've heard, by 2030 perhaps 20 per cent of the entire population of the province would be classified as seniors. You know, you can't pick a worse time to just pile cut upon cut.

The minimum daily hours of care in continuing care facilities has been eliminated, again, you know, when you have a larger population

in continuing care more than ever and more need than ever for people to get those minimum daily hours for cleaning and for wound care and things like that.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The elimination of the caregiver tax credit for those caring for seniors. As my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview described very eloquently with her own personal story, of course, looking after seniors is a responsibility for many of us, and we have to make sure we're looking after those caregivers, too. We know that many people who are looking after a senior in their family maybe are not all so well off either, and you're compromising the health and well-being of those people, too, by just presuming they can do it. Many of them can't. Of course, if they are being compromised financially or so forth, then they're less likely to be able to look after the seniors in their lives as well.

The fees to pharmacists serving seniors in continuing care facilities have been cut. Vulnerable seniors as a result are receiving less support. We know that a lot of our modern medicine, diagnoses, and treatment is to do with pharmaceuticals here. This is where we've seen a concentration of the most cuts for seniors, and I know of many seniors that will be choosing which prescriptions they will fill based on how much money they have rather than what's the medically best choice for them to make.

You know, I just wanted to point out some examples of people who we've been working with in Edmonton-North West. I won't use their real names, of course, for privacy purposes. So many of these seniors are women, too. Of course, there's a natural attrition rate between the genders. More and more often the male partners are passing away first. A lot of these programs that I just described here and also that overarching cut of \$26 million more from seniors' benefits are affecting senior women, right? Their situation is exacerbated by maybe less of a chance women of that generation had to have full-time work and a pension from that. That just makes it even worse.

We've had a woman in the last couple of weeks. They've cut the power off, right? They give you some minimum power legally to keep the lights on, but it's not enough to run the stove and the lights at the same time and the fridge. You have to make choices around that. It's still quite cold at night, and, you know, you can't run your furnace properly if your electricity is being cut, and so I see that quite often in my constituency office.

I had another person who, again, is looking for food, you know, feeling embarrassed to go to the food bank and looking for other ways to look for emergency support. Talking about skipping meals, right? Talking about skipping meals. I asked: what do you do for breakfast? With this one individual, she said: "What's breakfast? What do you mean? What's that?" You know, trying to make a joke in a sort of very dark way of the fact that maybe she's skipping breakfast.

You know, there are so many things that we can do, and I know that the Minister of Finance said that he had to make lots of tough choices during this budget, and I'm sure he did. That's absolutely true, but when you do so, you prioritize the things that you do pay for based on the effectiveness of that expenditure and the impact on people. For us to categorically target low-income seniors, you know, looking for \$26 million of savings I think is a poor use of that tool of triage: looking for the most effective way to help people during a difficult time, during an affordability crisis, to make sure that we're not compromising some of the most vulnerable people that we have in our society.

I mean, people have said it very well, and I'll say it once again: we must honour seniors in our province. They are the people who

helped to bring us up ourselves. They've helped to build Alberta to where we are today, and during their senior years – they like to call them the golden years, but you know, when you're living in poverty and so forth, it's not so golden. You want to get by, and you want to have the safety and security to know that you will get by and your loved ones will get by in a reasonable way. That's the very least that we can do.

Mr. Speaker, this bill simply does not satisfy that standard of which we should be operating here in the province. Thank you.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon on Bill 27, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. You know, I've been listening to my colleagues, and it's so relatable, the stories that they're sharing, the stories that we're hearing out of my office. I know that they're being shared with the government because we're being included in those e-mails. It's absolutely disappointing to know that this government has an opportunity to invest in people and invest in Albertans, and instead we saw a budget that essentially cut supports and resources for seniors and so many different areas that people in Alberta heavily rely on.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that the number one concern that we're hearing out of my office is affordability. People all across the province are talking about this. It's hard. People are struggling, and to know that this piece of legislation is reducing the income threshold by 9 per cent for seniors to be able to access programs is not the solution to that.

Just a few weeks ago I was sitting in a classroom with 70-some grade 6 students. There were two classes combined, and when I asked them what they talk about at home, they all talked about the cost of groceries and how, you know, they've heard the grown-ups in their life talking about things that they're struggling with. It's something that I think the majority of Albertans are talking about at their dinner tables across the province: the cost of groceries, the cost of living in general. To see that, with this information the government has, they're putting forward this piece of legislation, Bill 27, that essentially creates a greater capacity for more people to be entering into poverty, is quite sad, Mr. Speaker. I think Albertans deserve better from their government.

4:40

We're talking about a government who released their Budget 2026 and had a \$9.4 billion deficit, yet we're seeing cuts to seniors. It's insulting. Seniors in our province deserve dignity and respect and shouldn't have to worry about their fixed income having to stretch even further with the cost of groceries; medications; car insurance, which is also addressed in this piece of legislation; rent. Like, there are so many things that this government could be putting forward. Quite honestly, Mr. Speaker, there are many things that the Alberta New Democrats have put forward as suggestions, as private members' bills, that have offered solutions to some of these areas of affordability, and they've all been voted down.

When I'm talking with my constituents, you know, they're sharing heartbreaking stories about not being able to afford essentials, medications, healthy food. The numbers that report that they're accessing food banks: there's a church in our community, Good Shepherd, that offers food hampers, and they've reported that their numbers have substantially increased. It's families, it's seniors that are accessing those services. I'm very grateful that Pastor Jordan and the congregation are able to offer those supports and resources, but it's absolutely devastating that they have to in the

numbers because of the things that this government is doing, like this legislation.

There are thousands of seniors that are currently on a low income that are going to be impacted by this legislation, and they're already struggling. The cost of car insurance is absolutely outrageous. So many seniors have told me that they can't afford to purchase gas and can't afford to keep their car insured, so they're taking public transit, and the public transit system isn't supported well. It's a place where, I think, when people are at that stage in their life, they deserve so much better.

Now, the other piece of this legislation: to be clear, this impacts three different ministries. The two that I'm going to focus on today are the seniors' benefits cuts and the auto insurance because this is something that we're hearing about a lot as well. Anybody that has auto insurance knows that the UCP allowed auto insurance rates to get out of control after they removed the insurance rate cap that the Alberta New Democrats put in when we were in government. And it's not getting any better.

Mr. Speaker, we've called on this government over and over to do things that actually address an affordability crisis. One thing that they could do today is remove the provincial gas tax. We've asked over and over and over for weeks, and this government has refused. It's hard to understand how they're hearing from so many Albertans that are struggling, that are desperate, yet they're not doing anything to address the affordability crisis in the province, and they're introducing legislation that makes it more difficult and more expensive for Albertans to live.

Now, you know, I've mentioned that we've put forward previous pieces of legislation in front of this House. We have opportunities to do that on Mondays. One of them was a solution to auto insurance affordability. It was Motion 504. It was voted down. I would love to be able to say that this is a collaborative space where all members can introduce pieces of legislation that can move forward; however, zero of our private members' bills and motions have actually proceeded. These are solutions that have gone through consultation, are based on talking to Albertans, and could actually improve the cost of living for so many across the province, yet they're continuously voted down. Like I said, zero have been approved.

I don't understand why this is the stance that this government has taken, and it's not new, Mr. Speaker. We've seen over the years that the UCP has made numerous cuts that impact seniors. There is a question about why. When you know that seniors are on a fixed income and that the cost of living is so high, why are they continuing to put forward legislation that creates more and more harm to seniors?

Now, since 2019 there's been significant legislation that has had negative impacts on seniors. Some of those examples are that the copay increased by \$10 for each prescription. Drivers' medical exams are no longer covered for seniors. They eliminated the office of the Seniors Advocate. The special needs assistance: cut by \$9 million. That's things like foot orthotics, emergency personal response systems, laundry, those types of things. They deindexed the Alberta seniors' benefit. They kicked 40,000 seniors off of the drug insurance program, eliminated the caregiver tax credit for those caring for seniors. They've cut fees to pharmacists serving seniors in continuing care facilities, meaning vulnerable seniors receive less support. That's not an exhaustive list. That is just a few of the things that this government has done since 2019, yet we're here again debating this Bill 27 that is, again, impacting seniors in a negative financial way.

Now, I'm very, very blessed, Mr. Speaker, in that my mom, who is a senior, lives in my home and has for many, many, many years. I am so grateful that that is the situation that we have in place in our family because the heartbreaking stories that I hear about the care

of seniors that are living in care facilities at different stages and lodges are absolutely unacceptable. The stories that we're hearing aren't only being shared with us. The government knows what is happening around this province, yet when asked about it, they deflect. They give different numbers. They're not sharing the reality of what's happening. They're putting forward legislation that is making it worse.

Part of my role is not only to be the MLA for the incredible community of Edmonton-Castle Downs, where I've lived for over 30 years, but it's representing veterans. Now, 1 in 10 veterans is said to retire in the province, and I can tell you that the way that this government has treated veterans specifically is absolutely unacceptable. When asked about what the government is going to do, they've said, years past, they'd promised veterans housing. They specifically said eight beds. At a summit that they hosted, they said that they would provide eight beds in the homelessness space specific to veterans. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that zero have been dedicated to veterans. Zero. A promise of eight.

We're watching this government continue to make life more unaffordable when they have opportunities to do things that they say they're going to do instead of putting forward this piece of legislation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage everyone to vote against Bill 27. Thank you.

4:50

The Acting Speaker: Are there others that wish to speak?

Seeing none, the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to close debate. That's waived.

I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I call the committee to order.

Bill 22

Animal Protection Amendment Act, 2026

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Chair. Very excited to have this bill in Committee of the Whole, but I would like to propose an amendment that's essential to Alberta's culture and heritage. I move that Bill 22, the Animal Protection Amendment Act, 2026, be amended in section 3(b) in subsection (2)(c) to include chuckwagon racing and rodeo. This amendment – I'll wait until that gets to you, Chair.

The Deputy Chair: This amendment will be referred to as A1.

The minister of agriculture can proceed to read it into the record.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Chair. This amendment will provide certainty to industry and enforcement agencies by confirming that chuckwagon racing and rodeo fall within the scope of permitted sporting activities. Rodeo, of course, holds a special place in Alberta's cultural identity, serving as both a celebration of the province's ranching heritage and a living tradition that unites urban and rural communities. Events like the Calgary Stampede have become internationally renowned, drawing visitors from around the

world and showcasing Alberta's deep connection to the land, livestock, and cowboy traditions.

Beyond entertainment, rodeo reflects the resilient, adventurous spirit and co-operative values that helped shape this province. Its ongoing importance lies not only in preserving history but also fostering community pride and economic vitality throughout the province.

Organizers and participants of these events are deeply committed to ensuring the welfare of all animals involved, adhering to strict guidelines that prioritize safety, health, and humane treatment. Professionals are present at all major events to monitor animal health, and any concerns are addressed immediately to prevent unnecessary stress or injury. The continued evolution of best practices demonstrates the community's dedication to responsible animal care, balancing tradition with modern standards of animal welfare. Mr. Chair, those working in the chuckwagon and rodeo industry are experts when it comes to animals, and they take the welfare of their animal athletes extremely seriously.

For those reasons, I urge all members to support this amendment. Thank you, Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any comments to amendment A1 as proposed by the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation?

I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to provide comment back on the main bill? The Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 22, the Animal Protection Amendment Act, 2026, and to lend my support to this bill. You know, I think any time we have an opportunity to update legislation that's over 20 years old, it's probably a good thing to do, and I support the improvements to this act. I really think that this act helps to modernize Alberta legislation and Alberta, really, in regard to animal protection and helps us catch up to other jurisdictions, which is important.

My biggest concern about this bill is that there's a little bit of a disconnect between the law and the resources required to enforce it and implement it. I think that that's really critical. I mean, it's critical for all pieces of legislation but especially in this case. This law is really about protecting animals from being in undue distress, so it's critical that a law like this has the capacity for effective and rapid enforcement so that we're not causing any long-term or undue suffering for animals that might be the subject of this bill.

There are a lot of things in this bill that I like. The one thing that I really like the most, perhaps because I have pets and I've worked with wildlife and animals my whole life – I really love the changes to the definition of distress. This bill includes pieces like an animal can't be "deprived of... appropriate light... confined in unsanitary conditions... deprived of... exercise, movement or the expression of natural behaviours," can't be "exposed to... undue or prolonged fear, anxiety or frustration." I think any of us in this room that has a dog at home that misses us a lot for the four days that we're up here knows what it looks like when an animal is experiencing anxiety or distress.

You know, I've worked with grizzly bears and all kinds of wild animals, too, and I know that animals are big brained, capable of making decisions, weighing stimulus, and they're definitely capable of emotion. Scientific research is even showing that animals that we underestimated in terms of their emotional capability have tremendous emotions. Whales, orcas, even octopuses are now being shown to have emotional capacity, so any

kind of legislation that we can introduce in this House that helps protect animals from undue suffering in regard to distress I think is a good idea.

You know, I think that the more we learn about animal behaviour and animal intellectual capacity, the more important pieces of legislation like this become, so I also really like that there is a new offence around abandonment to make sure that animals can't be abandoned and left on their own. I really like that this bill expands enforcement capabilities as well. It extends to the types of locations. Types of locations and businesses that can be inspected now include boarding and grooming facilities, for example. I think that this is great. We're expanding the number of businesses and operations that we're holding accountable to appropriate treatment of animals.

It also adds a requirement for an occupant to produce an animal on reasonable request, and I think that that reduces the need for an inspection officer to enter a dwelling. I think that that is also really important. We know that around the world illegal trade in wildlife and other animals is a problem – that's not just Alberta – and the people who are the bad actors or who are engaging in these illegal activities can sometimes be dangerous. I don't know if you saw the episode on *Heartland* about horse thieves, but it was edge-of-your-seat kind of stuff. Those guys had guns, and they were not using them for good things. *Heartland* aside, I think that this bill increases the safety of the officer requesting that somebody bring the animal to them so that they don't have to enter private property without permission, and it gets them to an answer more quickly.

5:00

The bill also increases penalties and accountability for people who are engaged in nefarious behaviour. It recognizes prohibition orders from other provinces, which is amazing. It's the first bill in Canada to recognize prohibitions from other provinces in animal protection. My question is: will we now start advocating for some back and forth in that regard so that other jurisdictions also respect and honour the Alberta Animal Protection Act? We're the first ones to do this, and I think it's a really meaningful move forward, especially when we have some people who have illegal operations that span provinces or they move from one province to another. It increases the fines from \$20,000 to \$250,000. Also great, right? Like, if you're engaging in this kind of behaviour, there should be very clear and expensive consequences.

There are a few things in this bill that are a little unclear that I look forward to the minister clarifying perhaps in the regulations or in future budgets. I think the biggest piece is really around funding and implementation. The way animal protection enforcement works is that in Edmonton and Calgary there are, like, humane societies at the municipal level or at the bylaw level that are responsible for enforcing laws inside the city. However, across the rest of Alberta it's up to the Alberta SPCA. That is a pretty big landscape for one organization to be responsible for enforcement.

The SPCA is a nonprofit organization who does incredible work. I'm very thankful for our Bow Valley SPCA in Canmore that I know does work across a really broad landscape to make sure that animals in the Bow Valley are treated humanely and fairly. But the SPCA is constantly fund raising, and that's what you do when you're a nonprofit organization. The SPCA does expect that the number of calls and number of enforcement requests that they'll have to address because of this bill will increase when this bill comes into power.

The SPCA is responsible for training the people, so the peace officers or the sheriffs or the RCMP, who will be assessing and investigating complaints around animal protection. The SPCA needs to train these people on what to recognize and how to investigate

these complaints, but then they also need to do the work oftentimes to rehabilitate or care for animals that have been mistreated.

Last year the SPCA was 80 per cent donor funded. That is a lot of money, and they're going to need to increase their annual budgets in order to implement this bill. So I think we need to be careful to make sure that the government isn't creating pieces of legislation that it's then relying on volunteer and nonprofit organizations to implement. That is a big risk. And then the other thing is that the SPCA currently only has one year of funding. I think we need to consider having regular annual funding for the SPCA so that they can implement this law that the government is bringing into power. We need to make sure that the capacity to enforce it exists, and we need to make sure that the funding for that capacity also exists.

The last thing I'll comment on is that there's a piece in the legislation around hold periods and outcomes. Increasing the hold period from three to seven days may have implications for the length of stay and the ability to provide timely care while animals remain in custody. Some of the SPCA stakeholders that we chatted with had questions around the implementation, how that increased hold period would be monitored, and they'd really like to revisit it once it's been implemented for a while just to make sure that it functions in practice as it's written in the legislation and that animals can get the timely medical care that they need.

Thank you.

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

[The remaining clauses of Bill 22 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.

Bill 26 Immigration Oversight Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any wishing to provide comments, questions, or amendments? The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak against Bill 26, the Immigration Oversight Act. Let me begin with something that many Albertans have already seen and experienced, that's not new. This did not start with this bill. Long before this legislation was introduced, serious problems were happening in the province. When LMIA fraud became common in many workplaces, when temporary foreign workers were being exploited, when they were paid below minimum wages and forced to work long hours, this government did not act. Workers were afraid to speak. Families were struggling to survive. Some employers took advantage of the system without fear of any consequences.

This was not hidden. This was happening in plain sight. I saw it in my own community. People in trades and service industries saw it, too. Stories were shared quietly, but the pattern was clear. As a concerned Albertan I could not ignore it. I created a short film on that – it's called *The Rust* – to highlight these real experiences. Workers were paying thousands of dollars just to get a job and then waiting months without pay, living in fear. That film was not fiction, Mr. Chair. It reflected what was happening on the ground. Even then this government did nothing meaningful. No urgency, no enforcement, and no protection for those workers. That silence spoke loudly.

At the same time, this government was actively encouraging more immigration. They launched the Alberta Is Calling campaign. It spent millions of taxpayer dollars on advertising and even offered \$5,000 to the people who moved here. The Premier spoke openly about doubling Alberta's population. She talked about how she wants Red Deer to grow from about 100,000 people to 1 million in no time. The message was clear – come to Alberta – but when people came and when people faced problems, there was no support, no protection, no enforcement. That gap between admission and action was not just concerning; it was deeply unfair.

Now things changed. The immigration level dropped significantly across Canada, including here in Alberta. The federal target was reduced in 2026. They said 40 per cent immigration is going to be reduced. In Alberta, compared to previous years, in 2025 only a fraction of people chose Alberta to call home, and we know why. Albertans are struggling. Health care is under pressure. Education is stretched. Cost of living is rising. This government failed to keep up the growth when it had the chance. It had strong revenues, especially from oil and gas revenues, but did nothing. They did not invest enough in infrastructure like hospitals and schools. When people started asking questions, instead of taking responsibility, the government shifted the blame. It pointed a finger at the newcomers, the same people they once invited loudly and proudly.

5:10

Now, only after this, after everything happened, all the abuse, the LMIA fraud, we see Bill 26. Why introduce this bill now when immigration numbers are already 75 per cent down in Alberta? This bill comes too late. More importantly, it does not address the real problem.

Let us look at what this bill is going to propose. It creates a new provincial registry for employers hiring foreign workers. It introduces the licence system for immigration consultants and recruiters. Officials have power to investigate a workplace even without complaints. It allows the minister to create new rules later through the regulation. At first glance this may sound like action, but we must look deeper into it. Many of these rules already existed. Federal immigration laws are already in place. Provincial labour laws already protect workers. The issue has never been a lack of rules; the issue has been weak enforcement.

Instead of fixing enforcement, this bill adds another layer of bureaucracy. Businesses already deal with federal requirements. Now they will face a second system, more paperwork, more delays, and more confusion. Industry groups have raised concerns. Sectors like hospitality and construction already struggle with a labour shortage, and adding more red tape will not help. It will make things hard.

And what about the workers? This bill does very little to protect them from retaliation. Many workers are afraid to report abuse because they fear losing their job or being sent home. Without strong protection they will remain silent. The bill also does not directly address the key views we have seen: illegal fees, underpayment, and exploitation tied to the LMIA process. These are the real issues, yet they are not properly addressed in this bill.

Immigration is mainly a federal responsibility. This bill creates a parallel provincial system. That creates overlap. It creates confusion. It risks conflict between levels of government. Even the bill itself admits that provincial rules must align with federal law. So we must ask: why build a whole new system instead of improving co-ordination with the existing one?

There are also concerns about power. This bill gives significant authority to appointed directors. They can enter a workplace, review records, and start an investigation on their own even if there

is no complaint. The details of how these powers will be used are not fully clear. Many decisions will be left to future regulations. The minister can also grant exemptions, but without clear criteria written into the law, that raises questions about fairness and consistency.

Mr. Chair, this is not just about policy. It is about trust. Temporary foreign workers play a significant role in our economy. They fill real gaps. They contribute to our communities. They deserve respect and protection, not blame. The LMIA abuses we saw were known for years. Action at the time could have made a real difference. It could have protected workers. It could have held bad actors accountable. Instead, we now have a bill that expands authority but does not deliver real protection.

We need a better approach. We need stronger enforcement, not a whole new law, a whole new bill. All that this bill says already existed in federal or our provincial labour laws. We need real support for workers who speak up, we need clear consequences for those who break the laws, and we need co-operation with the federal government, not duplication. Bill 26 does not deliver these regulations.

Albertans deserve better. Workers deserve protection. Businesses deserve clarity, and newcomers deserve fairness. For all these reasons, I cannot support Bill 26.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Calgary-North East.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Rowell Pailan was over the moon. He got a Canadian visa, a stable job at Canadian Tire, and a dream of a better Canadian life. He thought he will live the best life. He excitedly shared the news with his friends and relatives. He knew if he worked honestly, worked hard every day, he will pay off his \$7,900 USD debt, the money he borrowed to pay Allison Jones Consulting and AJ Immigration Group as a recruitment fee. He packed his bags, boarded the plane to Canada toward a better future: new country, new job, and new life. He showed up to work every day, he worked hard, and he worked honestly.

He began to get paid and began sending money home to pay off his debt, but then things began to change. His salary was reduced. He barely survived. He stopped paying off the debt that he borrowed from back home, and Rowell was stressed. His work permit was tied to one employer and losing the job would mean losing status. That would mean leaving Canada forever, and the debt would stay where it was.

He was not alone. There were many other workers at that business. They fought back, they filed a case, and a labour officer launched an investigation and found that the companies illegally charged recruitment fees. They were operating as a single, unified business despite claiming otherwise, and workers were misled and financially exploited. Rowell became the face of the case. The court ruled in their favour. Rowell alone was paid more than \$10,000, including penalties, and Rowell said: I was so happy and teary-eyed because finally I got justice.

Rowell is not the only one. There are thousands of foreign workers who continue to be exploited, underpaid, and mistreated. Not all of them can fight the case against their exploitation because of the fear of losing their job, fear of losing status, and fear of deportation.

Mr. Chair, before we move on any further, we must look at the history of the temporary foreign worker program. The seasonal agricultural worker program was established in 1966, the higher-skilled temporary foreign worker program component in 1973, and the live-in caregiver program in 1992. Then this program was

expanded to include the nonskilled category in 2002. Worker exploitation has been a concern since its inception, and it has been difficult for governments to track, tackle, and treat the problem.

The Auditor General's report in 2021 found that agriculture inspections in 2020 and '21 provided little assurance that workers were protected. Employment and Social Development Canada's own 2020 report follow-up audit found that 98 per cent of the sampled investigations in the 2018 to 2019 to early 2020 period exceeded internal timelines – 98 per cent of the investigations, Mr. Chair. On-site investigations averaged 376 days to complete; one full circle of Earth around the sun to complete one investigation. Paper investigations were even worse. They averaged 674 days, almost two years to complete an investigation. Two years is a lot of time in the life of an exploited worker.

5:20

Let me share some recent numbers, too. In the period of 2022-2023, 2,141 inspections were initiated, 23 warnings were issued, 93 penalties, and seven bans. Once \$1.6 million was recovered in penalties. One point six million dollars: it seems a big number, but it's just the surface, Mr. Chair. If we include the cases that were never reported, never filed, and never investigated, this number could balloon to an unimaginable figure. In '23-24, 8,426 tips were assessed, 2,122 were inspected, \$2.1 million was recovered in penalties. Again, \$2.1 million can seem a huge number, but it's not even the tip of the iceberg. In the first half of 2024-2025, 649 inspections were initiated and again \$2.1 million were recovered in penalties.

Mr. Chair, every worker who lands in this country should have equal opportunity just like everyone else. Their hard work, their honest work, and their labour should be respected in this country, in this province, in our society. They deserve to live the life of dignity. They are not just workers; they are builders. They build homes. They build hospitals. They build almost everything that we see around us. They work as janitors, construction workers, and every job that is least favourable for everyone else, but when will their exploitation end? Why can't our governments take concrete steps to end exploitation? Why can't we give them the life of dignity? Why can't this UCP government end worker exploitation without having to have sweeping powers over immigration?

When I talk to people in my community, they tell me they want to see an end to this worker exploitation. They want everyone to have a life free of exploitation. They don't want to raise their kids in a society where exploitation is a norm, and this exploitation has spread like a termite in our economy. We must kill this termite of worker exploitation before it eats away our entire economy, Mr. Chair. This UCP government can do this without having to poke into our businesses with their iron fist.

They can do three things to fight this termite. First and foremost, they can strengthen the worker protection laws. Protection to workers does not just end exploitation; it gives them dignity. It gives them respect and a sense of belonging. Exploitation steals that away. Exploitation shatters dreams. It makes workers feel useless. It kills their motivation, and since 2019 this government has weakened worker protection. With Bill 2 the UCP reversed the 2018 rule that let workers bank overtime at 1.5 hours off for every overtime hour worked. The 2018 rule put more money in workers' pockets. It gave them extra cash to spend in our economy. It gave them a sense of purpose, Mr. Chair. The UCP brought the weaker rule of one hour off for one hour worked. The UCP took money out of the workers' pockets. It made them poor. It made them feel less worthy right in our province.

Bill 32 went further by allowing employers to impose averaging agreements over as long as 52 weeks, which can spread busy weeks

over a long period and reduce overtime owing. Overtime is extra work that workers have done. Extra work should come with extra pay, Mr. Chair. It's not charity; it's workers' rights, and the UCP took that right away.

Then the UCP brought Bill 47, that reinstated a cap on maximum insurable earnings, limited presumptive coverage for psychological injuries to a narrow set of occupations, restored a voluntary rather than mandatory system for reinstating injured workers, and removed the requirement for employers to keep contributing to health benefit plans while injured workers were off work. These changes poured salt on the wounds of the injured workers, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, a stronger workforce builds a stronger economy. No economy in the world flourishes without strong worker protections. When workers succeed, our province succeeds, and when our province succeeds, our future becomes brighter, stronger, and secure. In Alberta under this UCP government that's not the case. Alberta's workers haven't seen a single dollar increase in minimum wage since 2018. When the minimum wage doesn't go up, it goes down. Fifteen dollars in 2018 has the purchasing power of \$11.75 to \$12.20 in 2026. It has lost 20 per cent of its value. Twenty per cent down. Have groceries gone 20 per cent down? No. They went 40 per cent up. Has insurance gone 20 per cent down? No. It went 60 per cent up from 2018. Sixty per cent. Has tuition gone 20 per cent down? It went up by more than 30 per cent. While everything else went 40 to 60 per cent up, minimum wage is down 20 per cent. That's shameful, that's deliberate, and that's cruel. The UCP can do some other things as well. They can increase the minimum wage, and they can listen to Albertans.

I will share one last story and then I will sit down so that my other colleagues can speak. Mr. Chair, a young guy from my town of Faridkot came to Canada in 2022. He borrowed money from his relatives to come here. He paid close to \$40,000 to his recruiter to get a job and sponsorship. His father is a local priest in our local gurdwara. His mother has two cows and sells milk in the village to keep the house running, so repaying the debt was entirely on his shoulders. He began working but was just paid \$15 instead of the promised higher wage. Fifteen dollars was so low that he could barely pay his own expenses, leave alone the debt of \$40,000 plus the interest.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

He began to borrow money from his friends to pay for his rent, food, and living expenses. How long can someone continue to borrow, Madam Chair? Life doesn't work like that. One day I got a random call on my WhatsApp from India. I hear his brother's broken voice. He said Akashdeep ended his life by hanging in the garage in Calgary. They needed my help to get his dead body back home. Imagine Akashdeep making a living wage, imagine Akashdeep paying off his debt, and imagine Akashdeep living a life of dignity in Alberta.

He was not alone. There are so many other Akashdeeps living in Alberta who are barely surviving. We can help them. We can give them the life of dignity. We can show them that their lives do matter. We can do that with one bill, one move, and one right thing that this UCP government can do. They can introduce a bill and increase the minimum wage and do the right thing to help those workers. I'm glad that my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View did that, and every single one of the UCP MLAs stood up to kill that bill. That's shameful, and that's cruel, and that's deliberate.

I have lots of other stories, Madam Chair, but I will leave it to my other colleagues to share their own stories as well. I ask all the members to vote against this bill, as this bill is not intended to help

workers or end worker exploitation or put more money in their pockets. This bill is entirely focused on poking into immigrant businesses. This bill is entirely focused on anti-immigrant rhetoric. This bill is entirely focused on anti-immigrant narrative coming right from this government, and we cannot continue like that.

I'll take my seat. I request all members to vote against it, and I'll leave it to my other colleagues to share their stories as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill 26, Immigration Oversight Act, sponsored by myself, and respond to some of the comments made by the members opposite. Now, I'll begin by noting that there are some legitimate concerns raised by the members opposite and how our government is responding to them. I understand, and my condolences to the member opposite for the loss of his friend. You know, one life is one too many, Madam Chair. My condolences go to him and his family. I understand that there are many Albertans who are struggling with many other issues, and we do have supports available, particularly through mental health, to ensure that they get the supports they need and that taking one's own life is not considered an option. Community. We rely upon community, and it's important that we have that, and the government has a role to play there as well.

5:30

To the other points I would like to make, particularly about minimum wage. Now, this has been something that we have discussed at great length in the Chamber and the differences of opinion between the members opposite and the government on minimum wage. To echo one of the comments made from my colleague behind me, it is a minimum wage; it is not a mandatory wage. By that, Madam Chair, what I mean to say is that there are many people in Alberta who are earning well above the minimum wage who are on the employment spectrum. In fact, only about 5 per cent of Albertans are earning minimum wage, and the vast majority of those who are earning minimum wage are actually not incurring the most expensive costs on a day-to-day basis, things like rent, the payment of a vehicle, those kinds of things, utilities. They're living at home. What I'm driving at here is that these are oftentimes young Albertans who are experiencing their first employment opportunity.

The reason why I talk about that first employment opportunity, which is partially germane to this conversation, is that as a province we have seen over the past couple of years concerning trends in youth unemployment. Now, as a government we do not believe that we create jobs. We don't create wealth. We create an environment where those jobs and that wealth can be created, can be manufactured, where the risk takers can do what they do best and create opportunities. But when you artificially augment a wage to the point where it becomes prohibitive for corporations, businesses, small and medium-sized businesses to hire employees, it actually has a negative effect on the labour market. When you impose a new minimum wage on businesses who are already paying what they can, what the market has determined is the value for that labour, now that you're increasing that, you're actually driving out employment opportunities.

By consequence, what you're also doing is you're robbing young Albertans of the first employment opportunity that they need to have. Some people think that that first job isn't actually that important. Madam Chair, I put to you that it is critical. It is absolutely critical that you get that first chance to work, to learn

how to show up on time, how to communicate with customers, communicate with superiors in the workplace, how to dress properly, how to, you know, do your hair, handle money, whatever. There's a whole spectrum of skills that you cannot learn in the classroom that you get in that first job, but if you can't have that, your entire labour trajectory, your entire employment trajectory could be affected negatively.

That is why we've introduced Bill 26, the Immigration Oversight Act. We have seen the spirit and the intent of the temporary foreign worker program abused in some instances. We understand that there are many industries, Madam Chair, that rely heavily upon temporary workers, and those industries should not be concerned about this legislation because we understand the impact that major changes would have; things like agriculture, for example.

Now, I spent some time in the summer connecting with the agriculture producers in my constituency of Cardston, and I can tell you that what I heard is they are paying youth to come to do things like picking weeds well over \$20 an hour because that's what they have deemed the value of that labour at. They're still having a difficult time retaining employees because it's tough work. It's hard work. This is an industry that relies heavily upon temporary workers. I have signalled before and I'll signal again here in the Chamber that, you know, industries like agriculture shouldn't be too concerned about this bill.

The intent of the legislation, Madam Chair, was never to be having temporary workers in entry-level positions in Calgary working in things like fast-food restaurants, understanding that that is oftentimes that first opportunity for employment given that there is not a wide skill base for youth coming in between the ages of 16 and 25. As you get more to the higher end of spectrum there is as they're graduating university or in the trades, but what I can say is that those entry-level positions are occupied oftentimes by youth.

There are difficulties getting jobs. We just saw, Madam Chair, two instances where there were job fairs in Calgary where thousands of kids in Alberta were looking and lined up to get a job, all competing for only a finite number of positions that were available. As a result, these lines were there for hours.

The legislation is designed to have more oversight over employment recruiters and immigration consultants, particularly targeting the bad actors, ensuring that they're not withholding documents, not charging fees, not giving false information to those who may be coming here to Alberta to work. Not only do we have a need to know who is working and who is hiring temporary workers, but also we have a reputation to maintain, Madam Chair. I've been many places around the world to go and sell the Alberta advantage and what it is that we have to offer as a premier destination to work. That reputation cannot be tarnished by bad actors who would bring employees under false pretenses into the province only to have those employees call or e-mail or talk back to their home and their families and say: I was misled; you should never come here. That is a reputation we never want to have. That is the reason why we have more oversight over this industry.

Madam Chair, I know I'll have lots more to say on this in third reading, but I would encourage members on the opposition benches to keep their comments specific about the immigration consultants, to keep their comments specific about the employment recruiters, and to also make sure that they remind themselves of the spirit, the intent of this legislation, which is to make sure that bad actors are being weeded out, that Alberta maintains a strong reputation of being a wonderful place to live and to work but also keeping in mind those youth, the youth in Alberta who will become the labour force of tomorrow, who need the first employment opportunity. Those employment opportunities in many instances are being occupied by individuals who, though well intending, should not be

coming and occupying those positions in Alberta. We want to make sure, first and foremost, that Albertans have the first opportunity at Alberta jobs.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and have the opportunity to add my comments to this very bill, Bill 26, Immigration Oversight Act. I'm just going to see if I'm going to use the notes. Maybe not. Thank you.

Madam Chair, what I wanted to say about this bill in starting is that, you know, this bill: when you go through, honestly, there is nothing about oversight in this bill. Its heading states this, and the – I don't know. The minister is not – I'll not actually mention the minister's position. But the way the minister tried to project it, this bill, if you go a little bit deeply into it, what it tries to do, either is duplicating the process that already exists or, more than that, follows the same pattern that this UCP government has in the past seven years. No solutions but more powers to the ministerial offices. This bill exactly does the same thing.

The funniest thing about this bill is that as I have been hearing this UCP government's rhetoric for the past seven years, they have created a ministry for that. They call it the red tape reduction ministry, a special department. In this such case it doesn't seem they're convinced by it, so they're going totally in the opposite direction in this bill. All the professionals working in the immigration field, the immigration consultants and the people who use immigration services, follow the federal law, and what does this government do? They just wanted to create the extra step under the provincial government that also depends on if their policies align with the federal law. The federal law had to be in agreement with what is being done in this to follow those people.

5:40

When looking at this crisis, I know we had immigration policy issues. I wanted to thank you, immigration minister, for paying attention to the debate, I hope taking interest. I hope he will take something back, if we are serious, to fix the immigration problems. Take back this discussion to the backroom and maybe make changes, and bring it back into third reading so we can properly address the real issues. I hope that would be the case.

The current immigration policies: the former UCP Premier Jason Kenney as immigration minister in the Harper government always took pride that he is the architect of these modern immigration policies, ending the direction of the federal immigration from the humanitarian, compassionate grounds to temporary federal immigration policies. He flew to Australia very many times and copied or probably borrowed or followed their very infamous policy that did not work in Australia, that became very controversial, that ended up being changed. Mostly, broadly, they shut down their programs, and that's what we're seeing here in Canada. The federal government has already started clamping down on immigration policies, and my colleagues have eloquently spoken about that with the facts, with the numbers, what is happening in the federal policy.

On top of this, I just wanted to read page 32, I believe, in the act, where this bill claims under part 7 that they wanted to provide a clear path to file a complaint to prohibit the people who experience reprisal or retributions, bad practices in the industry. When you go through the bill, there is no such provision in this bill that really supports their claim.

On the contrary to this, I remember, because as an active part of the community and participating in so many different issues around immigration, I remember that. If there was any change, that was a change brought by the previous NDP government when there was a temporary foreign worker abuse case in Fort Saskatchewan. The existing program: what it did to the worker was as soon as somebody compiled a complaint against an abusive employer, they immediately lost their employment and became the undocumented immigrant and, basically, faced deportation. So nobody was coming out.

That was the change brought in by the previous NDP government, and that was about eight or nine years ago. This UCP government did not do anything in the past seven years to improve on that.

A lot of the issues that we hear from the community members and the constituents in our constituency offices are around clarity, transparency, and accountability in Alberta's immigration nominee program. People file their applications and are given promises or outline programs, and when they get through that program, then they apply into that, then they get stuck until they become undocumented and vulnerable to get abused in the industry. This bill doesn't do anything to help those vulnerable immigrants.

The other thing I just wanted to say on the record: context is very important. We have seen that there are a number of ways immigration policy can be administered in the provinces. We had the provisions, but unfortunately this UCP government's record on this is flip-flopping: one step forward, two steps back, but no lessons, no changes. I have seen under Premier Jason Kenney that they wanted 20,000 immigrants; then they wanted no immigrants during COVID; then they wanted to cut all the categories; then they wanted to open all the categories; then they wanted 10,000 immigrants and no applications were being processed. If we even have provisions under the federal immigration law, this government is not doing anything. They don't have clarity, even. What is the issue and what could be the solution?

What we have seen for their own political conveniences: this government is using immigrants for scapegoating on their issues. When they go into ethnic communities, they want more immigration, they want to add more protection around immigration programs, but verbally in their talking points; nothing in reality. When they want to promote their separatist agenda, then it's about immigration and everything is making it bad.

The government failed to deliver on their own promises to Albertans, let's say from 2023. We have seen the historic teachers' strike in this province after waiting for three years on this UCP government's promises. Instead of finding solutions to that and showing their leadership, they started blaming immigrant communities. The same thing in health care: people are dying in hospital facilities in the waiting rooms, waiting to get treatment not for one hour, two hours; eight hours, 13 hours, and the minister got up and announced some programs to tackle that. Those solutions are just on the piece of paper for talking points he has. No updates since February to the end of April.

5:50

Those are the problems. To cover it up, the government and the government ministers have brought forward this bill under the guise of trying to solve problems in immigration, maybe to look like they have another field where they're fighting with the federal government to court their separatist agenda. What I wanted to say for the record, once again to the minister of jobs, economy and to the minister of immigration: you already know what the problem is. This bill is still in the Committee of the Whole. If this government is honest about addressing the issues in the immigration department – and they know the issues – they should go back and fix this bill and bring it back.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to Bill 26?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Bill 26, the Immigration Oversight Act.

[The clauses of Bill 26 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report bills 22 and 26.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: I've got to put my eyes on here.

Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 26. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 22. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 10 tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:53 p.m.]

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