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The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

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Day 56

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, May 11, 2026

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 25

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

[Adjourned debate April 23: Ms Hoffman]

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

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that after reading this legislation, after listening to teachers, parents, school trustees, and education workers across the province, one thing becomes painfully clear. This government has completely lost the plot when it comes to public education. Bill 25 is not a serious education bill. Alberta classrooms are in crisis right now. At a time when Alberta students are funded at the lowest level in Canada, classrooms are bursting at the seams, kids with complex needs lack the supports they deserve, and teachers and families are facing immense uncertainty this school year because of this government's neglect, the UCP government's focus could not be more misplaced.

There are real challenges in our educational system that need to be addressed, and instead of responding to the real problems in our schools, this government has decided to sow more division while not taking any meaningful action on education. Bill 25 is not a classroom support or student achievement bill, but it appears to be a distraction bill. Frankly, Albertan students and families and teachers deserve better than being used as apparent props in the UCP's ideological project. While this government obsesses over flags and policing teachers' speech, teachers and students in this province are still waiting for meaningful action on classroom sizes, classroom complexity supports, and basic educational supports.

As of 2025-26 Alberta consistently ranks last in Canada for per-student funding, spending roughly \$13,005 to \$13,006 per student in 2022-23, which is significantly below the national average of over \$16,000. This funding gap has widened for four consecutive years, with inflation-adjusted spending per student dropping by 17 and a half per cent between 2013 and 2014 and 2022 and 2023.

Nevertheless, teachers continue to show up every single day, giving everything they can to support our children. Teachers love what they do, and they're passionate about it. They believe in the potential of every single student. They deserve a government that supports them in return, not one that underfunds education and pushes them towards strike action.

A teacher and parent in Edmonton-South told me: "It is disheartening to feel so undervalued in a profession I have dedicated my [entire] life to. The public perception of teachers as "lazy" or "money grubbing" is wholly untrue, yet it persists." On this side of the House we stand with Alberta's teachers. It's clear that Bill 25 falls short of delivering real support for education. Our teachers deserve an environment where they can effectively educate students, especially when so many students have a variety of diverse, broad needs. Unrealistic class sizes, unsupported students' needs, the inability to disconnect from work have led to widespread burnout. All of this has a direct impact on student learning and well-

being and, quite frankly, on families as more and more teachers are choosing to leave the profession.

It's the UCP government that stopped publicly reporting on class size averages in 2019, yet data from the Alberta Teachers' Association shows that many high school classes exceed 35 to 40 students, well above recommended levels. These are areas that could have been addressed in this bill. Close to 200 K to 12 schools in Alberta were overcapacity in the 2023-24 school year according to statistics from Alberta Education. Another 27 schools are at 100 per cent capacity, having the same number of students enrolled as they were designed to hold. Dozens more sit between 97 to 99 per cent full, in some cases only a few new students away from running out of room. The above stats are not something to be proud of. Improving literacy and numeracy scores is not achieved through standardized testing; it's achieved through improved classroom conditions and supports for teachers and their students. Though about three-quarters of full or overcapacity schools are in Edmonton and Calgary, school authorities in 28 other municipalities have also hit enrolment limits.

Overcapacity in schools is a huge issue in Edmonton-South. As a parent whose kids attend local schools in my riding of Edmonton-South, I have been witness to this for years. Mr. Speaker, families in my riding deserve real action on education, not the shortcomings in Bill 25. Young children in Edmonton-South, some only in kindergarten, are being told they need to commute 20 to 25 kilometres or more round trip for school because there's no school available in their catchment area; they're full. All of the surrounding schools are full as well. No funding was provided to expand existing capacity at K to 9 schools in Edmonton-South, which are bursting at the seams. No funding for modular classrooms or pods, which could significantly benefit young students.

Edmonton-South is a vibrant, fast-growing community, and that growth is bringing its fair share of challenges. I recently heard from a parent who told me

Currently, families in Desrochers neighbourhood, including my own, are designated to Duggan Elementary School, which is 14 kilometres away from our community.

That's one way.

This distance presents a significant hardship for families, particularly those with young children who are just beginning their educational journey. As parents, my spouse and I have moved to Desrochers . . . with the understanding that there would [have been an] accessible [school] options available for our children. However, the reality of the situation has left us feeling disappointed and concerned about the future of our family in this community. We are even contemplating the possibility of selling our home, which we built just last year, in search of a more suitable location with better educational opportunities for our children.

This is not the first family who's told me that when they bought their home in a community that was because it was a good value and more affordable, but now they're considering leaving because there simply isn't a school nearby that's able to enrol their children.

Bill 25 shows the UCP government is solving, quite frankly, what looks like imaginary problems when families have real issues and their kids are struggling with educational challenges every single day. What makes it more frustrating is that parts of this bill are not just unnecessary; they're almost insulting. Take the provisions of Bill 25 around teacher neutrality. Teachers in Alberta are already governed by a professional code of conduct, and that code already prohibits teachers from taking ideological advantage of students.

So what exactly is this bill accomplishing other than signalling distrust towards teachers? That is what this bill fundamentally says to educators: "We don't trust you. We don't trust your professionalism, your judgment, or your ability to facilitate discussion responsibly." That matters, especially after teachers have spent months pleading

with this government to take classroom conditions seriously. This bill risks creating confusion and fear around exactly that kind of teaching. Apparently, political interference is fine when this government does it. Apparently, ideology only counts when it comes from someone they disagree with.

Teachers are begging for educational assistance, and this UCP government responds with flag regulations. Students are waiting months for assessments, and this government decides the urgent priority is which banners hang in schools. Families are worried about overcrowded classrooms, and the UCP says: what if we regulated hallway decor? This is what happens when a government is so disconnected with what Albertan teachers, families, and children need and want in our educational system. For a government that claims to be focusing on establishing a strong and free Alberta, it is shocking that the UCP can't see the irony of what they have trampled on, including teachers' expertise and collaborating with teachers to better help students.

Trustees and their elected communities: to oversee local educational systems is their job, and that is the entire purpose of school boards. Yet under this bill boards lose authority over superintendent appointments because the minister now gets that approval power. School naming requires ministerial approval. Surplus school property can be effectively transferred to the Crown. Once again we see the UCP centralizing power into cabinet while weakening local democratic oversight. Albertans should pay attention to that because this government constantly talks about local control right up until local voices disagree with them.

7:40

One of the few areas this bill actually puts a real issue into the classrooms that could be looked at and should be looked at is violence in schools. It's real. Teachers, EAs, and parents have been very open about this. But classroom violence does not happen in a vacuum. It's connected directly to underfunding, lack of student supports, overcrowding, and rising classroom complexity. Quite frankly, when one teacher is trying to manage 30-plus students with multiple complex behavioural and learning needs and insufficient supports, things break down, and this is the result of bad policy decisions.

The numbers tell the story. This government announced 476 complexity teams across Alberta. Nearly 68,000 classrooms are dealing with medium or high complexity. How exactly did the UCP decide that 476 teams would adequately address a province-wide crisis? What analysis supports that number?

The important thing here to note, though, is that Alberta teachers are not unreasonable. They are the experts, and they know classrooms are becoming more complex every single day. Teachers are not asking for luxury. They're asking for the bare minimum required to give our students the education they deserve.

Bill 25 does not reduce class sizes. It does not increase per-student funding to the national average. It does not hire enough EAs, meaningfully address complexity, fix overcrowding, or solve the staffing crisis. What it does is that it creates political talking points, and Alberta students deserve far more than what they're getting with this UCP government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Academic excellence is a cornerstone of an education system, is a cornerstone of strong schools. It's a cornerstone of democracy. We could not possibly have the society that we have where a four-eyed child-of-immigrants kid can become a lawmaker – that happens in a lot of

places in the world, but it happens a lot here in Alberta. I'm proud of that. Everything that I've ever had and everything that I've ever become and everything that the world has given to me has come because I was lucky enough to grow up in the world's best public education system here in Alberta.

Here now we have a government that is dismantling what made us great. Mr. Speaker, it's heartbreaking. It's really sad. This is a government that deliberately went to war with teachers expecting that the people of Alberta would support the government and, to their shock, found out that the people of Alberta supported the teachers because it was the teachers who were fighting for our kids. This government had to order them back to work, had to strip away their constitutional rights in order to do that, which is something that I can't even – every time I think about that, the injustice of that sticks within me. This is their revenge. This is the revenge of the right wing that has taken control of our province.

To the people of Alberta: most of us know, because most of us grew up under a world-class education system before this government tried to destroy it, no, the world is not flat; yes, vaccines will save your life; yes, measles is dangerous. No, the world is not 5,000 years old, and it's going to be very hard to learn to be a petroleum engineer if you thought it was.

What I stand for and what got me here and what put me in this House is that I could see this government destroying something precious, something so incredibly important to me, something absolutely critical to the success of my children: the formerly world-class education system. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, folks, if you're going to have loud conversations, perhaps don't have them in here unless you're recognized by the chair first.

Hon. member, carry on.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a government that presided over the lowest per-student funding in Canada, a level of funding that, when I speak to people on the doors, continues to make them insane; went to war with teachers, took away teachers' constitutional rights.

I want to talk a little bit about my cultural upbringing, too, because, of course, I've been successful in the majority culture, primarily because of the world-class education system that I grew up in, yet I bring to me the thousands of years of history that my parents moved to this country with. One of those elements, one of the most important elements of that history is the relationship between the teacher and the student. In fact, there isn't really an English word for it. English had to borrow a word from Sanskrit for that relationship; it's "guru."

Your guru is your God, your teacher is your God, and this Bill 25, it's intent, it's application is to interfere between the relationships between students and teachers and create a culture of fear where teachers can no longer teach their students to become world-beaters, which was the opportunity that I had and the opportunity that those who grew up with me had. It's devastating.

I have myself spoken to students, high school students, who are like: "Yeah. The teachers have gone radio silent. They come into the classroom, they do the seminar, and they leave." For the extreme right wing in this province, that's exactly what's supposed to happen, because, of course, teaching that climate change is real is ideological now. Teaching that residential schools existed is ideological. Teaching that the British ownership of India for 200 years was wrong is too ideological for this government, so they're going to stop it, and they're going to stop it by interfering between the relationship between teachers and students.

What that means for kids whose parents are not from here, who are trying to figure out: “Okay. I understand, you know, my job. I understand my role. I understand my family. I don’t know if I understand the culture all that well,” and let’s face it, schools have a role in creating democratic citizens. They have a role in establishing our culture, a very important one. Where students like me learned that is from our teachers and from our fellow students in an atmosphere of trust and one of safety, where I didn’t really have to worry about whether I was breaking the law by having a conversation with the teacher, and the teacher doesn’t have to worry about whether she was breaking the law by having a conversation with me. That relationship is being taken away.

7:50

And, make no mistake, what that means for kids like me is that the quality of their education will get worse. This is a bill that diminishes academic excellence in schools, which is why it is completely unacceptable to me. This is a bill that makes the quality of our education worse, that makes our children stupider and, by extension, makes our society stupider, and that is not acceptable to me, Mr. Speaker. It’s ultimately about the fact that this government had a choice after the teachers’ strike. They could have learned their lesson. Ironic, isn’t it, that this government that refused to learn its lesson is now doubling down on the same tactics that brought this province to the brink? It’s really sad.

I don’t know how many members of the government had to make a living by using their wits, by matching wits against those who went to some of the finest schools in the world, had all of the opportunities. But I’ll tell the people of Alberta that when I was growing up, your kids were to become world-beaters, and they can’t do that anymore. I know this from watching what happened to my own children.

Now, when my wife and I were in the States and we were thinking about having a family, her parents lived in California, so we thought maybe we’d move there. My parents lived here in Alberta, so I thought maybe we would move here. What tipped the balance is that if we’d moved to California, then we would have had to endlessly be concerned about what school district we were in, because the difference between being in Palo Alto school district and San José school district is enormous. It’s a million dollars on a house. We didn’t have to worry about that here. So she moved here, putting up with minus 20 and minus 30 in January, in return for having our children have the world’s best education. It turned out that my daughter got that and my son did not because my son is four years younger.

So I, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, do not support this bill, will not support this bill, will not support any bill relating to education that doesn’t address funding and doesn’t have as its kernel and as its core academic excellence being the most important driving force for a school system.

To the people of Alberta I just say: look, the title of this bill is taking ideology out. Who are you going to believe? Are you going to believe the people who went to war with teachers? Are you going to believe the people who think that vaccines are dangerous, the people who think measles is fine, the people who think the world is flat, the world is 5,000 years old, that chemtrails will make you sick? Do you believe those people? Or do you believe the people who’ve had to make a living by beating the smartest people in the world at what they do? It’s up to you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. Just before you begin, it’s I hope a gentle reminder that as per Motion 42 debate

on this bill ends before the vote ends at 8:30 today. Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Something that has consistently been hitting our e-mails and our voice mails is that Albertans are asking for smaller classrooms, better support for students with complex needs, safer learning environments, and proper funding for our education. This is not very complex. This is very straightforward. Bill 25 does not address this crisis in Alberta. It does one thing. It is political destruction, and Albertans are not asking for political destruction. They are asking this government to invest in our education system and invest in the future of this province, our children.

Albertans are not asking this government to police classrooms, what kind of flags would be there, which cultural flag would be hung, to rename the schools, or to centralize the political control of our education system that has a very, very good localized governance system, which I will speak to later in my debate. Bill 25 inserts more government control while ignoring the urgent realities facing students in our classrooms, the teachers that go to schools to teach these students, and the families that trust these teachers and that send their children to our classrooms.

The thing here is that we do recognize in this Chamber that there is a problem in our education system. That’s why we had to use the notwithstanding clause against teachers. We do recognize that there is a crisis that exists in classrooms, Mr. Speaker, but the problem is that Bill 25 misdiagnoses that. It doesn’t address the problem. The classrooms are overcrowded, they are underfunded, and there is increasing complexity within our classrooms. Eighty per cent of Alberta’s classrooms now face medium to higher complexity – 80 per cent. Thirty-two thousand classrooms have more than the recommended number of students in those classrooms – 32,000 classrooms in our province. Alberta students remain among the lowest funded in Canada, even after a budget that also tabled \$9.4 billion in deficit. It still doesn’t address the funding required for our classrooms.

Teachers ask for classroom support. Teachers ask for complexity funding. Teachers ask for educational assistants. Teachers ask for improved working conditions. It’s good for the teachers. It’s good for the students. It’s good for the society. It’s good for our province. You hope this bill will address that. It doesn’t. It focuses on optics, Mr. Speaker, not outcomes.

Teachers in Alberta are already bound by a professional code of conduct. They are already prohibited from taking ideological advantage on students. This bill implies that Alberta teachers are failing in their professional obligation. This is not about protecting students, Mr. Speaker. It’s about undermining the public trust in our teachers, and the consequence of when you insert and when you create such a narrative of impacting public trust in teachers is really, really serious.

Teachers may fear discussing current events. Kids are exposed to a world web that has all the information in a world where misinformation and disinformation is increasingly growing. This is what we need: teachers that are equipped with confidence and support so that they can guide and teach these students to navigate through this world. This will cause classroom debate to be compromised. This Bill 25, Mr. Speaker, will make educators avoid important civic conversations out of fear of repercussions. Teachers should be supported. This bill doesn’t. It creates an environment where teachers are politically targeted.

Another thing is that the bill doesn’t only stop at undermining the teachers’ ability to teach in classrooms; it also undermines the governance of our schools, Mr. Speaker.

8:00

We have elected school board trustees that are entrusted to govern our school systems. Local democracy: that is one of our key components of our elected representatives in different levels. That's why we have elected trustees for our education system, so that they can address, they can be agile, responsive, a local governance to support our schools and our students and the changing dynamics of the needs of those schools. Their role is to represent local priorities and make decisions in the best interests of the students. Bill 25 weakens local democratic control because it requires ministerial approval for a superintendent appointment. The school board trustees have only one hiring to make, and that's the superintendent.

You will expect that this is a government that would reduce red tape, but in this case the school board trustees cannot hire the only staff that they were supposed to hire. Instead, it would be through ministerial order. It limits the trustees' influence not only of the superintendent; on the surplus school sites. It's another trait that we have seen in every single bill. It's centralizing more authority in the government.

The government claims to support local decision-making except when it comes to public education. Bill 25 removes authority from the communities and places it in the minister's office. It's not accountability, Mr. Speaker. It's political centralization, something that we have seen in many bills that we have debated in this House.

This bill also bans non-Alberta and non-Canada flags unless approved by regulation. It's not even an approval of the school board level, not even an approval of the superintendent level. It's an approval through a cabinet regulation. It requires ministerial approval for the naming of new public schools. This is taking away the ability of the district school boards to identify working with their local communities in terms of naming their schools.

At a time when classrooms are struggling with violence, with complexity, and with underfunding, this government is focusing on that kind of disempowering the school board trustees. Students need resources, Mr. Speaker; not optical culture war legislation that doesn't invest in our schools. Well, some of the things that some of my colleagues have spoken about were the increased incidence of violence, but violence cannot be addressed through committees or through pieces of legislation. We really have to understand: what are the reasons for this? The real drivers are overcrowding, insufficient educational assistants – we have seen months of strikes from educational assistants – rising classroom complexities.

I have about 30 schools in my riding, many that have expressed the complexities that they are experiencing, Mr. Speaker. While the government has announced complexity teams, this remains insufficient when nearly 68,000 classrooms face medium or higher complexity. Thirty-two thousand classrooms show that they have higher than the average number of students needed in those classrooms.

Mr. Speaker, this government had a choice. They could have increased per-student funding to exceed the national average. They could have reduced class sizes. They could have expanded support for complex classrooms. They could have improved safety with staffing and resources. But they chose naming approvals, they chose trustee limitations, they chose ministerial control, they chose ideological framing.

Bill 25 is not an education reform bill, Mr. Speaker. It is a political management bill. Alberta students deserve classrooms that are properly funded, classrooms that are safe, classrooms that are inclusive and welcoming, classrooms that are supportive, classrooms that are responsive to real education challenges that our students face today. And teachers deserve respect. Trustees deserve democratic authorities. Parents deserve meaningful solutions. Bill

25 fails to address the real crisis in Alberta's education and prioritizes political narratives over outcomes.

For that reason, I cannot support this legislation. Albertans need an investment in our education system, not ideological destruction.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

An Hon. Member: What highway goes to Sherwood Park?

Mr. Kasawski: All roads lead to Sherwood Park.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing the voice of Sherwood Park to come and speak in this Legislature. First off, we're just keeping a little bit of score. We've got an education bill in front of us, and Albertans keep score. They can't always hear all the noise coming out of this Legislature, but they can look at the number of schools built and modernized and opened under the New Democrats for the time it had in government. I think it was actually 244 schools. Yeah. If the minister wants to intervene and add his number, I think it's 14 – 14 – schools built and opened during this time of seven years under this government.

I think when Albertans are keeping score and they're looking at education, they're seeing that under the New Democrats education improved, education was modernized, and it was a good situation for students and teachers and parents and families in Alberta. A good, hopeful progressive period of time in Alberta. Now we've heard from others in the House that funding per student is still the lowest in Canada.

Oh, Minister, absolutely. If you'd like to jump in on those numbers, keep out the scorecard.

Mr. Nicolaides: Yeah. Absolutely. Thank you so much for the invitation to intervene. I'm happy to do so, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin, though, with respect to some of the numbers I just want to reiterate the comment made by the Leader of the Official Opposition himself, who stated on September 17, 2024, that the government of Alberta "is making a generational investment in schools." I'm truly happy to see the Leader of the Opposition providing this endorsement for the schools now program.

Since the NDP were in government, they only approved 48 school projects, Mr. Speaker. In the two years since Premier Smith formed government – excuse me. Names are not allowed. My apologies. I retract. That's what happens when you look too closely at your notes. In the two years since the Premier formed government, almost 77 projects have been announced, just in that period of two years, versus the 48 schools that the NDP announced in their entire four years. I'd like to reiterate to Albertans that right now 161 projects are under way.

Mr. Kasawski: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I think it's still 244 to 14.

I'm going to speak in opposition to Bill 25 because we're not talking about building schools here. We're not talking about improving funding for students. It's apparently an act to remove political ideology from classrooms. It's an amendment to the Education Act.

I have to say that after reading the legislation, after listening to teachers, parents, school boards, and education workers in Sherwood Park and across other parts of Alberta, one question that keeps coming back to me again and again is: what is the problem that the minister is actually trying to solve here? It's not building more schools. It's not adding more funding. So what is the problem we're trying to solve here? It's a question that comes up a lot of times in legislation. It's not fixing overcrowded classrooms. It's not giving teachers more energy. They're still exhausted. Educational assistants are still stretched thin. Students with complex needs are

waiting too long for supports. We heard the Premier say that they need to earn their way into the classroom, which was preposterous, Mr. Speaker.

8:10

Parents are worried. They're worried about how the UCP are handling education, and they have every reason to be, and school divisions are trying to do more with less and less, and that is the reality of Alberta classrooms, yet this government responds with flag bans, naming approvals, ministerial control over superintendents, and political micromanagement of locally elected school boards. Mr. Speaker, classrooms need funding, not flag bans.

I believe deeply in public education. In fact, I believe that public education is the single best investment a government can make. There's no higher and better use of public dollars than investing in children, teachers, and schools and believing in people. It's exactly why I ran for elected office. I trust Albertans. I trust parents. I trust teachers. I trust local school boards. I trust communities. But with the UCP they reveal over and over again that they do not trust parents, teachers, school boards, or communities.

Something different is revealed in Bill 25: the government does not trust people. The UCP believes that decisions must always flow downward from cabinet ministers and political offices. They believe that local voices cannot be trusted. They believe that communities need supervision. They believe that teachers need monitoring. They believe that school boards need control from here in the government building, and Bill 25 is another step in that direction.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is not about removing politics from classrooms. It's about centralizing political control over education, and Albertans can see it. The government talks endlessly about freedom and local autonomy unless local communities disagree with them, then suddenly the government knows best.

We've seen this pattern before. Step by step this government has been undermining public education in Alberta. Albertans remember the curriculum written with the ideological interference by the UCP cut and pasted from Wikipedia. Albertans remember the attempts to redefine public education itself.

I remember the first thing when the UCP got in, they said that schools shouldn't be called public schools anymore, that we should change all the names of schools that are called public schools; they should just be schools. Here we are again.

Perhaps it's a fine time to talk about the coal industry, talking points being brought into our grade 5 classrooms. A teacher was neutrally teaching about the coal industry to my daughter when she was in grade 5, and she was reading the homework to me at the table. I had to, you know, get up from my own work and say: what did you say again? And she said: Alberta coal is clean coal, and it's really good for the environment. I was like: can you show me the piece of paper? Right out of a handout from the teacher that was provided by the curriculum from this government, and it was indoctrination written by the coal industry. When we talk about neutrality, it would have been okay for a teacher to be, like: maybe this curriculum coming in from the government, maybe we need to reflect and use some critical thinking on that.

When my oldest daughter was in grade 5, I remember how important school was not just academically but socially and emotionally. School was a place where children learned to belong. They learned empathy, they learned confidence, they learned curiosity, they learned how to live together in community, and that's why one of the most troubling parts of this bill is symbolic, but deeply symbolic. The bill strikes out the words "welcoming" and "caring" from the Education Act.

Just think about that, Mr. Speaker. For years Alberta schools were expected to provide welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments, and this government chose to remove: welcoming and caring. Why? What message does that send?

The minister says that schools can still go above and beyond. Well, Mr. Speaker, if those values still matter, why remove them from legislation in the first place? Because words matter, especially in education, especially to children, especially to students who already feel vulnerable, isolated, or uncertain about whether they belong. Instead of strengthening belonging, this government is choosing division and culture war politics.

Mr. Speaker, teachers in this province recently undertook historic job action. Teachers were crystal clear about what they needed, and this bill does not address any of that. They asked for better classroom supports, they asked for manageable class sizes, they asked for proper complexity funding, they asked for resources for students with special needs, they asked for Alberta to at least reach the national average per-student funding. Those were concerns teachers raised and shared across this province. Not flags, not ministerial approval of school names, not political oversight of every local decision, but this government ignored the real problems facing classrooms. Instead, they created fake problems to avoid solving real ones.

Mr. Speaker, the section of this bill that bans flags in classrooms other than Alberta and Canadian flags unless specifically approved by regulation: again, I do not understand the problem that is trying to be solved here. I suppose it is probably important in the minister's riding for students to understand they should not cheer for the Calgary Flames, and those Calgary Flames flags should not be shown in classrooms, and that's a fair point.

The Speaker: You're on the edge of a point of order right now.

Member Ceci: Go Habs.

Mr. Kasawski: I'm on the bandwagon, too, Mr. Speaker. The Habs bandwagon.

Many schools proudly display flags representing the countries and cultures of their students and families. That's not political indoctrination; that is inclusion. That is belonging. That is recognizing the diversity of Alberta classrooms. What about Indigenous flags? What about treaty flags? What about Métis flags? How does this legislation align with truth and reconciliation? How does this legislation support the calls to action? Indigenous students deserve to see themselves represented in schools, too, and frankly Albertans are wondering: is this government now going to hire flag inspectors? Is there a new bureaucracy coming? Maybe they can join the Municipal Affairs library inspectors in some new United Conservative department of thought police. While classrooms are under strain, this government is focused on policing symbols instead of supporting students.

Mr. Speaker, another deeply concerning aspect of Bill 25 is the attack on local democratic governance. School boards are elected by local communities to bring local perspective. Parents vote for trustees because they want local representation and local accountability, yet this bill increasingly transfers authority away from communities and into ministerial hands. Superintendents, the educational leaders hired by school boards, now require ministerial approval. Again, why? What evidence exists that school boards across Alberta are incapable of hiring qualified leaders? If there are isolated issues somewhere, then address those issues specifically. Do not punish every school board in Alberta because this government wants more centralized control.

This bill even allows the minister up to 60 days to approve superintendent appointments. School boards are trying to fill

critical leadership roles while managing growing environments and staffing pressures, and now they have to wait for the minister for up to two months to say if their decision is okay. Why create more delay and bureaucracy? Why interfere with local governance?

The double standard here is impossible to ignore. The government imposes increasing control over public school boards while giving charter schools and private schools greater flexibility. Public boards face more political oversight; charter schools get permanent charter pathways. Public boards face more restrictions; private schools avoid the same scrutiny. If accountability matters so much, why does the government apply one standard to public education and another to the privately operated system? It's funding both.

Mr. Speaker, local communities also engage extensively when naming schools. Parents, students, Indigenous communities, local leaders: they all participate. It is a big moment. They are thoughtful, local conversations that reflect local identity and history, and now the minister wants final approval over school names, too. Again, what problem is this minister trying to solve here? Why does the government believe local communities cannot name their own school? Why must every decision ultimately run through cabinet?

Then there's the issue of strategic priorities. School boards already align with provincial business plans and provincial education goals, and they also reflect local priorities developed through community engagement, and that matters. Sherwood Park is not identical to Calgary. Calgary is not identical to Fort McMurray. Fort McMurray is not identical to Medicine Hat. Local voices matter, local context matters, but this government keeps moving towards a one-size-fits-all model directed from the minister's office.

The one area this bill covers that I agree with is that improvements are needed. We need follow-up supports connected literacy and numeracy screenings, and that is positive. Those supports should already be in existence from the beginning.

Mr. Speaker, that's my commentary on Bill 25. I'll now turn it over to others for reasoned debate.

8:20

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 25, An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act, 2026. As is evident by my learned colleagues on this side of the Assembly, they and I will not be supporting this legislation. It makes very little sense that this has been brought forward by the minister as, you know, a bill that is a priority. All it does is cause more problems, and the problems that already exist are being ignored.

We know that there are 68,000 classrooms that have significant complexity. We need more teachers to support those students. Also, because of the significant increase in our population, we need more teachers for those students, we need more educational assistants for support in those complex classrooms, and we need more schools, as the Member for Sherwood Park so clearly outlined. These are what this legislation should be addressing, but instead here we are debating something that is really kind of inane and, I think, kind of insulting to the people of Alberta.

It's like the government doesn't understand what a professional is, you know? Like, teachers are professionals and they deserve respect from this government, but this government doesn't get that. Time after time after time they disrespect professionals. We all know famously how the minister of health unilaterally tore up the contract with the docs: "Why should I listen to them when we have

this legitimate agreement? I'll just tear it up." That's a significant act of that kind of disrespect.

Certainly, even the bill that separated both regulatory and associations is kind of the – it was a super big attack on many professions, and certainly my profession as a social worker. We don't have a large profession. There are about 10,000 of us registered social workers in Alberta, and we had an association and a regulatory body together. It worked fine for, you know, 50 years, but then the UCP comes along and says: No, no, no; you have to be separate. Guess what that does. That weakens us, and that weakens the advocacy we can do because the regulatory college only has a very narrow mandate. And the association: well, that's voluntary now. That means that people don't necessarily join it, and it makes it very difficult to do advocacy work.

That's really fundamental to the profession of social work. We're always talking about the person and environment. We don't just work with individuals. We look at their family systems, their communities, society as a whole, and sometimes the intervention has nothing to do with that individual. It has something to do with a lack of programs, low minimum wage, racism, sexism, tons of societal issues that aren't the responsibility of the individual, but the individual is impacted. Guess who tries to support people to function in a society in a healthy way. Social workers. Instead, this government wants to weaken our profession so that it's much more difficult for us to do our job.

Time after time after time the UCP ignores the significant contributions that professions have made to our province, to the people of Alberta, and here – I mean, obviously, this is a direct attack on teachers once again, acting like they don't even understand how they're educated and how they're trained to serve the students of Alberta. So, I just think I'm going to give a little bit of an educational class for the minister and the other members.

There are five hallmarks of a profession. One is that they're trained and educated with a specific body of knowledge. Two, the specific area of research that adds to their body of knowledge, are always – you know, professions are alive. They grow and develop all the time. There's a code of ethics and standards of practice. They are governed by that. As a social worker, if I do something unethical, I can be disciplined. I could lose my licence as a social worker. I mean, this is serious stuff. There's mandatory registration, meaning each year, as long as I'm practising in the profession, I must register. Of course, I continue to do that, and there's a regulatory body that governs the profession.

But the UCP doesn't get that. Certainly, with this bill they didn't even bother to talk to the regulatory college of teachers, the Alberta Teachers' Association. Like, how disrespectful is that? That's ridiculous. I mean, a government – and this government likes to pretend that they do robust consultation. They don't. They just do what they want and like to denigrate professions who've contributed significantly. They should be grateful to them, but instead they ignore them. You know, certainly the ATA sent out a statement after this bill came out and beseeched the government to please meet with us certainly before you implement anything like this.

Of course, they have a majority, so this bill will pass because the government members will vote in favour of it. But the people who have to deliver this, who work within the system: their voices are being ignored, just like they were in the fall when they went on strike, a huge demonstration of deep concerns in our education system. Basically, they were ignored then, too. It's disturbing that the government does this time and time again, thinking they know best, but they're not professionals in this area, and they should be working hand in hand with the teachers and certainly their regulatory body.

One of the qualities of being a professional is that there is discretion. You are highly trained, highly educated, with significant experience. Each year you do continuing competence to keep yourself up to date on things, and you have professional discretion. You know, you can make decisions on the fly based on this large body of research and experience that you have. The fact that the UCP thinks they have to put in legislation that teachers must be impartial in the classroom is ridiculous. That's ridiculous. That is kind of fundamental to how they're already trained through their education program. It's in their code of ethics, but somehow the government likes to fearmonger.

This is what this is, fearmongering, suggesting that there's something wrong with teachers and that teachers, of course, are feeding our children with really extreme views all the time. Well, this is all false. This is not true, and they're saying that we need both sides of the argument – certainly, I mean, that is done – or they need to be completely neutral in that. But, of course, we know that any kind of healthy society has a robust public discourse, where people can speak openly and be heard in both different views, and people shouldn't be quieted.

I'm old enough to remember the Premier of the Conservatives in the early '90s, Ralph Klein. I was a front-line worker in child welfare at that time, and any time anybody, any special interest group would come up and say anything to him he'd go, "Oh, you're a special interest group," which is bad of course, "You only care about your own little interest. You're advocating for people living in poverty. You're advocating for women trying to get out of family violence," and we have the highest rates in the country. He would dismiss them all and just say: "Oh, you know, you guys are just caring about that. You're just in my way," and whatever."

Then he started to call us left-wing nuts. He thought that we were left-wing nuts. I went to a social work conference in the early '90s. You know what we gave out when people registered? We gave them safety pins and one of those left wing nuts that you screw on.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt.

Members, pursuant to Government Motion 42 agreed to on May 7, 2026, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must be decided to conclude debate on Bill 25 at second reading, I must now put the following questions to conclude debate.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:30 p.m.]

[Three minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Hunter	Rowswell	Yao
Jean	Sawhney	Yaseen
Against the motion:		
Boparai	Hoffman	Schmidt
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hoyle	Shepherd
Ceci	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Dach	Kasawski	Sweet
Haji	Kayande	Tejada
Hayter	Miyashiro	
Totals:	For – 45	Against – 17

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a second time]

**Bill 28
Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes
Amendment Act, 2026**

[Adjourned debate May 6: Mr. Wright]

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 28 . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I will have them start your time over.

It is my duty to inform you that under Government Motion 42, agreed to on May 7, Bill 28 is now subject to one further hour of consideration at second reading, following which all questions must be decided in order to conclude the debate on Bill 28 at second reading. Further, pursuant to Standing Order 21, the interval between division bells on all divisions required to dispose of the bill at second reading will be three minutes.

Now you can start your time all over. I apologize for interrupting.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do stand to speak to Bill 28, the Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, an act that goes to the heart of how Alberta governs its communities, how we build housing, and how we respect the democratic role of municipalities. This bill is not simply a housekeeping measure, and it's not a minor administrative update. It's a fundamental restructuring of the relationship between the provincial government, Alberta cities, towns, and rural municipalities.

Let's be clear. Municipalities are not stakeholders; they are governments. They were elected, they are accountable, and they are closest to the people. They plow our roads, they approve housing, they run the rec centres, they maintain the water lines, and they respond when things go wrong. But what this bill tells them is that they don't get to decide anymore. The government is going to decide for them. That is the core issue and the core problem of this bill.

Bill 28 amends the Municipal Government Act and the housing statutes to give the provincial cabinet sweeping powers. It has powers over municipal land use planning, housing development approvals, regional planning boards, municipal governance structures, intermunicipal collaborative frameworks. Each of these changes may sound technical, but together they represent a massive centralization of authority.

I'm going to break it down. Provincial override of municipal planning. Under Bill 28 the cabinet can now override municipal zoning decisions, mandate land use changes, impose provincial housing targets, direct municipalities to approve specific types of development. Clearly not collaborative. It's also not a partnership. It's command and control once again by this government.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

8:40

Municipalities have told us repeatedly that they are ready to build housing, that they have plans to build housing. They have zoning reform under way, and they have infrastructure, and they have made it a priority. What they've lacked and what this government continues to lack is predictable funding, stable partnerships, and respect for local decision-making. Bill 28 gives none of that. Instead, it gives municipality orders. If the government truly believed in municipal autonomy, it would work with the municipalities and not legislate over them.

Regional planning, which we're all very aware of, especially those in Calgary and Edmonton, has become an ongoing concern for our municipal leaders. We had a regional board in Edmonton. We had a regional board in Calgary. The minister at the time just came in and decided no longer were those old boards going to exist and gave them 48 hours' notice and disbanded them, fired staff, got rid of everybody, and just said: we're no longer going to do it. Those boards worked together in collaboration, and sometimes there was tension, for sure, but they were able to work with each other to decide on what the regional plan was going to be both for Edmonton and for Calgary. For the government to just come in and say, "Well, we're just going to fire everybody and get rid of those boards," is another demonstration of the top-down directives that this government continues to do with municipalities.

When we look at the housing directives that are in this bill, the government claims that Bill 28 will accelerate housing developments, but it doesn't. It may address market housing, but what this bill doesn't do is fund infrastructure. It doesn't expand water and waste management capacity. It doesn't support transit. It doesn't address construction and labour shortages. It doesn't provide predictable municipal grants, and it doesn't reform the broken provincial housing capital plan. When this government says Bill 28 is going to build more housing, it's going to build more market housing. It's not going to address the underfunded low-income housing that major municipalities have had, the lack of infrastructure investment that it's had on many of these housing projects that have made some of them to the point where they're not even allowed to be inhabitable anymore, and it's not going to build new low-income housing. It is going to control municipalities in telling them what kind of zoning capacity that they can do and what kind of housing can be built.

We also know that this government has opinions about high density and whether or not there should be single dwellings versus high density versus having mixed residential developments. With that directive we're not going to see communities that address all demographics. They're going to remove a lot of the infrastructure that municipalities need to ensure that people can get from point A to point B. We've seen this government fight on the green line. We've seen this government threaten now, I guess, to remove bike lanes, even though municipalities have spent money building those bike lanes.

The ideology of this government just continues to be downloaded on municipalities, removing the voice of the very people that have been elected by their constituents. Yet every single day we see this government stand up and be like, "Oh, the federal government: they're taking away our power. They won't let us do what we want to do." Stomp, stomp. Have a pout. "We're so upset with the federal government. It's the federal government's fault." Yet the exact same behaviour that this government hates from the federal government is exactly what they're doing to municipalities. The exact same and, in fact, I would say worse because they're redesigning the communities that people live in based on their ideology.

It's a big problem. It's a big problem because not only are they eroding the infrastructure of our communities and changing the plan of what our communities are going to look like; they're now removing the ability for there to be any type of control by the municipality to bring this forward to the government. In fact, there's almost a threat written into this bill that says: if you stand up, the government has the capacity and an ability to sanction you for it. So that just removes democracy all over again and removes the voices of the elected people.

It's just such a pattern by this government to continue to shut down voices when they don't agree with them. We just continuously see pieces of legislation being introduced that strip more and more power away and bring more and more power into cabinet and into a select few individuals in this province who ultimately, then, just get to decide what everything's going to look like, whether it be education and what children are allowed to learn, whether it's about what infrastructure people are allowed to live in, whether or not they want to ride a bike and that that bike just happens not to be on a road. We're going to take that infrastructure away because for some ideological reason this government just hates bike lanes. I mean, heaven forbid children ride their bikes to school on safe infrastructure or for that matter be able to take an LRT from one side of their city to another side of their city.

The reality of it is that this government will say, "Well, we are fiscally responsible, and we're all about saving taxpayers' money, and that's why we have to do this," but the very idea of moving into municipal planning – again going back to the bike lane debate, the threat of, like, we're going to pull up all of these bike lanes because the government doesn't like them is that taxpayer dollars have already been spent on this infrastructure, and now it's just a pity party. They're going to take what has already been invested in infrastructure and based on ideology pull it out of the ground and get rid of it out of whatever their ideology is, and it's already paid for. It doesn't even make sense.

It's just one more fight that this government has to choose to continue to do with a different level of government to distract from all of the other things that they're doing. If it's not the feds' fault, it's the municipals' fault. We'll just keep, you know, playing the ping-pong game, and the government is in the middle. It's everybody else's fault but the government's fault. Then we're going to put all of these pieces in place at a legislative level so that the government can then stand up and say: well, according to the law it is now the municipal's fault because we've just made it against the law as of today, but we're not going to do anything.

So when the infrastructure doesn't get built for low-income housing, the government is going to be able to say: "Well, we gave the cities a mandate, and they didn't get to the number of the mandate that we told them to. We gave them an arbitrary number that we picked out of our heads. We didn't partner with them, we didn't fund it, we didn't do anything, but we told them they must build it." So when they don't, the government is going to be able to say, "It's not our fault; we told the municipalities they had to do it, and in fact, we legislated it," so therefore, it must be fact. And it's just another distraction and another way to blame somebody else and to write legislation that removes the accountability from the province to have to say that they had anything to do with it. It's really poor legislating.

At some point I would love to see this government stand up and take accountability for the role that they have to play in this province instead of blaming everybody else. Instead of trying to say that, well, it's poor planning by these guys, and it's not enough financial transfers by these guys, and the deficit is somebody else's fault, and let's go down history lane seven years ago when the NDP

did something, the government could just say, “We don’t like this stuff, and ideologically we don’t agree, and we’re going to stand up on principle and our values and just be honest,” but this government really fails on honesty. The reason is . . .

Mr. Williams: Will the member accept an intervention?

Ms Sweet: No. We’re time allocated, Minister. You can sit down. It’s my turn.

The reality of it is that once again the government made a decision to put in time allocation and to say the opposition only gets so much time. Now they don’t like what I’m saying, so now they’re trying to intervene and take some of my time. It’s a behaviour, a repetitive behaviour, and it’s so fascinating to me.

Pay for infrastructure. Support municipalities in the work that they’re trying to do. Invest in the people of this province. Don’t create legislation that tries to distract and remove accountability from the level of government that exists, which is what this government has, which is provincial. It’s not everybody else’s fault. The province has made mistakes. Albertans deserve an honest answer, and the government needs to stand on a principle and a value and tell us what they truly believe and think instead of trying to say: it’s the federal government’s fault, it’s the municipalities’ fault, and don’t look at us because we had nothing to do with it. There is integrity in that, and at some point I would love to see this government lead with integrity instead of distraction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8:50

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in opposition to Bill 28, Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. To summarize what I see in this piece of legislation, I will say this: it’s more of the UCP’s greatest hits. You know, the greatest hits that you’d find in the Walmart bin. Exert control where possible, create red tape, and when it comes to imposing a partisan political agenda, where there’s the minister’s will, they will get their way.

Bill 28 is a continued attack on municipalities, particularly their autonomy, authority, and jurisdiction. The blatant power grab by this government when it comes to areas outside of their jurisdiction, in this case municipalities, is par for the course. When they can’t manipulate a municipality to vote their way, they will step in to remove the powers of those you elected. Like I said, where there’s the Premier’s or the minister’s will, they will get their way. Never mind that your city councillor, school board trustee, or mayor ran on a platform; the UCP will simply replace it with theirs.

I’ll say that this bill brings to mind something I heard from a constituent once, which was that the UCP stands for the unintended consequences party, and I would have to agree. When it comes to this bill I worry about what the consequences will be for Albertans at all levels. Municipalities have governance that impacts our daily lives: literally how our streets run, whether our snow gets shovelled or not, what our infrastructure is like, how our communities are formed.

Reckless and ideological policies should not replace thoughtful consultation and local decision-making that’s based on local expertise and knowledge, but here we are. I’ve said this before. The UCP has imposed ideology on teachers, students, businesses, regulated professions, and now they’re coming back for more when it comes to cities.

I am actually amazed and stunned by the audacity of this government to bully various entities in our province instead of support them. Time and time again I’ve seen them take decisions

made by cities and overturn them, and the end result is that this costs local authorities money and time and is a total disregard for the work that cities have done. One example that I can think of right away is of course the green line in Calgary. Years of consultation. I think you can still look at the individual consultations by stop for the green line. We’re talking about in-depth consultation where communities were engaged where they live at each stop.

I am always disappointed but never surprised at how quickly this government is willing to just throw out consultation, to basically tell Albertans that their input doesn’t matter. We need only to see the results of what they’ve done with the Electoral Boundaries Commission as an example for what they are willing to dismiss, which is, I would say, the golden and treasured feedback of Albertans.

A meddler’s work is never done, and what we see here is the UCP coming back to meddle in municipal affairs. They did it with Bill 20 in 2024. They came back for more in 2025 and removed codes of conduct. They changed finance rules and introduced partisanship in politics for city councils. It didn’t work out that well for them, I guess. They didn’t get that desired result of a more conservative council, or maybe not conservative enough, so now they’ve come back to impose their will. Like I said, where there’s a minister and a Premier’s will, they get their way.

When we look at the issues of municipal jurisdiction and where the UCP is putting in its hands where it shouldn’t, the minister now has the sole discretion around dissolving municipalities. They can force municipalities to approve pits that have received provincial approval. They can impose blanket province-wide bans on library materials. I’ll get more into that in a little bit. Granting themselves the power to take over legal authority of a municipal utility: with all of the misplaced bellyaching I’ve heard about our municipal infrastructure in Calgary, as someone who actually lived through floods and infrastructure issues, how quickly they’re willing to blame anyone but themselves.

They are requiring municipalities to pass bylaws adopting a provincially imposed community design code, which I find rather shocking. I’m wondering if they’ve ever actually consulted with community associations. That’s part of our job. That’s what we do on a regular basis, engage with our community associations. Now, each of those communities – I can think of a few in the area that I represent. I think of places like Cambrian Heights, where there is a deep knowledge of the history, of the design and the aesthetic that belong in each of those communities, and it’s generation after generation. People will live there, you know, into their third and fourth generations. To consider that this government is willing to put their oar in, shall we say, when it comes to community design is rather insulting to the people who put in their time, their volunteer work.

They make thoughtful decisions on things as simple as a community sign when you’re entering a community. To think that the minister would have any authority and would try to impose that authority on the community associations that I’ve worked with, that are so thoughtful and do such careful consultation with their communities, I find rather shocking.

Mr. Williams: Will the member accept an intervention?

Member Tejada: Oh, no. Thank you. You know, you had your turn. You got to talk quite a bit. Thanks. I was going to offer you some Solarcaine for the burn that you got earlier. Through the chair.

The Acting Speaker: Just direct comments through the chair at all times.

Member Tejada: I would have offered Solarcaine to the member in question for the burn received earlier.

Also, granting the minister the authority to set lodge rates in the regulations, stripping municipalities of the ability to have local vacancy taxes that affect Alberta residents. This was particularly salient in Canmore, who recently passed their own legislation around vacancy taxes. You know, what I'm finding now is that different communities, different organizations, different entities often have to sort of find a way to work around the ideological and rash decisions of this government.

They've decided to remove municipalities' choice in whether or not they publish a sunshine list. You know, I guess what the provincial government taketh they giveth back with the codes of conduct. They did strip cities of codes of conduct earlier for their city councillors, and now they're putting a new one in, so let's hope that all works out.

9:00

I'm just going to talk a little bit about libraries and book banning. Public libraries I'm seeing increasingly used as a political pawn for this government in an ideological and cultural war of their own creation. Libraries, as I heard it referred to actually on the Calgary public library website in reference to Judith Umbach, who is the namesake of the Umbach library in Calgary, one that I knew as the Thornhill library when I was a kid and spent a lot of time in – I guess, in this website they're talking about Judith Umbach and how public libraries are the gem in our cities.

An Hon. Member: I worked with her.

Member Tejada: Yeah. Actually, I think I recognized her. I looked up her picture. I think I might recognize her, possibly from having gone to that library so much.

A little bit of story time. I grew up in the '80s in Klein's Alberta. We were very, very poor, and I was my mother's summer camp plan for my younger sibling. Part of what I did with that plan – I used to live in Beddington, currently with a wonderful MLA for Calgary-Beddington – we would take the 46 bus during the summers every day. We would go to the Thornhill pool, which is still there, and I think it's still called the Thornhill pool. After the pool – that was the summer camp for my kid sister – we would head over to the Thornhill library. I was probably about ages 12 to 14.

I was the child care during summer, and we would spend our hours at the Calgary public library because we couldn't afford camp. We couldn't afford various activities that some of my classmates were taking part in in the summer, but the library was like a little oasis for a couple of really curious kids. We had this little bit of freedom as kids to go into the library, pick the books that we wanted. In my case I was always interested in art, so I would be looking for instructional books on how to draw, how to draw people, how to draw animals. It was just such a joy to be able to go back and forth into the library and explore at will.

There was no hiding of books that I brought home. My parents saw everything that I brought home. They started imposing limits. I know one of our other members, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, shared his own story about being told about limits of what you could take out at libraries. It was really foundational for us. Although we were poor and although the way in which we moved around in our city and the things that we were able to experience was limited to what we could pay, the library was free. It had no limits, and we had no limits.

I think about all of the books that I was able to access back then, even books that I was able to access as a teenager in the '80s, and I wonder how many of them would be banned now by this

government. What I will say is that book bans under this government will make our province, I think, poorer in our range of experiences. For me it was really an opportunity to see a world beyond what I could experience, and what I could experience was very limited by what my mother and father made as an income. It was able to expand our horizons, much like shows like *Reading Rainbow*. I don't know if anyone remembers that, right? It really is a window into the world, and to think that this government is so focused on making those windows much smaller, making that world much smaller and more controlled.

I would say it also goes against, you know, many of the parenting books that I was lucky enough to read when I was raising my kids and thinking about how I wanted to raise curious and engaged citizens who cared about the world around them and who were curious about the world around them in all forms. It's a real shame that this government has now seen fit to exert control over libraries. I think what it will do is really limit our horizons as Albertans, limit our horizons for all those kids that want to access libraries but also people who are in various states of housing status, right? We have houselessness. We see that libraries are now public spaces that allow folks to come in and experience warmth but also knowledge. I know that one of my constituents does an English language class at the library every week for newcomers. It's a community hub. It's where people connect.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise on Bill 28, an omnibus bill affecting a whole pile of municipal statutes that I'm happy to discuss. I want to repeat what I just said, speaking to Bill 25, that academic excellence is the cornerstone of a school system and the cornerstone of a society. Our potential as Albertans in a democracy in Canada is limited only by the capacity of our people, and the capacity of our people is only limited by how much we're willing to develop our children when it comes to education. This is why libraries are so critically important for nurturing our children.

As a teenager I was very fortunate that the St. Albert public library was on the way home from school. I grew up in St. Albert. I lived north of the river, and I went to school at the only high school in town at the time, which was Paul Kane. Between one and the other I would walk home every day. I took the bus to school because I didn't want to get up earlier than I needed to, but I walked home. On the way home was the library, and it was joyous. It was wonderful because every day I got to come home and spend a couple of hours just chilling at the library and reading a bunch of stuff and checking out a bunch of books.

Most of what I read was not high-quality literature, shall we say. I was – what? – 14, 15, 16 years old. It was kind of a golden age of really terrible, objectively terrible, paperback, like fantasy sci-fi stuff. Yeah. I won't name any names because they don't deserve it. The authors of these books have made a ton of money and created a lot of value. [interjection]

What is that?

Member Miyashiro: It should be banned.

Member Kayande: Yeah. Yet at the edges between, like, mountains of paperbacks that I devoured, I actually read a few things that taught me something. I know that in this space I go on about how important it is and how impactful it was. I'm so lucky to be Canadian. I'm so, so incredibly lucky to be Canadian and to grow up at this time where somebody who had the background that I did could be standing in this space and speaking for the people of

Alberta and the people of Calgary-Elbow. It's such an incredible privilege.

One of the things that was so lucky is that I had public libraries. I had librarians who I had great relationships with, who would show me stuff that they thought that I would like, and we would talk about books.

9:10

My first degree is in engineering at the University of Alberta where, you know, like, I was always really good at math and I did the mathy things, but it turned out that as I got older and needed to learn how people ticked and how to manage people, knowing Jane Austen was actually as important for my career progression as knowing calculus. And it's true. It was my time in the library that, you know – I mean, this is probably no surprise to anyone. I was a bit of a weird kid.

Ms Hoffman: Kid?

Member Kayande: Yeah. Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Love you.

Member Kayande: Extremely introverted, didn't, you know, make friends really easily, like terminally shy, right? Books were my friends. How I learned about human nature was through the books that I read.

One that I remember – I haven't gone back and read it in forever, but there was a science fiction author, James Hogan. He never wrote very much, and I think later on in life he became, kind of, a bit of a weirdo, but he wrote this science fiction book about a future in which people had so much incredible technological progress yet never truly believed in the power of technology and mathematics and science. As the society became more and more technologically advanced, people themselves became more regressed.

You know, it's kind of like how we have the best minds in the world making vaccines to keep us safe while there's a lot of people who believe that vaccines will actually kill them, or the fact that we have just sent a probe to the moon while there are people who believe that the Earth is flat. You know, that kind of dichotomy. One of the things that I learned by hanging out at the library was just that society is weird and funny and strange.

Now, the reason I'm talking about libraries is that, of course, this bill puts the Minister of Municipal Affairs in charge of what a library stocks, and he has maintained that he wants to keep pornography off the shelves. I also do not want pornography on the shelves of a library, and good news: it's not there. Libraries don't have pornography. But historically – and see, I know this because I like to read – before there was pornography there was obscenity. That's what they used to call it; they used to call it obscenity. It was meant and intended to make sure that people didn't have stuff that they shouldn't have according to the censors and according to the customs officials and according to the lawmakers at the time who made those decisions.

What did they make those decisions on? Well, oftentimes it was flouting social convention. *Ulysses*: banned. *The Sun Also Rises* by Hemingway: banned. *Beloved* by Toni Morrison: banned. I don't know how you write about the experience of a slave in the south before the Civil War without having some extremely shocking passages. I highly, highly recommend all three of these books that I've mentioned: *Ulysses* by James Joyce, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, *The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway.

Ernest Hemingway was banned because the main character was impotent and because one of the other characters, Lady Ashley:

well, she was loose. *Ulysses* was banned for a whole variety of reasons, but ultimately these three books, like other books that were banned – and I'm just picking on three – were banned because they portrayed a vision of a society that was incompatible with those who led society at the time, with those who were in charge. The people in charge didn't like it very much.

I mean, let's remember what life was like, what was socially going on in the 1920s, when *The Sun Also Rises*, when *Ulysses* was written. It was a society where capitalism was failing, where more and more of the fruits of labour, where more and more of the work that people did was captured by millionaires at the time. They didn't have billionaires then, boy. The people in charge, the millionaires, the people who ran the large trusts, the people who ran the massive monopolies that were squeezing the economic productivity of society and making life worse for people, didn't want to hear about, for example, how capitalism is failing, as you would understand by reading *Ulysses*.

You know, the modernists were fascinating. I really enjoy reading Virginia Woolf, one of the first feminists. D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was, of course, banned. It's right there in the title, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, but it wasn't banned because of sex; it was banned because of the shocking nature of a relationship between a noblewoman and her groundskeeper, a transgressive relationship. It makes for great, great literature, it makes for great reading, and for me as a child of immigrants it created a sense of social capability, of social competence, of an understanding of the society that I live in.

It also created some, like, really amazing conversations that I would have with some of my engineering colleagues when we would talk about the works of Jane Austen. Believe it or not, we actually did over lunchtime, and talked about our favourite books and least favourite. Yeah, I mean, *Mansfield Park* is probably not something you need to read.

As well, I can't let my conversation about books – I can't leave this without talking about *Dubliners* by James Joyce. There is stuff in *Dubliners* that was absolutely banned for obscenity, and whatever reason was given, it was not because of the immorality within the books, but it was because of their transgressive nature and what it said about a society that wasn't working for people.

You know, the extreme right wing that seems to have taken over Alberta's government – and I say "extreme right wing" very carefully because, I mean, the minister of energy himself, in a committee meeting with me, pointed out to me – what he said to me was: "Man, are you in the right party? Because you're more conservative than I am." That's true. He said this. It's in *Hansard*. Yeah, absolutely, I'm in the right place opposing this business, because this business is not conservative. Peter Lougheed would be appalled. Ron Ghitter is appalled.

Mr. Williams: Will the member accept an intervention?

Member Kayande: Minister, you voted for time allocation. I'm sorry. You voted for it. This is my time.

So, politicians should not be in charge of libraries, because politicians being in charge of libraries and what libraries can stock makes our kids stupider. That's why, fundamentally, I oppose this bill and its restrictions on libraries.

Now, the other thing this bill does it allows the province to seize utilities. I mean, I live in Calgary. My electricity and gas is served by Enmax. We can, of course, in a competitive market buy our electricity from whoever we want, but it's Enmax who does the wires.

9:20

I don't know why the province wants this unless they want, like, an open – unless, basically, they want a blank cheque to be able to sell our utilities to private equity. This is enabling legislation that allows them to do that as a first step without the city and the taxpayers in the city who paid for all that infrastructure having a say in who owns it.

I've talked a little bit about how in the 1920s there was a real flowering of literature around how, you know, the excesses of capitalism aren't working for people.

An Hon. Member: You have a better system?

Member Kayande: We have a better system. We have a better system. Peter Lougheed has a better system.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 28. Immediately upon reading the proposed legislation, I was reminded of a book that I'm rapidly reading and seeing very many, many parallels to what's happening here in Alberta and what the book describes. The book is a book that I'll table the title of in due course. It's by Turkish journalist Ece Temelkuran, and it's entitled *The 7 Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship*. The parallels are astounding. What the book describes is the rise of the right-wing populist movement in Türkiye to the eventual election of Erdogan in Türkiye and describes the steps taken to see a vibrant democracy turn into what ultimately has become a tantamount dictatorship.

Reading Bill 28, Mr. Speaker, is a step-by-step analysis as to how the government of the day here in Alberta is seeking to emasculate democracy in our province in a way that parallels the right-wing populist movements globally in western democracies that we've seen over the last number of years. Of course, in Hungary Viktor Orban was recently deposed in an election, which took 16 years, but his own supporters eventually turned against him. What is astounding is that we have an elected majority government in this Legislature which for the most part its members are sitting by placidly listening and watching this happen all around them. They go silently into the night, not opposing, not standing up, not demanding that their government do better to preserve the institutions of democracy. Rather, they are participants. They're complicit by their silence. This will be remembered by everybody in this province, in particular those at the doors who I talk to.

Even last weekend, on Sunday, yesterday, I talked to folks at the door. The first question that comes to mind when we broach the question of separatism is: How did we get here? What are they thinking? What is going on? This bill, Mr. Speaker, the Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, sounds like a benign piece of legislation, the piece of legislation amending other pieces of legislation that have been in place for a while. But when we talk about some of the things that this legislation does, like book banning, controlling libraries and what people can read – this book itself, *The 7 Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship*, probably will become the subject of a book ban in the very near future in Alberta because right on the front cover is a ringing endorsement of the book by Margaret Atwood on Twitter. She says: this is essential reading. So, from Margaret Atwood to the world saying "this is essential" certainly is going to guarantee this book gets banned, as one of her other books has been banned by the government of the day here in the province. Get your copy soon, Mr. Speaker, before it disappears off the shelves or off the shelf of your local library.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we shouldn't necessarily be overly surprised by legislation like this Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act because, of course, it was forecast or foreshadowed in the mandate letters to the minister. Bill 28 is a reflection of the predictions in the mandate letter. It outlines the steps to the minister, as I mentioned before, to emasculate, to strangle, to control local government in its every move.

One of them, of course, was the local banning of books. That really contravenes the attitudes and the opinions of Albertans. Polling on the issue of book banning was done by Janet Brown in January, 2026. That poll found that 82 per cent of Albertans trust public libraries to make appropriate decisions about materials. It's much higher than the 46 per cent who trust the government of Alberta on the same question. Sixty-nine per cent of Albertans prefer those decisions to be made locally by trained staff guided by local boards. Sixty per cent oppose provincial laws or regulations restricting access to library materials.

Now, of course, the Coalition of Alberta Public Libraries represents all the 324 public library service points across seven regional library systems. These libraries serve 99 per cent of Albertans. Albertans' public libraries get 38 million visits a year. Thirty-seven million items are borrowed a year. Over 84,000 programs are offered annually. Formal complaints about inappropriate materials in Alberta's public libraries have been extremely rare. In other words, Mr. Speaker, as in the words of the Member for Edmonton-City Centre in recent debate in this House: we're talking about a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of the visits to public libraries that result in a complaint. We're talking about an issue created by the government to limit the value of libraries to the province.

Now, why did they do this, Mr. Speaker? Well, the reason, I think, is that anything that this government feels is a threat, a minor threat to – anyone who opposes this government in any way shape or form is deemed to be a threat. That's not a sign of a very stable and strong and confident government. That is a sign of absolute fragility and weakness and uncertainty.

Of course, Albertans at the door ask themselves and ask me: how did we get here, the separatism? Many of them say that it's ludicrous. "I came to this country on purpose," they say if they're new to this country, and they said, "I didn't choose Alberta; I chose Canada. Like, what are they talking about, leaving Canada?" Then you get into the other issues about centralizing power and wanting power unto themselves. I don't have to take the lead on those questions, Mr. Speaker. They are starting to list things off themselves. This litany of destruction of our democratic principles is something that the people at the doors are learning to dictate to me.

That is a bit of a shock, Mr. Speaker, because quite often, unless it's an economic argument, unless it's something that directly hits home in the pocketbook, most voters don't really react all that strongly. However, the silent majority is rapidly waking up. This data breach that we've been speaking about in the House very recently, something that Bill 28, the Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, would probably be trying to address and quiet, if it could – but of course, the bill is already written. Maybe amendments are coming. We'll see if that happens, but this data breach where 2.9 million Alberta voters – like, every Alberta voter – have had their data, their name, their address, their phone number leaked by way of a transmission of the Alberta voters list to a party that should not have had it in their hands and that was then by them apparently made public.

9:30

Now what we've got, Mr. Speaker, is a situation where the whole population of the province is scared. If you think people are not

aware of this, I'm sure you when you're door-knocking very soon you will be made aware of it because it's something that hits home. It hits them right in their pocketbook, potentially. It hits them in their personal security. This is an issue that matters to Albertans, and it matters individually to people. It's something that will be definitely a vote mover. That is obvious to me at the doors when you talk to people because they're wondering what in the world should they do to protect themselves.

They're certainly not getting any advice from this government. We as a NDP caucus have publicized steps that people can take to prevent identity theft, to prevent scam artists, to protect themselves as much as possible, knowing that their data is out in the open right now. We've produced that and published it and put it on social media and are doing everything we can to provide these people who are asking for help in terms of how they protect themselves from scams as a result of their data being exposed to the world.

The government is saying virtually nothing. I think at the end of this discourse today, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice in a final retort said: if you're really feeling threatened, call 911. That is not relief to people at the doors that I've been talking to. They are really not happy, to say the least, with this government for, first of all, enabling this data breach to occur by supporting a separatist movement rather than standing up as a government that is purportedly a federalist government, one that's looking to make federalism work.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Rather than diametrically opposing separatism and any notion of it, they try to straddle the fence. Led by the Premier, Madam Speaker, they try to straddle the fence saying, on one hand, that we're trying to respect direct democracy, and, on the other hand, that they're trying to make Canada work, but they don't go together. They don't go together. If you are supporting a separatist party, you are not a federalist; you are a separatist, and that is diametrically opposed to what your job is, what your role is as a government member and, of course, as a Premier. That's why people at the doors that I'm talking to are asking out loud, like: what in the world is going on? They talk to me and say that they're going from one catastrophe to another, and they don't accept responsibility for anything.

Case in point, I talk to people about the blizzard that recently happened, highway 63 blocked. People were stranded for a day and a half, some longer, and were using Facebook to beg for help and information because they had no help coming. Madam Speaker, what took place was an abdication of responsibility in that the mayor of the rural municipality of Wood Buffalo had ended up sending an armada of buses and trucks and tow trucks and food and fuel to rescue 300 vehicles and all the people in them from a blizzard that the minister of transportation knew was coming for two days, yet the minister of transportation blamed that on Mother Nature.

Nowhere, Madam Speaker, is the government willing to undertake and to accept responsibility for what is their doing, and that is particularly galling when it comes to the promotion of separatist ideology, where they paved the way for the separatist movement to have a referendum question put on the ballot by lengthening the amount of time that they had to collect signatures, lowering the number of signatures they required, opening the doors to a separatist movement that everybody knows – it's an open secret that the UCP depends upon support of the separatist movement because they've been infiltrated heavily by the separatist movement, and that makes them duty bound to follow the separatist

tail that's wagging the UCP dog. That, indeed, is something that Albertans are pretty wise to.

In the discourse about Bill 28 we should all be reminded that there are few steps from democracy to dictatorship. And everybody should get that book.

I'll give my time up to somebody else. I've got a bit more time, I think.

Member Ceci: A little bit.

Mr. Dach: Yeah. A little bit more time. I've got lots more points to talk about.

As I mentioned, Madam Speaker, any form of opposition to the UCP is viewed as a threat. I mean, this government is so threatened that they apply time allocation to bills like this Bill 28, yet they still want to go ahead and try to use up our time, a limited-time debate, by intervening. That ain't happening.

Madam Speaker, this government is very calculating. Bill 28 is very calculated. They act with impunity as if there'd be no consequences.

The Deputy Speaker: You'll have about two minutes. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you. I am quite good at math on this side of the Chamber.

Just very quickly in the two minutes that I have, first of all, I would just like to start out by, you know, I guess, sending my sadness to the Minister of Municipal Affairs who was not able – but he tried. That was some serious persistence trying to get into debate.

I am going to hopefully speak more on this bill in committee, but I truly want to echo the comments of my colleagues tonight who have put on the record some really important pieces around Bill 28. You know, we jest a little bit, joking about library inspectors and that sort of thing, but this is actually really serious. This is consequential legislation that Albertans aren't asking for. When you're talking about four significant acts being amended, including the Housing Act, the Libraries Act, the municipal affairs statutes amendment act, and the MGA, this is consequential. It is unfortunate, it is quite unfortunate, in fact, that once again time allocation was used on this set of bills. I know a number of my colleagues won't get a chance to weigh in on a bill that does impact their constituency.

In fact, you know, I took the opportunity right after this bill was introduced to visit the two public libraries in my constituency, Sprucewood and Highlands library, and I used that opportunity to just thank them for the work that they do. They do such important work. They're not just librarians. They're community workers. Sprucewood on 95th Street in my constituency supports unhoused folks. I will, hopefully, talk more about this in committee.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, it's time to put the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:38 p.m.]

[Three minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Sawyer
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Show

Boitchenko	LaGrange	Schulz
Bouchard	Loewen	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Long	Sinclair
de Jonge	Lunty	Singh
Dreeshen	McDougall	Stephan
Dyck	Nally	Turton
Ellis	Neudorf	van Dijken
Fir	Nicolaides	Wiebe
Getson	Nixon	Williams
Glubish	Petrovic	Wilson
Horner	Pitt	Wright, J.
Hunter	Rowswell	Yao
Jean	Sawhney	Yaseen
Against the motion:		
Boparai	Hoffman	Schmidt
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hoyle	Shepherd
Ceci	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Dach	Kasawski	Sweet
Haji	Kayande	Tejada
Hayter	Miyashiro	
Totals:	For – 45	Against – 17

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a second time]

Bill 32

Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026

[Adjourned debate May 6: Mr. Williams]

The Speaker: Before the Assembly resumes debate on Bill 32, Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026, I will remind hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 21 and Government Motion 42 agreed to on May 7, 2026, Bill 32 is now subject to one further hour of consideration at second reading, following which all questions must be decided in order to conclude debate on Bill 32 at second reading. Furthermore, pursuant to Standing Order 21, the interval between division bells on all divisions required to dispose of the bill at second reading shall be three minutes.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Williams: Shouldn't I get a chance to . . .

The Speaker: Pardon me, hon. Member. Has this not been introduced yet? Okay. Pardon me. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs still has 14 minutes left.

Mr. Williams: And I noticed I couldn't speak with interventions in the last moment, so I think I will close my comments by saying that physical geography is incredibly important along with diversity of demographic and, of course, history.

Ms Hoffman: Intervention?

Mr. Williams: I'm happy to hear an intervention from the member.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and to the minister. I met with a class earlier today, Minister, and they were talking about how many people live in the riding that I represent of Edmonton-Glenora and how that compares to other ridings. Certainly, there are tens of thousands more people living in my riding than some other ridings, including ridings in the north, and

the legislation has allowed that. They asked if that was fair, and I had to say that I didn't think it was and that I was certainly here to fight for the constituents of Edmonton-Glenora. Would the minister agree that that's not fair that their vote is worth significantly less than the vote of somebody in the minister's riding?

Mr. Williams: Not only would I take issue with that description, so would the Supreme Court of Canada and Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin in the Saskatchewan reference case, where the idea of effective representation was enshrined in an interpretation of Charter rights, which I know members opposite deeply, deeply find incredibly important, as do I, particularly in this case.

Now that the member opposite has brought it up, I do think it's important to talk about a wonderful but apocryphal story about the origins of the word "riding" in our Westminster system. Now, the origins of that word "riding" aren't this, but the story goes that what would happen is Members of Parliament in the United Kingdom would get on a horse and ride from sun-up to sundown, and by the time the sun got down, that was the end of their riding. The idea here and the reason that this became popular lore and perhaps apocryphal but, nonetheless, tells us some deeper truth about the nature of what representation is and how it can be effective is that access to constituents and access of those constituents to the representative matters.

So it's not unfair at all to say that how big a geography is is a meaningful limitation on effective and real democratic representation. Our system works in a way where we have near five million Albertans, and not every one of them happens to know the minister of energy or the Premier or the Minister of Municipal Affairs, but they have a local representative who they have legitimate and reasonable and effective access to that does. That is the brilliance of our system. That is the brilliance of the geographic relationship we have as representatives. This is not some sort of generic, proportional representation that we've seen in other jurisdictions. We're tied to a place, and being tied to a place means accessibility to that member and that member's accessibility to members of this Legislature and members of Executive Council and the ability to influence decisions because we represent them, and you cannot represent them if they cannot have access to you or you cannot have access to them.

So, no, it is not a question of fairness to say that one individual doesn't have the exact same weight to vote across the province, though there should be some sort of parameters around that. I would agree. Even as Minister of Municipal Affairs we see this all the time when it comes to representation of wards and council men and women and councillors across the province. We have to have some sense of proportionality to it. You need effective representation. There needs to be some sense of geographic tightness, so our current legislation allows a 25 per cent variation, up to 50 per cent, if I'm not mistaken in section 14 of the act, if you meet one of the criteria of being next to a boundary internationally, et cetera. There are a number of others.

So, no, I think our legislation that we have in the act is constitutional. I think that it's fair, and I think that it's reasonable, but with that I will leave the rest of the debate to the members opposite. I appreciate the thoughtful intervention and appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Glenora engaging with the students. It's terrific to see.

9:50

The Deputy Speaker: Are there are other members that wish to join the debate on Bill 32 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak not just as a member of Calgary-Falconridge but as an Albertan deeply terrified for the future of our province. I rise to speak against an agenda that is so brazen, so cynical, and so profoundly un-Albertan that it shakes the very foundations of this Chamber. What we are witnessing from this UCP government is not a disagreement over policy. It is not a debate over the best way to govern. What we are witnessing is a deliberate, calculated, and cowardly threat to democracy itself.

Yes, the people of Calgary-Falconridge sent me here, or all of us here, to fight for them. They sent us here because they cannot afford their utility bills, their property taxes are soaring, because they're waiting in endless pain for hospital beds that do not exist, because their children are crammed into overflowing classrooms. They're fighting every single day just to keep their heads above water, and what is this UCP government doing while the hard-working people of my community suffer? What is their grand priority? They are in the backrooms, Madam Speaker. They're hiding in secret meetings, plotting to protect their own jobs. They have looked at the people of Alberta, they have realized that they have lost their trust, and instead of working harder to earn it back, they have decided to simply rig the game.

This is the action of a government paralyzed by fear. They're terrified. They know they cannot win on their record. They know they cannot win on a level playing field, so what do they do? They tear up the rules. They throw out independent, fair, and impartial voices. They silence the experts. They ignore the thousands of everyday Albertans who participated in a fair process in good faith, and they take a black marker to the map of our province to draw lines that guarantee their own survival.

Madam Speaker, politicians do not get to pick their voters. Voters pick their politicians. That is a fundamental, unshakeable bedrock of a free society, but this government has decided that they're above that principle. They have decided that if they cannot win over the voters, they will simply redraw the boundaries until the voters no longer matter. They want to manufacture a permanent grip on power entirely insulated from the will of the people.

Madam Speaker, we must ask ourselves in this Chamber today: what is the legacy we are leaving behind? When we look at the youth of this province, the kids in Calgary-Falconridge and right across Alberta, what are we teaching them? We tell our children to play fair. We teach them that if you lose, you lose with grace, you work harder, and you try again. We teach them that integrity matters more than winning, but this UCP government is teaching them the exact opposite. This government is standing up in front of the entire province and declaring: if you can't win by the rules, just cheat. If the independent referee makes a call you don't like, fire the referee and rewrite the rulebook yourself.

Madam Speaker, the UCP is digging a grave for the next generation. They're digging a grave for the democratic integrity of Alberta. They're actively conditioning our youth to believe that the system is rigged, that fairness is a myth, and that absolute power is the only thing that matters. What are we leaving for them? We are leaving them a province where dictatorship is normalized.

I do not use that word lightly, but what else do you call it when the ruling party completely circumvents an independent, nonpartisan process to redraw electoral maps in secret? What else do you call it when a government votes to allow external partisan actors to secretly influence the very foundation of our elections? What else do you call it when they strip away public oversight, refuse transparency, and demand that the architecture of democracy be hammered out behind closed, locked doors? It is a slow, creeping shadow of authoritarianism. It is the

government saying: "The province is us. We are the law, we are the maps, and we are the outcome."

This is how democracies wither and die. They do not always die in dramatic explosive moments. Often they die in committees. They die in secret meetings where the public is shut out. They die when those in power decide that preserving their own authority is more important than preserving the rights of the citizens they were elected to serve.

Madam Speaker, the UCP think they can get away with this because they think Albertans aren't paying attention. They think they can shroud this in bureaucratic language and committee jargon. They think that if they just push this through fast enough and quietly enough, the people of Alberta will simply accept it as a new normal. I want to assure the members opposite that Albertans are watching. The people of Calgary-Falconridge are watching. You cannot gerrymander your way out of your failures. You cannot draw a map that hides the soaring cost of living. You cannot draw a map that covers up the crisis in our health care system. You cannot draw a map that distracts from the broken promises and the crushing unaffordability you have unleashed on this province. You cannot try to silence the independent commissions. You can try to stack the deck with your own partisan actors. You can try to force this illegitimate, antidemocratic process down the throats of the people of Alberta, but you will not silence the truth.

Madam Speaker, We are standing here to hold the line. Alberta's New Democrats will not give you a free pass to dismantle our democracy. We are sitting in our illegitimate committees not to validate your cheating but to expose it. We are there to shine a spotlight on every backroom deal, every secret map, and every partisan manoeuvre they attempt to pull. We will fight every step of the way because we believe in Alberta. We believe in the intelligence and the decency of the voters. We believe that the people of this province deserve a fair fight, a free election, and a government that actually respects them.

Madam Speaker, true leaders are not afraid of a fair contest. True leaders trust the people. True leaders stand on their record, present their vision, and accept the will of the electorate. The fact that this UCP government is going to such extraordinary, unprecedented lengths to manipulate the electoral map proves one undeniable thing: they're terrified of the people of Alberta. They know their time is up. But know this. You will be remembered not for what you built but for what you tried to destroy. When the next election comes, no matter how many lines you draw, no matter how you try to slice and divide our communities, the people of Alberta will see right through you. You cannot gerrymander the truth, and you cannot gerrymander your way out of the judgment of the voters. I encourage members opposite to oppose this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

10:00

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise at this hour under time allocation feeling a sense of urgency to call on all members of this Assembly, especially those members of the government caucus who appear to be on a roll of rubber-stamping under time allocation, to give this bill a sober second thought and seriously consider the precedent that they are setting here today.

The bill reads – it's literally a one-page bill. There are two sections, and the key pieces that they're now, at this point, after they already brought in a bill changing the number of ridings from 87 to 89, having seen an interim report that was unanimously supported by the commission – three appointed UCP appointees, two appointed NDP appointees. After seeing that interim report, which

was unanimously supported, and then going on to a final report knowing that thousands of Albertans presented, including members of both caucuses – I was, in fact, there the day the Member for Rimbeay-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre presented, the day that federal representatives from other ridings presented. After all of that, after an open, public process set in the principles of democracy and a final report came back to this place, the government was clearly very upset by the fact that the majority report, the only report to be considered, wasn't one that all of the UCP appointees supported even though they'd supported something very similar unanimously in the interim process.

The final report was not supported by two of the UCP appointees. The justice who chaired the process did support it, made it very clear that if the government chose not to implement it, there would be significant legal consequences based on past precedent. That's what the majority report says. There were a couple of addendums, including a minority report.

When it was highlighted by the Leader of the Official Opposition that the minority commission members' minority report was clearly very much aligned with political staff and the Premier's office maps that they were shopping around in the community, the Premier responded by saying: well, haven't you ever heard of AI? AI clearly made these reports that were exactly the same, these boundaries that have no rooting in respecting neighbourhoods, respecting democracy, respecting like communities, respecting geographic migration. Clearly, AI made these maps that were exactly the same. The only way that that could possibly be true is if you asked AI to create you a map that gerrymandered the ridings in Alberta to give the UCP the greatest chance of electoral success even if they lost the majority vote significantly. If they lost the popular vote, how could a map be drawn to give them the ability to still win the next election?

Let's be very frank. Like, there are many problems with the Premier's defence of that, but the biggest one is that this was a process led by a justice, an independent justice, who looked at the principles of the legislation, legislation that the government brought in and that the government voted for, and they didn't like the outcome. They thought that it might not make their path to victory an easy one, and they're scared of having what could be characterized as a fair fight.

I don't think the majority report is perfect either. Of course I don't. I'm sure nobody looks at anything and thinks: "This is excellent. This is really going to help me." I was asked by that same group of students earlier today if there have ever been neighbourhoods that have been cut and had two different MLAs representing the same neighbourhood. Absolutely there have been, under many previous electoral maps but also under the majority map. Three blocks of three different neighbourhoods in Edmonton-Glenora are proposed to become part of a different riding.

But it was done democratically. It was done publicly. It was done through fair public hearings that both members of the UCP, members of the NDP, and independent members as well as people who are generally members of the community – as I mentioned, there were other elected officials there. There were folks representing religious organizations. There were people who were retired from the public service who know how important our democracy is and came to explain the process in which the population was arrived at as well as projections moving forward. I was really impressed. There were university students who came and took time out of their very busy lives to come and present on what they thought was important.

I remember talking to a hockey dad who, in his presentation, talked about: when you play in south Edmonton, you play in a different league than folks who are in Leduc or Beaumont until you

go to, you know, a higher level, until you're playing at provincials or perhaps zones, but that you don't play outside of municipal boundaries during the regular season, all really thoughtful, useful information that was given to the commission in an open and transparent process that the government has decided need not move forward.

I will say that there have been times where additional ridings have been added after a first piece of legislation, though in my recollection the only time I can recall that happening was when I believe Ed Stelmach was Premier. The interim report came out, and the Stelmach government was not thrilled with what was happening because, of course, people were moving to urban centres and out of rural centres. They were concerned about the impact on rural ridings, so they added more seats so that there could be more seats generally in Alberta, which would reduce the number that needed to be removed from rural Alberta and put into urban Alberta. I get it. But they did that between the interim report and the final report so the process could still move forward so that those independent commissioners and the public process could have integrity.

What the UCP have done is completely thrown out any of those principles of independence and fairness, and they have created MLA committees that, of course, they have a majority, so they dominate on that committee. They are moving full speed ahead with their own priorities and desires around creating a map that creates an electoral advantage for the current governing party, something that we have been raising concern could be an outcome of this process for some months.

The government said: "Don't worry. Trust us. We respect the process." The Justice minister on multiple occasions said: "This is free and fair. We have complete confidence in the commission." He bragged about the fact that the interim report was supported unanimously, and then they come in here with a final report that isn't significantly different and say that it's terrible, it needs to be thrown out, and MLAs need to do the job of the independent commission with no independence. Well, it's clear that they thought that they could whip a judge and their own appointees, but that didn't work, and now they are working very hard to make sure that they can whip their own members into submission.

One thing that's happened between the prior reading of this bill and this is that one of the things that the UCP has said is that it's really important to have rural voices heard in this place. There was somebody who I highlighted had been kicked out of their caucus for standing up for his riding and for rural Alberta and was set to come sit on the opposition side of the House as an independent member. Certainly, he was put through the wringer by many of his former colleagues, and now he, of course, has been welcomed back over after a period of penance and solitude to sit on the government benches, but he certainly hasn't been encouraged to have a voice or to speak up on behalf of his constituents.

He simply spoke up in opposition to what he said was a budget that would do nothing for his riding. That is correct. I grew up in that riding. Now he's forced to celebrate, again, a budget that does nothing for his riding, a budget that has a near record level of deficit being taken on at a time when oil and gas prices are near record highs, where we're paying the most at the pump that I can ever recall in my lifetime. Still nothing for his riding, but he has to celebrate this budget if he wants to be let back in to sit quietly among his UCP colleagues. It is not democratic, it's not respectful of this institution, and it's certainly not respectful of voters in growing areas.

I will say that if originally the prior bill that's being amended would have come up with 89 proposed electoral divisions, I am confident that the vast majority of the feedback at those public

hearings would have been to continue to add more seats to the urban centres in this province. Edmonton has seen astronomical growth. I'm sure that the members know because they drive through it when they drive into Edmonton every Sunday or Monday when they come back to this place to work. Astronomical growth, and only one net new seat for the city of Edmonton: that is appalling.

The fact that they are taking the core of our city, which currently has six representatives, and reducing that to five where there is significant densification happening all throughout our city but especially in those core neighbourhoods – all of the city of Edmonton plans around densification or around transit-oriented development are in the core. They're reducing the number of seats in the centre of Edmonton, and they're only adding net one new seat to the city of Edmonton. That is so backwards, Madam Speaker. It is not democratic. It is not respectful of all of those people who came out to present and is not respectful of this institution in which we have the honour of serving.

Madam Speaker, I strongly encourage all members to vote against this bill.

10:10

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

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I simply cannot support Bill 32, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026. The government's entire justification for this falls apart the second you hold the act itself up to some sunlight. One would think that once a trusted expert speaks to it, that should be the end of it. When we have folks who are unbiased doing the work, you would think this government would support an independent outcome. However, instead of respecting the referee, they decide to replace the referee.

You see, the majority report is the official recommendation of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, a fair map that's developed after hearings, evidence, and public consultation. These hearings consisted of mayors, experts on maps, community members, First Nations, First Nations leaders, Métis, and everyday Albertans. Thousands of everyday Albertans showed up to sit in front of the commissioners and share their opinions, their thoughts, and contribute to this map. The minority report was basically two UCP-appointed members saying: we'd rather redraw the map another way that helps Conservatives politically. That's basically the simplest explanation. Three commissioners supported a fair map; two commissioners wanted a more political map. But instead of respecting the majority, the UCP grabbed onto the minority like a drowning man grabbing onto a pool noodle, and here we are because the fair map was not politically convenient for them.

You see, Madam Speaker, imagine if five neighbours were agreeing to build a fence in their small town. After months of walking the old ways, you know, foot to foot around the land, everybody walks it, measures fairly, listens to the concerns, finally, they agree on the fence lines. Then two others show up afterwards, drawing some different maps where they would get more of the pasture or maybe more of the water for themselves instead of using the fair fence lines that everyone had worked on. You know what the government says? "Let's use the sketch that benefits us." Nobody calls that fairness. It is what it is, cheating. That's exactly what people are calling the process of gerrymandering.

Gerrymandering is a fancy parliamentary word that we don't use in everyday conversations, but it's actually very simple. Gerrymandering means politicians redraw the map to help themselves win an election. That is what it is. Politicians picking voters instead of voters picking politicians, as the leader had stated

to us earlier. It's moving the goalposts because you're afraid of losing the game. Albertans see that instinctively. If one hockey team gets to redraw the blue line after the first period or the second period, people would lose their minds. If at the Calgary Stampede, you know, we're watching chuckwagon races, but we're going to say that one of the racers gets to go ahead 50 feet instead of all the other packs, people would lose their minds. That's not competition. That's rigging it.

That's what this UCP government is doing. The truly terrifying part about all of this is that it's not hidden. It's explicitly out in the open. They rejected the independent process, the independent process where folks like mayors – as I was mentioning earlier, people drove from their towns, got out of their homes, out of their jobs to participate in this. What a way to dismiss Albertans' voice. What a disturbing attack on democracy. The UCP government created a brand new committee. They have allowed secret meetings, allowed partisan interference, allowed secret maps, and have refused transparency measures. It was very transparent with the commissioners. The meetings were transparent. You could join the meeting. Anyone could participate. This UCP government voted down against that. That is what we would call political manipulation.

You know, transparency is the one thing that will kill corruption. There's nothing transparent about this second approach. It's all being done in the dark. You know what survives in the dark, Madam Speaker? Cockroaches. Every time this government shuts the door, hides meetings, rejects oversight, rejects, you know, the public's opinions, rejects mayors, rejects everyday Albertans, Albertans are becoming more and more convinced that something rotten is happening behind these closed doors.

We can't keep pretending that this is simply about two seats, about 89 versus 91. This is about fairness, about listening to the experts who we've trusted to uphold our democracy, and this is about a government that is refusing to accept the results of an independent democratic process. Why would we have independent democratic processes if we're not going to use them? Why would we even have this Chamber if we're not going to uphold the things that this Chamber is built upon? I think Albertans need to really start asking themselves some questions about whether democracy is serving them. This is a very real issue. The chair of the commission even clarified that his addendum did not replace the majority report, yet this UCP government has deliberately twisted the language to pretend that it has a mandate for a new partisan process.

Historically independent commissions handled the electoral boundaries every single time in Alberta's history. This is something new. We cannot trust politicians to draw the lines because we are not going to draw them fairly. This side of the House is not going to draw them fairly. That side of the House is not going to them fairly. That is why we have independent commissions, because everyone has their own interests at heart, and this is why the process of independent commission exists and why it should be upheld and why I have to completely reject this bill.

Every democracy understands the basic principles. People in power should not control the rules of the election they are running in. That is common sense. We don't allow students to mark their own exams, we don't let casinos investigate themselves – although – and you certainly do not let politicians redraw their own election maps, particularly in secret, and especially after the commission spent months listening to Albertans and looking at maps with experts. Why would you do that to Albertans? Why would you sit with them for months and months, listen to them, take their opinions, have this book, a report, that is published and ready, and

say: “Actually, it doesn’t serve us. We’re going to take a crayon and redraw it.”

Madam Speaker, this government is behaving like a team afraid of losing the next election. That would be my guess why they’re redrawing the maps or trying to redraw the field before the whistle blows. It’s not a very confident government, is it? It’s a bit more of a panicked government.

Albertans, you know, have learned something about the process of democracy, and they’ve learned about this UCP government: that they actually don’t trust their own processes in democracy. Because if this UCP government did believe in Albertans and did trust them, it would have upheld the report, and they wouldn’t need to hold the secret meetings, the manipulated maps, the procedural loopholes. They would trust the work of the committee. They would trust the voices of the mayors, the councillors, the citizens, all the folks who showed up. That’s democracy. That’s what happens, is that you listen to the people, but weak governments, like this UCP government, use manipulation because that’s what losers do. They manipulate.

You know, the Electoral Boundaries Commission cost over \$1 million dollars. Over \$1 million dollars. So that million dollars is completely wasted – completely wasted – and we have an affordability crisis. We’ve got hospitals where the hallways are jam-packed, and you’re just lighting a million dollars on fire because you did not like what the outcome was. It’s a shame, shame, shame.

You know, if we think about and look to some of the court decisions based on this kind of work: in Quebec, the Legislature passed Bill 59, which protected two ridings that were being removed in a recent map. Here we have precedent in our country. When a government goes to do what this government is proposing to do, the courts turn it over anyways, again, wasting more time and money of Albertans. Seems to be a theme in this UCP government plan.

10:20

You know, my colleagues have said a tremendous amount about this, and one of the major themes that keeps coming out in this conversation is that it’s not fair. We know life isn’t fair. Things in life aren’t always fair, Madam Speaker, but Albertans trust democracy to be fair. Albertans trusted each one of us when they elected us that we would stand for fairness, that we would stand for integrity, that we would stand for dignity, and that we would do all that we can do to make sure that democracy is the institution that is held together for their children and their grandchildren. It’s the system that we’ve had here for – what is it? – 105 years. A hundred and fifty years of treaty and 105 years of democracy: it’s being eroded right before our eyes, not only democracy but also treaty.

We have work to do. Gerrymandering? Not okay. Manipulation? Not okay. Let’s listen to the experts, to the committees that we trust to do their job. Let’s listen to the experts that we trust to do their job, whether it’s teachers, doctors, nurses, or commissions who do the boundaries. These are people who are knowledgeable in the areas of their work. Whether it’s the boundaries commission or the teachers, we can see that this UCP government has gone to war with all of them. What we also see is an unprecedented amount of court cases against this UCP. Again, we’re going to see tomorrow another court case that is going to come against this government. The UCP is continuously wasting not only our time but taxpayers’ money over and over, and this is just another example of it.

I cannot support this bill, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Member Tejada: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I’m pleased to rise to speak in opposition to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026. I’m very thankful for the input of some of my colleagues here. This has been, obviously, a very, very important conversation that’s had not only within our caucuses on both sides but something that I am hearing about constantly from my constituents. They are concerned about this UCP government, basically, dismissing and throwing out the process.

That’s the thing about democracy, especially an established democracy, you come to expect process, and you come to expect that the people that are in government, even if they don’t share your views, will respect the process and that it’s one that can be trusted. I talked a little bit about that recently, that the process in this democracy is about, you know, basically participation and respect for free and fair elections. Part of the process that we’ve set up here is that independent commission that would gather every eight to 10 years and has been in place for over 30 years here in Alberta, which then reviews and develops new electoral maps based on hours and hours of public feedback and a thorough analysis of the communities that are going to be represented, how many seats we will need, and how they will be best represented.

Now, I often say that this government likes to tell on itself, and I think that this bill really belies the self-limiting mindset of the UCP. Just to get into a little bit of what that mindset is, as I’ve observed, is one where a government doesn’t believe in democracy but does believe in power and grasping on hard to that power. As I’ve heard the Leader of the Official Opposition say: what we see time and time again from this UCP government is that they care about winning to stay in power, not necessarily to serve. This bill is another example of that.

What they’re telling us in this bill is that the last election was just a little too close for comfort, and rather than risk the uncertainty of real direct democracy, which I hear the members opposite often wax poetic about, what they’ve decided to do instead is to take the reins and manipulate the maps to a vision that they believe are more in their favour. I guess the most accessible phrasing for this would be gerrymandering.

Just hearing the story about what gerrymandering is and where it originated and how ridings were manipulated, when this term came about to resemble a salamander. I would say that the minority report that was presented, that somehow magically appeared after all members of this committee had voted unanimously on the interim report, the resulting maps look like any number of very oddly shaped animal characters that make no sense and don’t provide effective representation for the people they’ve sworn to serve.

Just a little bit of history. We had a commission do I think it was about a year and a half of work, consulting with communities, setting up multiple sessions where people could join in person or online, by which I was thoroughly impressed. It was truly a process that took into account Albertans’ feedback, and took seriously the time that they each took out of their days to come and give us feedback on their communities and how they felt they could best be represented. In some cases, I was sitting with folks who came from all corners of the province just to be sure that they could participate in this process regardless of political leaning because it was one that they trusted that their feedback would be taken seriously. What this government has done essentially is ignore precedent but also ignore the feedback of all of those Albertans who participated in the independent commission.

I would say that on top of the million dollars, as was pointed out by my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford – there’s the million dollars that we know that this cost the government. How much did

it cost individual Albertans so that they could be able to participate in this process? Folks that I know were driving in from all over the province, folks with disabilities who required someone to assist them as they came to give their feedback: what did it cost for each of them? What does it say to them? They have a government that is willing to basically toss out all of that feedback, convene its own new committee, not part of any process we've seen previously, and just draw their own maps to choose their own voters, which is something that should never happen. Albertans should choose their politicians, not politicians choosing which Albertans they get to represent and which map looks best to them.

Something else that this bill tells me is that this is a government that is honestly scared of running on what I would say is a fair map even if, as expressed by many of my colleagues here, not everyone is happy with the map or with the individual details of the map. They want one that guarantees power for a good long time and they don't think that they can get that on their own. They certainly don't think that they can get it based on the policies that they have enacted. They are probably hearing loudly and clearly, just like I am, from folks all over the province that they will not stand for the blatant power grabs, the abuse of power, the concentration of control in ministers' offices and, certainly not, ignoring the recommendations that Albertans have put forward for how they'd like to be represented.

10:30

We know that instead of passing the commission's majority report, they have created and pursued an alternative and illegitimate process. It's making news everywhere. It's making news across this country. It's making news in other parts of the world. I received a link to an article from Colombia talking about the gerrymandering in Canada. It's shocking. It's disappointing. Actually, maybe not shocking. Not surprising again. Always ready to be disappointed, never really surprised.

What this bill says it does in this iteration of the manipulation of the electoral process is that the majority report recommended 91 seats, and that's not true. They want to raise the number of electoral districts to justify setting aside the majority report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and they'd like to change the number now because they don't like how that map looked. This is a blatant politicization of the electoral maps. It's the first time in our history, I would say, in Canada, just based on a little reading that I did, this outright rejection of an independent commission's report on how electoral boundaries should be drawn. It's the first time that this has happened in our history. They want to circumvent an independent process.

Really, we think that even, you know, just the fact that they were the ones that decided the number of seats that we were going to have in this House, that we were going to increase to 89. But because they didn't like the result, they would now like to add another two seats and make sure that they can get their hands back on the lines that are proposed in that map and skew it to their favour.

We know we don't have enough time for an independent Electoral Boundaries Commission to properly study how to allocate 91 ridings before the 2027 election. This is just another one of many steps that the UCP is taking to take away voters' rights to freely and fairly choose their next government. They forced an illegitimate process on Albertans through Government Motion 37, and Alberta New Democrats will always vote to protect this province from partisan gerrymandering and political manipulation.

You know, even the majority report map was not a guarantee of anyone's victory, but I find it interesting that this government is so obsessed with staying in power and that it thinks that this will be

one of the measures by which they do that. I think it's a big risk to them. Folks know that this is in no way normal.

There's talk about gerrymandering in the United States, which I know perhaps some of the members opposite would love to emulate; but we know that this is not normal. There is nothing normal about interfering with democracy, and I for one know that any of the people that I've spoken with won't stand for it. I think it actually injures our reputation as a democracy, as a province, and within the nation of Canada, and people are watching. They're paying attention.

I think for the first time I had some teenagers from one of the schools that I was visiting talk about this. They're passionate and unfortunately also feeling a bit of despair at a government that would override their democratic rights because they know that that's what's happening. They've seen this. They've heard about it in their history books, which who knows how long those will exist or be considered not neutral. No more history courses because we can see that this government is definitely taking from a playbook that is undemocratic. For that reason I would encourage all members of this Assembly to vote against Bill 32. It's undemocratic, it makes us look bad, and I hope all other members do the same.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 32, Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act.

I want to be very clear, Madam Speaker. I and all of my colleagues on this side of the aisle believe that the Special Select Committee on Electoral Boundaries that has been struck to fulfill this act is illegitimate and likely unconstitutional. We do have members that are participating, but that's simply because we as representatives of our constituents feel we do need to be there at the table to keep an eye on what it is this government is choosing to do, and to be very clear that what this government is choosing to do is have MLAs redraw the maps.

Now, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat took great offence when I said that at committee this morning. He said: "No. That is not what's happening. That's false. That's misrepresenting." You know, he said: "There's an advisory panel. They're going to do the work." Madam Speaker, the fact is that this is a committee dominated by government MLAs. Yes. They will appoint an advisory panel. That panel will report back to those MLAs, and those MLAs will vote on what happens after that. The advisory panel has no independence. The advisory panel will not make any final decisions. A committee dominated by UCP MLAs will make all the decisions, and whatever decision they make, whatever they decide to send to us here in the House, then will be subject to a vote, again, dominated by government members. MLAs are going to be redrawing the maps. More specifically, UCP MLAs are redrawing the maps.

You know, this government talks about: "Why don't you care about rural Alberta? Don't you care about representation?" The fact is, Madam Speaker, here's what some of those folks have to say about this government's special select committee. Mayor Cindy Jefferies from Red Deer, quote,

I think the boundaries commission was formed for the purpose of maintaining neutrality and objectivity in forming boundaries. Rejection of the report calls into question our commitment to democracy and what the true end game is in trying to adjust them. The committee that looked at this was representative of all parties, so to completely reject it and move to your own answers, I think, calls into question the integrity of the process. I guess

from a democratic perspective there's a reason to raise an eyebrow about what's happening here, and it begs the question: what is the end goal?

Mayor Brent Ramsay from Red Deer county: "Once you cut out public feedback and rush it before the next election, there are going to be concerns." Susan Samson, former mayor of Sylvan Lake and member of the original Electoral Boundaries Commission: when MLAs of any stripe start picking their voters instead of the voters picking their MLAs, we're on a very slippery slope; this is a real stab in the heart for democracy, grassroots democracy being challenged.

If they're going to do it, that is draw the maps themselves, what do you think they're going to come up with? Now Dr. Jared Wesley, political scientist at the University of Alberta: I found his comments particularly interesting because Dr. Wesley actually chaired a boundaries commission. He chaired a boundaries commission for the city of Edmonton, and he wrote about his experience with that. Here's what he had to say. He said: "Our commission found that people can live with compromise. They can live with trade-offs. What they cannot live with is a suspicion that the rules were bent after the fact to protect one side."

The fact is, Madam Speaker, it is far from a suspicion at this point. I think we have flashing red lights and a blaring alarm. It is absolutely clear what this government is doing and why, and the fact is that it is just one more way in which this government just continues to undermine all of our democratic processes and destroy Albertans' faith in the very systems that we depend on. They've done it in education: tore that system apart. They've done it in health care: quadrupled the bureaucracy, created longer wait times, less access, undermined people's faith that care is going to be there when they need it.

10:40

Now they're doing exactly the same with their democratic systems, whether it's undermining the Chief Electoral Officer by changing legislation to make it harder for him to actually investigate, leading to the data breach we saw last week – nearly 3 million Albertans' information out in the wild for nearly a month before they were able to take action, because this government changed those laws – whether it's them playing with the rules every time there was something that happened to be in the way of a separatist referendum question, rigging the rules to support their friends, their biggest supporter and influencer, Mr. Mitch Sylvestre.

Again, Madam Speaker, this is not helpful for Albertans. This is not helpful for anyone. This is a government that is content to let the province burn in the seams so they can rule over the ashes. The fact is, the committee that this government has put together, dominated by their MLAs, to redraw the constituency maps, to bring it up to 91 seats – now, when we talked about this earlier when the government brought in that motion, the government members were like: "Oh, well, why don't you support rural Alberta? Why don't you support representation." If they supported rural Alberta, if they supported representation, they would have come out with 91 seats to begin with. They didn't. They limited the committee to 89. It was only when they got the maps back and they didn't like what they saw – they didn't like the fact that the independent commission was actually independent – that they decided suddenly we had to go to 91 and they had to be the ones to figure out how that was going to happen.

The fact is at that committee, Madam Speaker, we tried to set some reasonable parameters. Again, our members who are there – this is a committee that is illegitimate but the government is forcing it through, so we're going to be there. We're going to try to make a bad thing better. Our MLAs at that committee tried to put forward some

straightforward motions. They tried to put forward a motion that simply all of the meetings would be on the record in full sight of Albertans. The government rejected that. That no one could be appointed to the advisory panel who had clear partisan affiliation, folks that had recently made donations to any political party, that have participated in partisan processes. The government voted that down.

Strangely enough, they felt that it was necessary for advisory panel members to not be required to report any attempts to influence them or provide them with gerrymandered maps. No requirement for bipartisan support in appointing the chair of that advisory panel.

Again, Madam Speaker, the government claims this is collaborative. They claim it is not their MLAs dominating, but yet they insisted that whoever is appointed to chair of this advisory panel could be appointed only by them. They rejected a requirement that the chair of the advisory panel be a sitting justice of the Court of King's Bench or the Court of Appeal chosen by the Chief Justice of Alberta. They rejected a proposal that said the chair could not be partisan, could not have made political donations or volunteered with a political party within the last 10 years, and they refused any requirement for public interviews or hearings for any nominee for that position of chair, much as they are not taking any public consultations as part of this.

Now, I was reading through the record, Madam Speaker, of some of the folks that spoke up at those panels and indeed the concerns they raised, and you know what? The number one thing I seem to hear from rural municipal leaders and others who spoke is that they felt they had not been heard or represented. The fact is, they were very clear that their expectation would be that their voices are heard and considered, and they're indeed raising concerns that this government is once again shutting them out.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 42 agreed to on May 7, 2026, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must be decided to conclude debate on Bill 32 at second reading, I must now put the following questions to conclude debate.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:46 p.m.]

[Three minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

10:50

Against the motion:

Boparai	Hoffman
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hoyle
Ceci	Irwin
Dach	Kasawski
Haji	Kayande
Hayter	Miyashiro

Totals: For – 44

Schmidt
Shepherd
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet
Tejada

Against – 17

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In this late hour I want to applaud all members of the Assembly for providing us with their debate and their contributions to all of the bills that preceded, but at this time I would like to ask that we move that the Assembly be adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:53 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 25	An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act, 2026.....	1833
	Division	1839
Bill 28	Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.....	1839
	Division	1845
Bill 32	Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2026	1846
	Division	1852

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