

Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 23, 2026

Day 71

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature
Second Session

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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Campbell, Kyle, Calgary-Shaw (NDP)
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, November 23, 2026 1:30 p.m.

1:30 p.m. Monday, **November 23, 2026**

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our King and his government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Hon. members, it being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Brittany Blommaert. I invite all to participate in the official language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

The Speaker: The Legislative Assembly is grateful to be situated on Treaty 6 territory. This land has been the traditional region of the Métis people of Alberta, the Inuit, and the ancestral territory of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Iroquois, and Nakota Sioux people. The recognition of our history on this land is an act of reconciliation, and we honour those who walk with us. We also acknowledge that the province of Alberta exists within treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10 territories and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, sitting in my gallery today is Her Excellency Lucila Crexell, ambassador of Argentina to Canada. She holds degrees in law and political science as well as a master's degree in gender studies. She also has pursued postgraduate studies in energy and environmental affairs. Prior to her appointment as ambassador she served for 12 years as a national Senator representing the province of Neuquén. She is joined by Minister Ricardo Arrendondo, the consul general of the Argentine Republic in Vancouver, and Mr. Juan Pablo Allamian, secretary of embassy and deputy head of mission from the embassy of the Argentine Republic. Please all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, also in my gallery we have our anthem singer Brittany Blommaert, an Edmonton-born singer raised in Mill Woods. She is a Concordia University graduate with over nine years of classical training – I think we can tell that – and performs across multiple musical genres, never allowing her disabilities to hold her back. After contracting bacterial meningitis at five years old, she lost her right hand and foot and several fingers and toes. She is grateful for the support of the Stollery, Glenrose, War Amps CHAMP program, and her father, David Blommaert, who is accompanying her today. Both please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Also in the gallery we have Sheila Ethier, Elaine Hole Pedersen, and Dawn Price, the hosts of today's Blankets of Love event in the lower rotunda. This organization provides handmade quilts donated by volunteer quilters to hospital patients experiencing mental health challenges. Since its founding in 1996 Blankets of Love has donated more than 10,000 quilts to hospitals across Canada. I ask all to please rise and receive the warm welcome.

School groups today, starting with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you and to all members of this Chamber grade 9 students from Steele Heights junior high school with their teacher, Brooklyn Rowe. There are 97 in the gallery today, and I would ask that they all please stand and rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you Sheila Dorward, a former constituent of mine who recently moved to Marwayne, where she's looking after her husband. What she wanted me to emphasize today is that she's a proud Albertan and proud Canadian and proudly worked on the Forever Canadian campaign to get a strong vote to stay in Alberta. I ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lac La Biche is truly one of Alberta's hidden gems from a recreational and economic point of view. I'd like to introduce to you and through you the mayor, Paul Reutov, and his council. If you could stand, please, and receive the traditional warm welcome. It's an absolute pleasure to work with these folks.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Khalid Hashi, the executive director of SCERDO, Mohamed Ahmed, and Liban Ali, the program's team. They do incredible work in newcomer services.

Also, Mohamed Hersi, the chairperson of the Somaliwecare council. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce a lovely young lady. She's in grade 6 at Lois E. Hole. She's here with her school. I'm not sure if she's here yet. Whitney Brown is the daughter of my constituency assistant, and she's a fabulous ringette player and face painter. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, I introduce members of the Art of Living Foundation. This registered charity seeks to support emotional resilience and peacemaking. I would invite all members of this Legislature to use words of peace today and invite members of Art of Living to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Legislature.

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, I rise to welcome Dallas Alexander, a PPCLI and JTF 2 veteran who attended sniper school. Dallas was

part of the sniper team in Iraq that set a 3,540-metre world record shot that protected allied forces. He also helped raise $50,000 for soldiers injured at CFB Wainwright. Please join me in welcoming him to this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there more introductions? I see Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce my friends and constituents Dale and Deb Hoar from Ponoka county. Please rise and receive the traditional and warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

National Housing Day

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, yesterday was National Housing Day, and Albertans have good reason to be proud. Last year Alberta builders broke ground on more than 53,000 homes, a provincial record. Nearly 1 in 4 homes started anywhere in Canada was right here in Alberta. For the second year in a row we led the country in housing starts per capita.

1:40

Renters across the province are also seeing the benefits of this record-setting housing construction. Last year construction began on nearly 20,000 purpose-built rentals in Alberta. Rentals.ca found that six of the 10 lowest average asking rents for apartments were right here in Alberta. Fort McMurray, Medicine Hat, and Lloydminster took the top three seats. For a young Albertan looking for a first apartment or a family looking for another bedroom, lower rent means more room in the budget for groceries or other everyday essentials.

We're also ahead of schedule on stronger foundations, our government's affordable housing strategy. Five years in we're more than 70 per cent of the way toward our goal of supporting 25,000 additional households through affordable housing and rent supplements by 2031. This month our government opened applications for $500 million to build affordable homes, modernize seniors' lodges, and expand continuing care. For seniors and their families that means more opportunities to stay close to one another as care needs change. Half of that funding is available through the affordable housing partnership program. This latest round of funding builds on an already strong record. Since 2022 the program has already supported more than 7,400 affordable homes across nearly 30 communities. We expect this latest investment to support about 2,100 more.

Mr. Speaker, local housing providers know what their communities need, whether that's apartments for young families or a lodge where seniors can stay close to their children and their grandchildren. Our government will keep backing those projects so more Albertans can afford to put down roots in the communities that they call home.

Thank you.

Government Record

Mr. Nenshi: Mr. Speaker, every single time something goes wrong in this government, which is every single day in this government, the Premier has only one of two responses or both. She didn't know; it was someone else's fault. The entitlement and the arrogance of this government is matched only by their lack of accountability. The service Alberta minister bungles every file and is chauffeured from junket to junket at a taxpayer cost of tens of thousands of dollars. The minister of transportation lights $300 million on fire to build an LRT that doesn't even go downtown and is backtracking on his own bike lane legislation two days after introducing it. The Minister of Justice is deeply embroiled in the corrupt care scandal, yet is put up every single day to defend his own cousin and best friend, and the Premier and the minister of education were shocked to find out that flagpoles cost money.

Yet the Premier has never fired a single cabinet minister. It's because corruption and entitlement are baked into the DNA of this UCP government. When they have to choose between what's right for Albertans and what they think will keep them in power, they choose themselves every single time. It's all the corruption of the old PCs and none of the competence, and this kind of entitlement inevitably leads to cheating. A minister told one of my MLAs he didn't understand why he was mad about gerrymandering because the UCP saved his seat for him. Another minister blabs all over town that cabinet drew the map lines. They actually think this is how things are done. They don't know or they don't care that this is unprecedented, illegal, and unconstitutional. Thankfully, Albertans who are tired of this cheating, corruption, and entitlement have a better choice. They can elect a better government.

Illegal Waste Disposal

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, illegal dumping is a growing problem across Alberta, affecting city neighbourhoods, rural roads, farms, and public lands. It makes our communities less attractive, damages the environment, threatens wildlife and waterways, and leaves responsible taxpayers paying to clean up someone else's mess. That is unacceptable and needs to stop. The scale of the problem is clear. In 2025 alone Calgary received approximately 30,000 complaints and nearly 9,000 cleanup requests involving illegal dumping on municipal property. Those numbers represent real cleanup costs, diverted resources, and frustration for families and local communities alike. Yet offenders can be difficult to catch, especially when waste is abandoned at night or in isolated areas.

That is why our government is taking action to crack down on illegal dumping, strengthen penalties, and hold offenders accountable. Under the proposed changes individuals could face fines ranging from $10,000 to $100,000 while corporations could face fines ranging from $100,000 to $1 million. Individuals could also face between 30 days and six months in jail. These penalties send a clear message. Illegally dumping waste in Alberta can carry serious consequences.

But enforcement is only part of the solution. We all have a responsibility to protect the places we call home. That means disposing of waste properly, hiring reputable waste haulers, and reporting suspicious activity. If you witness illegal dumping, contact your municipality or Alberta's 24-hour environmental response line at 1.800.222.6514. Every report helps protect our communities, our environment, and the land we all share. Albertans should never have to pay the price for someone else's illegal dumping. Those who break the law must be held accountable.

Together we can keep Alberta clean for future generations. Do your part. Don't dump on Alberta.

AI Data Centre Projects

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and her ministers promised Albertans a plan to keep AI data centres from overwhelming our grid and driving up power bills. Any data centre drawing 75 megawatts or more would have to bring its own power. How is that promise holding up? Unsurprisingly, it isn't. *Canada's National Observer* found 20 data centres have asked the province for power just under that line. Eleven asked for exactly 74.9 megawatts. Not 75, not 74; 74.9. East of Calgary three neighbouring projects were filed at 450 megawatts each. Two have now shrunk to – you guessed it – 74.9. That is not a coincidence. That is not a rounding error. That is a loophole.

Combined, these projects want more than 1,200 megawatts, more than Meta's project in Sturgeon county. Sixteen want it within three years, right when power companies expect prices to triple, and not one of them is required by the lax rules of this government to build a single megawatt of its own power.

Who pays for it? Albertans, of course. The system operator warned about this in June. Since then those projects have doubled. The final rules still have not been released even though they were promised for August. This government promised the grid would come first. They promised that you would not have to pay for their data centre pet projects. Well, 11 projects at 74.9 megawatts tell you exactly what those promises are worth. It just goes to show how entitled the UCP feels to power that they will stick you with the bill.

The UCP record on data centres is clear: higher bills for Albertans, a free pass for tech billionaire bros, and a loophole nobody bothered to close. The UCP forgot to do their homework again, but Albertans won't forget who stuck them with the bill.

Comedy and Freedom of Speech

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, "the only honest art form is laughter . . . You can't fake it." A quote from Leonard Alfred Schneider, who was born in Mineola, New York, in 1925. He's better known by his stage name, Lenny Bruce, and was a pioneer for stand-up comedy as well as a fierce advocate for free speech. He was arrested several times for obscenity and blacklisted from most American clubs by the time he died in 1966. Bruce talked about race, religion, and sex in language people used at home and pretended they never heard in public. When critics called him sick, he said: "I'm not a comedian. And I am not sick; the world is sick, and I'm the doctor." Without Lenny Bruce we probably wouldn't have George Carlin or Richard Pryor. Then we wouldn't have Eddie Murphy, Chris Rock, Bill Burr, Dave Chappelle, or Shane Gillis. Lenny Bruce fought for the freedom to stand at a microphone and say what he saw.

Mr. Speaker, the modern version of censorship is cancel culture and woke mobs on social media. You can laugh, boo, walk out, even heckle, but if you don't like what a comedian says, then simply don't watch them, or you could change the channel. If you're a true believer in freedom of speech, then you must also support the freedom of speech of the views you despise or disagree with. That's the whole ball game. Ricky Gervais said it best when he said, "Just because you're offended, doesn't mean you're right."

Mr. Speaker, laughter strengthens your immune system, diminishes pain, and protects you from the damaging effects of stress by lowering cortisol and releasing endorphins; a fancy way of saying that it makes people feel good. Nothing works faster to bring your mind and body back into balance than a good laugh. So the next time you find yourself offended by a joke from a comedian you probably already hate, don't give up. There's something for everyone in comedy. If you don't like Eddie Murphy, watch Jerry Seinfeld. If you're appalled by Shane Gillis, watch my personal favourite, Nate Bargatze.

I try and find the funny everywhere I go, Mr. Speaker, because it sounds like I'll live longer, and after all comedy is simply a funny way of being serious. Thank you.

1:50 Premier's Travel to Europe

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, the UCP is so entitled to power that they don't think twice about exploiting the public for their own personal indulgence. Albertans can't afford groceries. It took the Premier months to acknowledge that they were struggling with high gas prices and crushing property tax increases from her own government. That's why Albertans are fed up with the lifestyles of the rich and famous that the UCP seems to prioritize rather than regular people.

The Premier took luxury private flights paid for by her close friend, a Saudi prince, complete with a complimentary gold-plated cat. Albertans were rightfully angry about that, but did the Premier learn? Nope. Just one month later, after the Saudi flight scandal broke, the Premier was jet-setting again, off for a meeting in London, England. Did the Premier hail a cab, maybe do some research on mass transit for her rail plan and check out the world-famous London tube? Nope. She hired London's finest chauffeur service for $2,300 to ferry her to exactly one meeting with Travel Alberta.

But wait. That transportation was just for her entourage. She herself rode alone, up front in a separate, private, chauffeured car. The service the Premier's office used is from a company that boasts about being preferred by her close friends the Saudi Royal Family. Maybe the prince got her a friends-and-family deal. I don't know. It sure doesn't look like it given it cost Albertans 2,300 bucks for a 10-minute ride to one meeting. That's almost as bad as the minister of service Alberta's $5,400 four-day Kentucky booze cruise. Why did the Premier think it was acceptable just after her Saudi flight scandal?

This UCP government's 2026 report card has a big F and three Cs: failure to deliver for regular Albertans, multiple attempts to cheat in the next election, increased costs for everyone but themselves, and endless corruption for the UCP and their friends and insiders.

Oral Question Period

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

Online Gaming Regulation

Mr. Nenshi: Mr. Speaker, the challenges with the minister of service Alberta go far beyond his love of dubious junkets. For example, the rollout of online gambling in Alberta is another example of this government acting without thinking. Advertising is everywhere, guardrails are insufficient, and more people, particularly young men, are falling into gambling addiction and bankrupting themselves and their families. Why didn't this government learn anything from Ontario and either stick with the Play Alberta system, that was working well enough, or build real guardrails to prevent the harm of these predatory practices?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, online gambling has been in the province for almost 30 years, and quite frankly some of those operators have been repugnant in taking advantage of vulnerable Albertans. We did not bring online gambling to Alberta, but we did make it regulated. We made it a little bit more responsible. We took a look at the Ontario model, and we did two things differently. We brought in self-exclusion system-wide on day one, and we also made the operators pay for treatment.

Mr. Nenshi: We have significant restrictions on the advertising of alcohol and cannabis products. Even prescription drug products have significant rules around their advertising. Yet we've created a complete free-for-all for gambling, even as studies show that gambling addiction can be as harmful as substance addiction. Was the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction even consulted when the government decided to go forward with this? What advice from experts around the world did this government choose to ignore?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, you will never hear me say that we need more gambling ads, but we did bring in some guardrails such as that you can't target young people, you can't use athletes in advertising, things along those lines. We can't have a two-tiered system where the illicit black market can advertise but the regulated market can't.

Now, there have been a lot of online ads, but the market is young from a regulated perspective. We anticipate that it's going to go down. We're monitoring it. If it doesn't, we're prepared to take action.

Mr. Nenshi: As always: we're monitoring it. Why didn't we do it in advance? There was plenty of evidence to show this. I was speaking with an ER doc from Ontario this weekend who told me that young men are now presenting in the emergency room because they can't handle their gambling addictions. The only person who's really benefited from this is the minister himself with his multiple junkets to Las Vegas. Now Play Alberta is being readied for sale to the very people he schmoozes with in Vegas. Can the minister guarantee to every Albertan that as of today they can cancel and delete their Play Alberta account before it's sold to his Las Vegas friends?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can say that those comments are absolutely deplorable. We have the gold standard for gambling treatment, which is intensive outpatient-based therapy. It wasn't available prior to July 13. In fact, it doesn't even exist across the country. We have the highest standard of gambling treatment, and the best part is that it's paid for by the operator, and we feel strongly that that's the right thing to do.

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

Mr. Nenshi: So we'll cause a problem, we'll pretend to be surprised by the results, and we'll spend even more taxpayer money trying to solve the problems that this government has started.

Electoral Boundaries Committee Review

Mr. Nenshi: Now, in discussing the electoral boundaries debacle, another example of entitlement here, the Premier referred to the, quote, unquote, maps drawn by Notley. She didn't seem to understand that that was not only inaccurate but illegal. At least one minister has been blabbing all over town that the cabinet saw and had input into the lines on the map. Can the Premier confirm today that her cabinet actually did discuss where the lines should be drawn on the map, or was the minister stretching the truth?

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

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Another made-up scenario, another made-up story. The recommendations were developed by an independent advisory panel, chaired by a former Court of Appeal justice. They met. They deliberated. They looked at the material that was submitted. They looked at the recommendations, and they made a recommendation to this Legislature, which is before the Assembly here today to debate. That's what happened. No member wrote the maps, as the Leader of the Opposition is alleging. That would not happen because an independent panel was the one that made the recommendations in this Assembly.

Mr. Nenshi: But, of course, the government rejected the findings of the independent panel. Contrast with Rachel Notley: she accepted the findings of an independent commission, which pitted two cabinet ministers against each other, which merged the NDP's strongest ridings in Calgary, removed an NDP seat in Medicine Hat. But we have yet another minister who told one of my members last week that he should be happy because the UCP saved him a seat. This is what's going on with this government. So, again, did the government unduly influence the independent panel, and if not, why do multiple ministers think it did?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. No minister influenced the panel. The panel was independent. Two members of the opposition were appointed, two members of the government were appointed, and the panel was chaired by a highly respected jurist here in Alberta. That independent panel provided recommendations to this Assembly. All members have had the equal opportunity to review those, except maybe the Leader of the Opposition, who seemed to know a little bit more than everybody else before anybody else had seen the maps. That's what's happening. We will debate, we will discuss, and we will pass if those maps pass through the Assembly.

Mr. Nenshi: Yet somehow, magically, every single change proposed by the panel benefits a vulnerable UCP cabinet minister. Every single one. Actually, they forgot one, the most vulnerable of all cabinet ministers, the Minister of Justice. But there is an entire AI-written chapter that suggests that the Legislature treat that minister's riding as a special case and even apologizes that the information came too late to include it in the main recommendation. What information came too late, and from whom did it come? Was it from this government?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. No idea what the leader is talking about. The independent advisory panel deliberated on their own without any influence from anybody else. Quite frankly, I really don't know what the Leader of the Opposition is saying. My constituency was impacted probably more than anybody else's in this Assembly. Not everybody gets what they want. Not everybody gets what they hope for. That's the purpose of the panel and the independence of the committee. So which is it? Were they independent or were they not?

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

Mr. Nenshi: It's quite sad, really, that the minister hasn't read the report that he's trying to defend, or he would know that everything he said is not in fact reflected in that report.

High School Graduation Requirements

Mr. Nenshi: We also still don't know where the Friday the 13th education announcement came from. Parents didn't ask for it. The minister dismantled his student youth panel years ago. I stood with a bunch of trade unions on Friday who confirmed that not only were they not consulted; they didn't want it. This government is so entitled that they didn't consult anybody except right-wing American podcasts. So one more time: who asked for the lowering of standards?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education and Childcare.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, a complete mischaracterization from the Leader of the Opposition. There's no lowering of standards here; just giving students more opportunities and choice. Over the course of the summer we had an opportunity to engage with a variety of different partners to get a better understanding of some of their concerns, including the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents,

the University of Alberta, Bow Valley College, SAIT, Concordia University, NAIT, as well as other school authorities.

Mr. Nenshi: Yet not one of those people has come out and said they were consulted, and not one of them has come out and said they're in favour of the minister's changes. It's simply not true.

Alberta has a huge labour market problem. We've got massive unemployment. We need more people in the trades. We need more people in allied health professions. We need to increase our high school graduation rate. We need to increase our postsecondary participation rate. But this plan, lowering standards, does none of those things. The building trades were not consulted. They didn't ask for this. Most trades recommend the very courses that the government is de-emphasizing. Has the minister spoken to anyone in the trades?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As former Minister of Advanced Education we led significant reform to strengthen parity of esteem when it comes to the trades. Unfortunately, a lot of that work has been eroded by the comments of the member opposite, who referred to tradespeople as being uneducated, and other members of the NDP, who have continued to criticize and chastise members of the trades for maybe being below a standard that he is at. We know the professor really thinks of himself at a high bar, but we view any educational experience, be that in the trades or other postsecondaries, as equally valuable.

Mr. Nenshi: Except, of course, the minister with his PhD thinks that I am so powerful that my comments can change his whole system. Would that I had that power.

But there's a real problem here with capital costs. We're talking about tripling the number of gyms in every high school in Alberta. We're talking about building out shop space if in fact there was anything for the trades in here, which there isn't. This has to happen now, when every urban high school in Alberta is operating at over 100 per cent capacity. There's simply no space. Where is the funding for all of these gyms since construction has to start now?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, there you have it, Mr. Speaker. As soon as we call out the member opposite for his specific comments, he dodges and he diverts to something completely different. He should own up to the comments that he made. He should apologize to Albertans. He should apologize to tradespeople who built this province. Our government has been fierce in advancing the skilled trades, trying to create a parity of esteem, and at the first opportunity he denigrates the trades. He denigrates tradespeople. Shame on him. We welcome an apology from the NDP immediately. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

That was fun, but now we're going to listen to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Electoral Boundaries

Ms Pancholi: When I talk to elementary students about what MLAs do in the Legislature, I explain that in here we decide on the laws of Alberta, and I ask them if any of them can tell us what a law is. One kiddo always chimes in by saying that laws are the rules that everyone has to follow. Exactly right. Everyone follows the rules because that's what's fair. You shouldn't be able to ignore the rules just to make it easier for you to win because, if you did, that would be cheating, and kids get that. Can the Premier explain why ignoring the rules to establish fair electoral boundaries just to make it easier for her party to win isn't cheating?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Despite that comment, that's not what happened at all. The report initially from Justice Miller recommended increasing the number of seats by two to 91 seats because it would better reflect the makeup of Alberta. That's what this Assembly did, and then the independent panel revisited the maps with the 91 seats in their mind in order to be able to draw electoral boundaries that reflected 91 seats, which was what the recommendations were.

Ms Pancholi: You know, one rule in sports that I've always had a hard time catching is when a play is offside. It's the rule that you can't position one of your players in your opponent's half ahead of their defenders just to wait for a long, easy pass to score. But if one team decides that the rule suddenly doesn't apply to them and only their team is entitled to be able to score off long, easy passes, well, anyone watching would know that that's cheating, and that's exactly what the UCP are doing with electoral boundaries. They want to ignore the rules so only their team can play offside. Will the Premier admit that ignoring the rules is not only cheating but it's offside what Albertans deserve?

Mr. Amery: Well, Mr. Speaker, the great irony in that question is that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud actually asked for 91 seats as well, and that is what the panel provided as a recommendation in their boundary commission report. Those 91 seats were adopted by this Assembly through a bill that was tabled and debated here in this Legislature, and the panel came back with a map that consisted of 91 seats. That's what the process is. That's what the law says, and we followed it to its word.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, the brazen way that the UCP tells Albertans that rules to establish fair electoral boundaries are about helping the UCP win seats in Calgary and Lethbridge and not about ensuring every Albertan's vote counts speaks to the level of this government's entitlement. They feel entitled to seats where they haven't earned the support from voters. They feel entitled to drown out the voices of urban voters. They feel entitled to the votes of rural voters. They feel entitled to be government. Why won't this Premier call an election now so that Albertans can show the UCP that the only thing they're entitled to is to be thrown out of government?

Mr. Amery: Well, Mr. Speaker, we won't call an election now because the law has fixed election dates. That would be breaking the law.

Alberta's population continues to grow, and it's important that Alberta has effective representation. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. We're having fun today, but I couldn't even hear the answer. Let's hear it.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, as Alberta's population continues to grow and as it continues to expand throughout the province, it's important that Albertans have effective representation. That is the theme of the panel's recommendations. That is the theme that the panel was tasked with doing, and that's why a majority of the Electoral Boundaries Commission believed that it was necessary to have 91 seats, so that effective representation would be achieved.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

High School Graduation Requirements
(continued)

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents want their kids' education to prepare them for a bright future, but the UCP changes to school graduation requirements do the opposite. These lowered standards will leave students without the courses they need for apprenticeship and postsecondary training, and this entitled government did this without consulting parents, teachers, or tradespeople because they're too busy trying to cheat in the next election. How does making it harder for young people to get into the trades or university make any sense?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Childcare.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP continues to peddle false information as it relates to these changes to graduation requirements. Every single course that a student needs to pursue any type of pathway, be that to university, to trades, to college programming, is available and accessible for that student to choose. We've made sure to have detailed conversations over the course of the summer with a number of partners, as I've just mentioned a moment ago, regarding many of these changes. We're going to continue to ensure that students have the dynamic, flexible options that they need in order to succeed and find an area of passion and interest.

Mr. Sabir: Given that Albertans want their government to provide better education, not lower the standards, given that high school students will need more math and more science to be ready for the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow and given that tradespeople warn that these changes mean students will likely need to upgrade their training after school to qualify for apprenticeships, will the government reverse these proposed changes and improve education instead of lowering graduation requirements?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I want to take a short trip down memory lane. Just a couple of years ago, when we brought forward Bill 6 into this Assembly, a bill to mandate universal screening in reading, writing, and math to ensure that every single child from kindergarten to grade 3 would be screened in their proficiency in reading, writing, and math, and, more importantly, that intervention plans would be available to school boards to support those students that our screeners identified needed additional help. You know what? There was only one party in this Assembly that voted against it. That was the NDP. Shame on them.

2:10

Mr. Sabir: Given that instead of funding Alberta's classrooms, this government wants to cheat in the next election, given that this government has had years to build new schools and has not done so, given that Alberta's parents, teachers, and kids have been asking this government to fix the crumbling education system and given that lowering graduation requirements doesn't help with any of these, will the minister reverse these reckless changes and stop gambling with Alberta's kids' future?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm always happy to compare our record against the NDP. When the NDP was in office, they funded only 48 school projects. Since our government has been in office, we have funded 205 school projects. In addition, Budget '26 provides a historic level of investment to our education system. We've created complexity teams in our schools. We've hired hundreds and thousands more teachers, 2,100 net new teachers, and over 1,000 net new EAs, and more to come.

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

Affordable Housing

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was National Housing Day, and Alberta has a record worth celebrating. Last year builders broke ground on more than 53,000 homes in our province. Nearly 1 in 4 homes started anywhere in Canada were right here in Alberta. For young Albertans looking for a first apartment, or a family ready to buy a home, having more choice matters. Can the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services tell this House how our government is helping builders get more homes built across Alberta?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct. Albertan builders broke ground on more than 53,000 homes last year. That's a provincial record, up 14 per cent from the year before. For the second year in a row Alberta led the country in housing starts per capita. We're keeping that momentum going by cutting red tape and attracting investment. Our stop housing delays portal gives builders and municipalities a direct line to tell us where a project is getting held up so we can work to get them moving. Through stronger foundations we're working with our partners to drive more than $9 billion into housing investments so Albertans can find a home.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that Alberta builders started construction on nearly 20,000 purpose-built rental homes last year, giving renters more choice so that those homes open their doors, and given that paying less in rent leaves families with more room in their budget for groceries and other essentials, can the same minister tell this House what we are seeing in Alberta's rental market and how rent assistance is helping Albertans cover the cost of a home today?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Renters are already seeing the benefits of having more homes to choose from. According to rentals.ca six of the 10 most affordable small and mid-sized cities for renters in Canada are right here in Alberta. Fort McMurray, Medicine Hat, and Lloydminster were the top three. Across Alberta average asking rent fell by nearly 5 per cent from June to July. For Albertans who need extra help covering rent today, we increased funding for rent assistance by 9.7 per cent in this year's budget. More than 16,400 Alberta households received that help, giving them more room to budget for groceries and other essentials.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a family may need an affordable apartment near their children's school while a senior may need a lodge or continuing care close to loved ones and given that our government opened applications this month for $500 million to help communities meet those housing needs, can the same minister tell this House what that investment will mean for seniors and their families and how the affordable housing partnership program will help local providers build more homes Albertans can afford?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our $500 million investment will help more Albertans find a home that they can afford close to the people that they love.

For a senior that might be a lodge in their own community or a continuing care home close enough that their kids can visit from work. For a young family it might be their first apartment in a neighbourhood where they can put down roots.

On Friday I was home in Lethbridge to announce a $250 million investment through the affordable housing partnership program with our local housing providers and partners. We expect this round to support more than 2,100 affordable homes. That's serving Albertans.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Government Priorities

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even diehard Calgary conservatives are now pointing out the obvious. This UCP government has the wrong priorities. Shane Byciuk is an outspoken conservative and former city council candidate for the UCP-aligned municipal party, and on Twitter he said this about the Premier's backward priorities, quote: six-and-a-half-hour wait times at Alberta emergency rooms, and the government is focused on adding a separate flagpole at every school. Unquote. Albertans are all asking the same question: what is going on? Why is this entitled government so focused on the wrong priorities?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, since the moment we were elected in 2019, our priorities have not changed. It's job creation, keeping taxes low, supporting investment in the province, and we are seeing tremendous success under the leadership of the Premier. That's why, since she became Premier, we've had 300,000 new private-sector jobs created right here in Alberta and record investment in the private sector. That's something the NDP couldn't even dream of. That is why we're in government, and we're going to stay here as long as we stay focused, and I can tell you that we will. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. We want to hear Calgary-Currie now, so let's do that.

Member Eremenko: Given that the Premier could have asked any teacher or parent if the number of flagpoles at their school is more important than the number of students crammed into a classroom and given that the Premier admitted that you don't know what you don't know when pressed on why the UCP is forcing schools to pay thousands of dollars for extra flagpoles – I would love to know what the Premier now knows that she didn't originally – and given that this government is only consulting on decisions after the decision has been made, why is the UCP government too entitled to talk to parents and teachers about what they actually need in schools?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Childcare. [interjection]

Order. Let's hear from the minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm always happy to compare and contrast our record against the NDP. As I mentioned, 205 school projects funded versus 48. Now, let's talk about curriculum redesign. When the NDP was in charge, they started a curriculum redesign process in complete secret and had professionals sign NDAs so that information couldn't be released whereas we did that publicly and invited Albertans to provide their input and feedback on our draft curriculum. When the NDP were in office, parents wrote to the minister of education demanding changes to math, which the ministers then ignored and shut them out entirely. [interjections]

The Speaker: I think I heard quite a few voices that weren't from the minister or the Member for Calgary-Currie.

Member Eremenko: Given that even dedicated, partisan conservatives are noticing how rudderless this government has become and given that the UCP appears more concerned with virtue signalling over flagpoles or redrawing the map to cheat to win the next election and given that Albertans of all political stripes agree that we need strong public health care and affordable groceries, why is this Premier and this government so out of touch?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, if you think 300,000 new jobs in this province is out of touch, that seems to be a you problem. If they think that billions of dollars of new investment in things like aerospace and aviation is out of touch, that's a them problem.

I'll tell you what is their problem, though, Mr. Speaker: blatantly ignoring the direction from officials that tell you that critical infrastructure like water pipelines in your city, the province's largest city, is going to be broken. Doing nothing about it and not telling your council is negligence. That is the leadership of the opposition. That is their problem.

Health Care Spending and Service Delivery

Mr. Haji: It appears this UCP government is so busy trying to cheat in the next election rather than fixing the health care system. Instead of investing in things patients need, like beds and infrastructure, CIHI data shows that the UCP has more than doubled administrative spending to now nearly $500 million a year. This means that Alberta spends a jarring 43 per cent less on capital costs and 30 per cent less on continuing care than the national average. How can the Premier justify spending half a billion in admin costs while patients are left waiting for front-line care?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister for Hospital and Surgical Health Services.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, none of that is accurate. We know in fact that administration costs are actually at 1.4 per cent overall. When the members opposite quote numbers, they cherry-pick the numbers that they do quote. They use old CIHI numbers that are aggregate numbers where they lump all sorts of beds together. I'm happy to say that we are in fact making sure that we get better results in the most cost-effective way.

Mr. Haji: Given that the minister is trying to fix CIHI data on the spot, given that emergency department visitors have remained essentially flat yet patients now wait 50 per cent longer on average to leave the emergency department compared to when the UCP came to power, given that the problem is not the number of patients coming through the front door but the shortage of hospital beds, shortage of continuing care spaces and front-line staff, why is the government spending more on administration instead of expanding front-line patient care services?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, let's compare our records. Let's go back in history. When the members opposite were in government, open-heart surgery wait times increased by 50 per cent. The cataract and hip replacement surgery waits rose by 30 per cent while knee replacement surgeries climbed by 23 per cent. Coronary artery bypass

surgery jumped to 14.9 weeks. The members opposite: their record was dismal. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Edmonton-Decore, let's hear from you. You've got the floor.

Mr. Haji: Given that Albertans are paying the price for this government's decision to prioritize administration and bureaucracy over patient care and front lines, given our hospitals are running at more than 100 per cent capacity, nursing overtime has more than doubled, showing a strained workforce, and the continuing care wait-list, Mr. Speaker, is at 72 per cent, given that patients are being treated in hallways and health care workers are being pushed to the brink, how can this government justify throwing more money into administration rather than front-line care and hospital beds?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to quote CIHI data that shows, in fact, that our volumes are up 15 per cent, 15 per cent more surgeries being done than when the members opposite were in government. Wait times for hip surgeries down, wait times for cataract surgeries down, wait times for radiation therapy down: the shortest wait times in Canada, in fact. We have more doctors, more nurses, and more health care spaces in our hospitals. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. I'm trying to introduce the next speaker, who is Airdrie-Cochrane.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, this government picked fights with doctors, teachers, mayors, lawyers, immigrants, the LGBTQ community, people with disabilities, seniors, landowners, pro-Canadians and separatists alike. Quite a feat. Meanwhile Albertans are struggling with affordability and unemployment while the UCP sticks them with higher taxes, and now they're reshaping the electoral map because they can't win on their record. To the Premier: how does manufacturing outrage help put a single dollar back into the pockets of Albertans struggling with rising costs?

The Speaker: The hon. Finance minister and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always great to hear from the socialist from Cochrane. I can tell you this. To attack this government when it comes to taxes is outrageous. You know, Albertans saved $37 billion over the last 24 months in taxes compared to the next closest province. That's almost $8,000 in each Albertan's jeans. That's because we have the Alberta advantage. Now, if the NDP were ever to get back in power, if that member had his way, they'd do things like bring back the job-killing carbon tax and cause the Alberta advantage to go away. We're not going to be lectured by that member.

Mr. Guthrie: Given that Alberta prides itself on having no provincial sales tax yet the UCP keeps raising and introducing new taxes and given they've raised property taxes, the tourism levy by 50 per cent and are introducing a new 6 per cent sales tax on rental vehicles in January and given that most Alberta tourists are Albertans, with families already cutting back on the things they enjoy, to the minister of tourism: how does making it more expensive for Albertans help grow tourism or make life more affordable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Alberta does not have a provincial sales tax. The question is: if that member and the NDP had their way and ever got to this side of the aisle, would they bring back a carbon tax? The Leader of the Official Opposition raised taxes in the city of Calgary by 82 per cent, and you know what he did? He ignored infrastructure reports, and right now in the city of Calgary everybody is rationing water and can have three-minute showers. That's what the NDP's record is when it comes to taxes and services in Alberta. I'll put our record up against theirs any day.

Mr. Guthrie: Given that cabinet . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

You get to start over. Don't worry, hon. Member, and this time maybe we'll be able to hear you.

Mr. Guthrie: Given that cabinet gave itself powers to remove elected councillors and given the UCP demands Ottawa respect provincial autonomy while denying municipalities that same respect, raising their taxes and blaming them, and given Mayor Farkas warned of misguided economic carnage, citing a ridiculous lack of provincial leadership, essentially telling government to quit meddling and start governing, to the Premier: Mayor Farkas has skewered the UCP on overreach and hypocrisy, so what exactly is the criteria for removing pesky mayors from office?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, Mayor Farkas supported the recent announcement by the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and myself when it came to making adjustments for property tax. In fact, he congratulated us on taking action that should have probably been taken decades ago before this government was in power.

The real question is: is that hon. member going to continue to vote with the socialists in the Legislature? Is he going to continue to support a party that has gone out of their way, who has a leader who forgot to fix pipes in the city of Calgary, deliberately ignored infrastructure reports, Mr. Speaker, and has caused people in Calgary today to have three-minute showers?

The Speaker: The next question belongs to . . . [interjections] Order. How am I going to introduce the Member for Lethbridge-West if he can't hear me?

Go ahead.

Electoral Boundaries
(continued)

Member Miyashiro: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP is at it again. The real Electoral Boundaries Commission began its work in 2025 with input from over 2,000 Albertans. People wrote thoughtful submissions, gave their time to present to the commission. They shared what a fair boundaries redraw would look like. But Albertans know the UCP wants to cheat. They threw all that away. Can the Premier tell us how many Albertans engaged with the sham select special committee on boundaries?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I want to say this, and I'll put it to that hon. member: it is irresponsible for the NDP to continue to indulge in and throw false accusations around in this Assembly. As a matter of fact it was that member and that member alone who asked for hybrid ridings in the city of Lethbridge. It was that member that appeared before the panel and requested and said that hybrid ridings would be a good thing for Lethbridge. Do his

constituents know that he was the one that asked for hybrid ridings, and what exactly is he complaining about today? Which one is it?

Member Miyashiro: Well, given that the sham UCP select special committee didn't actually engage any Albertans in its obvious attempt to cheat on the boundaries process and given that the UCP is only interested in protecting UCP ministers and MLA seats instead of providing fair representation for Albertans and given that the UCP's liberal use of the notwithstanding clause to crush democratic processes shows just how entitled they feel to power, can anyone on that side explain why the UCP is trying to kill democracy in Alberta?

Mr. Amery: Well, Mr. Speaker, can that member get up and tell us exactly what his issue is? He was the one that asked for hybrid ridings in Lethbridge. He was the one that appeared before the panel and asked for Lethbridge to have hybrid ridings. He's smiling right now, but he knows what he did, and we know that because it's recorded in *Hansard*. It was that member that asked for it. That member got exactly what he was looking for. Hybrid ridings are good for democracy and good for the province of Alberta.

2:30

Member Miyashiro: Good thing that that one member talked to us about comedy.

Given that the UCP outlawed vote tabulators even when there was no evidence of tabulator-related fraud and given that they say that the confidence of citizens in their elections is a worthwhile goal in and of itself and trust in democracy matters and given that Albertans have sent thousands of messages to UCP MLAs and the Premier to slam their sham boundaries process because they don't want the UCP to cheat in the next election, will the UCP show Albertans that this government actually believes in democracy and withdraw Bill 40 now?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much again, Mr. Speaker. We will do no such thing. Bill 40 is the product and the result of the recommendations provided to us by the independent panel that was tasked with designing the new boundary redraws and providing those recommendations to this Legislature.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, that member has got up time and again to voice his dissatisfaction with the panel's report, but it was that member who asked for hybrid ridings. That member got exactly what he was asking for. He should be the happiest person in this Assembly.

Highway 40X Bypass

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, the highway 40X bypass is an approximately 12-kilometre section of road that would complete the southwest ring around Grande Prairie. This project connects three major highways in northwestern Alberta, connecting highway 2, highway 43, and highway 40 once this leg is complete. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: can you update the Assembly on the status of the highway 40X bypass?

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Member for Grand Prairie-Wapiti for his strong advocacy for this project. Obviously, highway 40X to Grande Prairie essentially will make a ring road around the city of Grande Prairie. Right now heavy truck traffic has to go right through downtown Grande Prairie to be able to get around. We know that this is an important project because so much of the wealth of the province of Alberta is in this region, and we have to make sure that trucks are going in the right area, not through downtown. I'm happy to say that ISL Engineering has done their functional planning, and we are hoping to see this tendered early next year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, thank you Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that the Grande Prairie region is expected to continue to grow and given that it's reasonable to expect that traffic volumes will continue to increase in that area and further given that connecting these highways will work to support a more efficient transportation network, to the same minister: how will the completion of highway 40X reduce volumes of heavy traffic in the city of Grande Prairie, thereby improving overall safety?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, highway 40 actually has double the amount of commercial traffic than the provincial average, so we know that it's heavily used by the trucking industry for good reason. We want to make sure that this project gets completed on time and on budget. I'm happy to say that phase 1 will have two additional lanes, a flyover on the CN Rail line as well as a new roundabout at highways 40 and 43. It is an important region of the province of Alberta, and we're going to invest in infrastructure where it counts.

The Speaker: Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that funding for the highway 40X project was expected to be addressed in last February's budget and given the importance of providing certainty to the Grande Prairie region as it continues to grow, to the same minister: can you update the Assembly on whether the funding for highway 40X has now been secured and what the current funding commitments and timelines for these projects are?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have identified $135 million in Budget '26 for this project, again, another example of this government investing in infrastructure where it matters to make life better for Albertans, unlike the NDP leader when he was the mayor of Calgary way back in 2015. He actually got $1.53 billion committed from the federal government. Then in 2017 he had the NDP government of the day commit $1.53 billion for the green line. Three-plus billion dollars wasted by that NDP leader and the NDP government for changing the scope of the green line. Never again will that happen in this province.

The Speaker: The next set of questions belongs to the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction Minister's Travel to the U.S.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier tasked her Finance minister to investigate the service Alberta minister's indulgent and entitled booze cruise. Her minister claimed the van was needed to transport multiple passengers, which is partially true since the staffer's husband rode along for free. This violates Treasury Board policy, requiring the billing of each charge to each specific

individual. Instead, taxpayers were left holding failed UCP candidate Gary Davidson's tab. Why did the Finance minister say that the bourbon tasting tour passed the policy sniff test?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, to be clear, no expenses were against the rules of Treasury Board and Finance, and it's not just me who checked that. In fact, just last week the Auditor General released reports, including on that ministry, that confirm that they found no challenge with the expenses inside service Alberta or any other ministry, unlike the last report that we see on the Leader of the Official Opposition, who told him that the pipes are broken in Calgary and now that member's constituents can't even have showers. Why doesn't he stand up and apologize for the Leader of the Opposition?

Member Ellingson: Given the Finance minister oversees receipt filings and given a Finance official flagged this $5,400 booze cruise tour as, quote, more than just a taxi and given an official figured out the minister could have just rented cars for $2,200 but given Albertans know why the minister would prefer a You Sip, We Drive tour of 11 distilleries, has the Finance minister confirmed no alcohol was consumed? And will he and the service Alberta minister state that on record?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we already have. Inside those vehicles were things like pop and chips and other types of snacks like that while they went through that process. I've confirmed that in the House. I've confirmed that outside the House.

But, again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is an MLA for Calgary. Can he confirm that his constituents can shower for more than three minutes a day? Is he going to continue to support a leader who hid and could not be bothered to tell the people of Alberta about broken pipes, who went out of his way to make sure that the poor people of Calgary would have to have water rationed? Shame on that member.

Member Ellingson: Given this bourbon booze cruise wasn't economical, wasn't documented properly, and turned out to be a vacation for a close UCP friend; given the minister spent 10 times the amount of time at distilleries than meeting with Republican officials about policy and given it shows this government prefers personal entitlement rather than using taxpayer dollars wisely, will the Finance minister demand repayment from his cabinet colleague for breaking government policy on the Kentucky booze cruise?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, it's been stated time and again that no policies were broken, everything was followed, and the Auditor General report confirms that. What the members opposite are upset about is the fact that we continue to go out to other jurisdictions, meet with legislators, with our largest trading partner, the United States of America, to continue to perpetuate our good relationship, that we are friends, we will continue to be friends, and we will share goods and services. The members opposite don't want that because they want to ship jobs out of the province, and they want to promote a leader who can't even stay for the rest of question period to defend his own record of broken pipes. [interjections]

The Speaker: We're not going to wait for that. The hon. Government House Leader will stand up and apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Schow: I withdraw and apologize.

The Speaker: Okay. That settles that issue, right?

The next question belongs to Calgary-Acadia.

Premier's Travel to Europe

Member Batten: Sure. Fresh off rejecting an independent commission's map in what looks like a blatant attempt to cheat in the next election, this government sent the Premier to London. She spent $2,300 chauffeuring her entourage in one 10-minute meeting from the hotel. It's pure UCP entitlement. The Premier claimed, "sometimes you need to be able to have everybody go together so that you can be [together] at the [meeting]," yet she rode in a separate chauffeured car. If everyone had to go together, why didn't the Premier?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, it is rich to hear the members opposite talk about some kind of trips that they may take if they're in government. On this side of the House we will continue to promote Alberta. The Premier has done that time and again. Her record is very clear, attracting investment, while the members opposite continue to insult everybody. They insult voters. They insult tradespeople. They insult foreign dignitaries. Heaven forbid they ever get in government because no one will take a meeting with them.

Member Batten: Given the Premier said, "We have to make sure we stay within a reasonable amount for transportation costs" but given that the Premier and her entourage took not one but two vehicles to chauffeur themselves just 10 minutes away to a single meeting at a cost of more than $2,300, does the Premier believe that two vehicles at more than $2,300 for a 10-minute drive is a reasonable amount, or will she admit this is pure, unashamed UCP entitlement?

2:40

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we have a leader and a Premier who will spend time in other jurisdictions to promote Alberta. Sad to say that the Leader of the Opposition and his predecessor Rachel Notley couldn't be bothered to leave Alberta to defend us against Bill C-69, who acted like a lapdog for Justin Trudeau. When Alberta's interests, our most critical sector, were at risk, she did nothing, and neither does the Leader of the Opposition now. Water pipes are just the beginning. That leader can't lead.

Member Batten: Given that the member apparently cannot answer a question and given that $2,300 for transportation was used for just one meeting 10 minutes from the hotel and given the Premier took a second car even though the government's own travel policy demands economic travel and given that Albertans were paying high fuel prices while the Premier's staff enjoyed London's finest transportation, fit for a Saudi Royal Family, does the Premier consider a $2,300 chauffeur service necessary and economical, or is this just another UCP blatantly entitled to waste Alberta taxpayer money on themselves?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, what is necessary is a leader and a government caucus who will take the time to meet with foreign dignitaries rather than insult them. The members opposite have insulted dignitaries from Saudi Arabia, from the United Arab Emirates, from the United States. They've insulted CEOs of large corporations like Uber. That is not how you govern. You don't get into power and then all of a sudden decide that everyone is your friend. People keep receipts, and that side of the House, I can tell you, nobody will meet with them. They have lost before. They're going to keep losing again. That's the . . .

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

Alberta Carbon Capture Incentive Program

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's Industrial Heartland, including Fort Saskatchewan, is home to major industrial facilities where carbon capture technology can help reduce emissions. Recently our government announced updates to the Alberta carbon capture incentive program to support further development of this technology. As Alberta continues to develop its energy resources responsibly, supporting new technologies remains an important priority. To the Minister of Energy and Minerals: can you please outline the key changes to this program and explain how they will support carbon capture development across Alberta?

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's exciting. This will ensure that investors have confidence in what Alberta is doing and confidence in investing in Alberta. The Alberta carbon capture incentive program is designed to unlock billions of dollars in investment. The program has been changed a little bit in two ways. The first is that people can actually receive some funding while the project is actually being undertaken, and the second is of course to align it with the federal program to extend it to 2035. This is going to get investor confidence back in Alberta and make our products more attractive to international investors and, in fact, to sell to the world.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given that Alberta is home to significant energy resources and established industrial facilities, including carbon capture infrastructure near Fort Saskatchewan, and given that jurisdictions around the world are competing to attract major industrial and energy investments, to the minister: can you please outline how the Alberta carbon capture incentive program helps enhance Alberta's competitiveness, attract private-sector investment, and encourage companies to choose Alberta for new or expanded carbon capture projects?

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, the world wants cleaner energy, and Alberta is a global leader in CCUS technology and development. We have the experience, we have the expertise, and of course we have the best geology in the world to do this and to be better than anyone else at it. These projects are essential to Alberta producing the most responsible energy in the world. They have the ability to lower emissions in hard-to-abate sectors like petrochemicals, cement, oil, gas, and manufacturing. That's why people are coming here to invest billions upon billions of dollars and creating thousands of jobs for Albertans.

The Speaker: Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given that carbon capture technology can help Alberta's energy and industrial sectors remain competitive while reducing emissions and given that major carbon capture investments can generate long-term economic activity in communities throughout Alberta, to the minister: can you please share what results Albertans are already seeing from existing carbon capture projects and how the updated carbon capture incentive program will support future investment, job creation, and industrial development?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it's true that many companies around the world are choosing Alberta. Deep Sky and other opportunities are here in Alberta. Quest and the carbon trunk lines have sequestered more than 18 million tons of CO_2. We have holes all over Alberta that are full of hot air but not as many holes as in the Calgary water pipeline after the leader of the leaky party committee got a hold of it. We're going to make sure we solve that problem and step forward to do it.

The Speaker: I'm going to stop you right there. You quoted that, and you had to apologize and withdraw the last time we did this, so I'm going to not wait and have you stand up and apologize and withdraw for calling it something other than the NDP. Yes sir, Minister.

Mr. Jean: Absolutely, sir.

The Speaker: No. I need to hear an apology and a withdrawal.

Mr. Jean: I'll apologize and withdraw for calling it the leaky pipe committee, sir.

The Speaker: No. Now you get to do it again because you said it twice.

Mr. Jean: I'll apologize for saying that LPP, sir.

The Speaker: No. Do it again. You know, we could do this all day, but you're going to give a proper apology.

Mr. Jean: I thought I did, sir, but I apologize and withdraw . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Jean: . . . for whatever you wanted me to. How's that?

The Speaker: You know what, folks? You can make this hard. You can make this easy. When you've got to apologize and withdraw, just do it straight up and quit.

Mr. Jean: I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds we'll continue with the daily Routine.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 48 sponsored by the Government House Leader.

> Be it resolved that (a) when further consideration of Bill 39, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (No. 2), is resumed, not more than one hour be allotted to any stage of consideration of the bill; (b) when further consideration of Bill 40, Electoral Divisions Act, is resumed, not more than one hour be allotted to any stage of consideration of the bill; and (c) upon the expiry of the time allotted under clauses (a) and (b) for each stage of consideration of a bill, every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at that stage shall be put forthwith.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Bill 44
Justice, Public Safety and Information Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move first reading of Bill 44, the Justice, Public Safety and Information Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

If passed, this bill would bring in stronger protections to safeguard the list of electors and protect Albertans' personal information. It would also improve road safety through changes made to SafeRoads Alberta and help families get timely and accurate answers following the sudden or unexpected loss of a loved one. Finally, the bill would modernize the legislative framework governing law enforcement.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 44. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a first time]

Bill 45
Natural Gas Infrastructure Act

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I make a motion for leave to introduce a bill. I request leave to introduce Bill 45, the Natural Gas infrastructure Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 45 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Bill 216
Property Statutes (Grocery Store Property Controls) Amendment Act, 2026

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to seek leave to introduce Bill 216, Property Statutes (Grocery Store Property Controls) Amendment Act, 2026, on behalf of my friend the Member for Calgary-Beddington.

If passed, Bill 216 will ban the use of anticompetitive property restrictions that currently limit grocery stores in our communities. This will promote competition, reduce grocery store deserts in Alberta's towns and cities, and make groceries more affordable for everyone. I urge all members of this Chamber to support this simple, common-sense bill to address the priorities of Albertans.

With that, I move first reading of Bill 216.

[Motion carried; Bill 216 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Justice minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the Public's Right to Know Act on crime and justice statistics for the period of 2021-22 to '25-26. The Public's Right to Know Act requires that I as Minister of Justice table five copies each year. This is the fifth report that is issued under the Public's Right to Know Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. That was lengthier than usual, but I'll point out that none of that was debate, which is why I let it go on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise to table a copy of an e-mail from someone named Natalie. Natalie is expressing her concerns about the changes to AISH and to ADAP, and I would urge all members in this House to read her letter.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Another proper tabling. Thank you. Any other tablings today?

I have one. Hon. members, I'm tabling six copies of a letter . . . [interjections] Order. Everybody else is quiet for tablings. I am tabling six copies of a letter I received from the Member for Leduc-Beaumont dated November 17, 2026, requesting early consideration of Bill 213, Alberta Personal Income Tax (Emergency Services Volunteer Tax Credits) Amendment Act, 2026 in Committee of the Whole. For those with questions, I'll be saying more about that shortly.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of Hon. Ms Fir, Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, pursuant to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act the Alberta Foundation for the Arts 2025-26 Annual Report.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, there are no remaining points of order. We dealt with two on the fly today. That deals with points of order, and there are no points of privilege, but here's something unusual.

Statement by the Speaker

Private Members' Public Bills

The Speaker: At the end of the daily Routine, hon. members, I have a matter of interest to address with the Assembly that has to do with the tabling that I just made about five minutes ago this afternoon. The Member for Leduc-Beaumont has requested that the private member's bill that he is sponsoring, Bill 213, Alberta Personal Income Tax (Emergency Services Volunteer Tax Credits) Amendment Act, 2026, be granted early consideration and be called in Committee of the Whole this afternoon.

Currently Bill 213 is on the Order Paper with the due date of day 75, which is Monday, November 30. The member's request is for Bill 213 to be considered in Committee of the Whole today, day 71. There is a protocol in place that has existed since 1997 in which a member who is the sponsor of a bill may request early consideration of that bill at a particular stage or in Committee of the Whole so long as the bill has passed the previous stage prior to making the request.

In this case Bill 213 received second reading on Monday, November 16, 2026. The protocol also provides that the bill for which early consideration has been requested must not take precedence over another private member's bill that has been adjourned at a particular stage that is being considered in Committee of the Whole but has not yet been reported to the Assembly or is due to be called in Committee of the Whole or moved for third reading in accordance with Standing Order 8(7).

Currently Bill 214, Alberta Health Care Insurance (Protecting Public Health Care) Amendment Act, 2026, sponsored by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, has been moved for second reading and has 99 minutes remaining in debate at that stage. Accordingly, second reading of debate on Bill 214 will continue this afternoon when Orders of the Day is called.

I will grant the request for early consideration of Bill 213 at Committee of the Whole if there is any time remaining this afternoon in consideration of the private members' public bills once 214 has been disposed of at second reading.

For additional information on the matter of early consideration of private members' public bills I'll refer to my ruling on April 13, 2026, which can be found on pages 1423 and 1424 of *Hansard* for that day. I know you all have it at your fingertips.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: That takes us to the hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I note your comments just a brief moment ago, but I would still like to request unanimous consent of the Assembly to suspend Standing Order 9(1) in order that the Assembly may move to immediate consideration of Bill 213, Alberta Personal Income Tax (Emergency Services Volunteer Tax Credits) Amendment Act, 2026, in Committee of the Whole.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Justice minister has just asked to change the orders of the bill to bring the one forward as he outlined and as I outlined at length in the speech I just gave. It does require unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 213
Alberta Personal Income Tax (Emergency Services Volunteer Tax Credits) Amendment Act, 2026

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? I'll recognize the Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lunty: All right. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is indeed an honour to rise to speak again to Bill 213, Alberta Personal Income Tax (Emergency Services Volunteer Tax Credits) Amendment Act, 2026. If I may, I would like to move an amendment to the bill. I do have it here. I'll pass it, and I'll give folks a chance to take a look.

I'll do a quick summary, and then I'm happy to speak to this in a little more detail, but the amendment would accomplish two things. First, it would raise the tax credit amount from $3,000 to $6,000, which would mirror the federal tax credit. The second piece that this amendment is addressing would change the coming-into-force date to January 1, which would align with Alberta's tax collection agreement with the federal government. This change would allow, if passed, the tax credit to come into force sooner. So that's a high-level summary, Mr. Chair, of the amendments that I'm proposing.

If I may, I would like to talk a little bit about . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, could you please read your amendment into the record? It'll be referred to as amendment A1 going forward.

Mr. Lunty: Sure. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would move that Bill 213, Alberta Personal Income Tax (Emergency Services Volunteer Tax Credits) Amendment Act, 2026, be amended as follows: (a) in section 2 in the proposed section 10.1 by striking out "$3000" and substituting "$6000" and in the proposed section 10.2 by striking out "$3000" and substituting "$6000" and (b) in section 12 by striking out "on Proclamation" and substituting "on January 1, 2027."

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. As I was mentioning, there are two substantial parts to this amendment. The first, of course, is raising the tax credit amount to $6,000 from $3,000 and by changing the date to January 1 from "on Proclamation."

3:00

Just as a bit of commentary on the process, I was able to talk to the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association, several volunteer firefighters, municipal stakeholders, and all the groups had the same feedback. They were appreciative that I was introducing this bill and that their hard work was going to be recognized.

The main question they did have, though, was, "Would we be able to consider increasing the tax exemption to mirror the federal government?" which is, of course, at $6,000. I will note, Mr. Chair, that several provinces have also made this adjustment. This was feedback that I took seriously. I wanted to speak with these groups, the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association, people on the ground, the volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers themselves, the ones who risk their bodies, put themselves in harm's way for us every day. I wanted to hear from them, and the feedback was almost universal that this would be a way to continue to show our appreciation, that mirroring the federal tax credit through this piece of legislation would be a way to show our support. So I was happy to take their feedback considering this amendment.

I was moved last week, when several of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle got up and spoke to their experiences in their own communities about the volunteers and the volunteer firefighters and the search and rescue volunteers and how that impacts their communities. In fact, Mr. Chair, we saw quite a breadth and depth of that service. I think we even had some examples from out of province. We might have even had an example out of country, in Australia. It speaks to the universality of volunteerism, and it speaks to that when a community is in need, you can judge the strength of that community by those who put up their hands and say: "I'm going to help you. I might put myself in harm's way. I might miss some of my family time, my family dinners, so that you can get back to your family." And that's quite a humbling act of service.

When I was talking to those folks and they were telling me, "Thank you for this legislation; would you consider this increase?" I took that feedback to heart, and I would hope and encourage that all members are able to support this amendment and that we can continue to show our support to these pillars of our community.

I also want to speak briefly in a little more detail about the coming into force date on the legislation. You know, Mr. Chair, this change reflects – I referenced it earlier – Alberta's tax collection agreement with the federal government, which requires tax measures to be implemented for a full taxation year. By amending the legislation to establish a January 1, 2027, coming into force date, it would fulfill those requirements. It would allow for these tax credits, if this bill is passed, to come into force in the coming year. Again, just a way that we can ensure that this service is in fact recognized. This is a change that, obviously, the volunteers, firefighters and search and rescuers, as well as the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association understood to be a part of the process, so I would expect their support on both of these changes that are in this amendment.

I think this is a good part of the process. I was very, very pleased to work through it to say: you know, are there changes, are there amendments when you introduce a bill that could strengthen it? And I was certainly heartened by the support that I received when talking to the stakeholders. Again, I was heartened to hear from my colleagues and friends and family about some of the impact that they feel in their own communities.

I had the chance to speak to the Leduc fire service at their graduation ceremony a couple of weeks ago, Mr. Chair, and it always hits home for me. You know, when you interact with these folks, it's often on the worst day of your life or when you're in distress, and those interactions matter. And some folks, of course, are professionals, and we have an amazing front line in Alberta; we're very blessed. A lot of those times those folks are professionals, but as this bill addresses, sometimes they're not.

Sometimes they're volunteers. But if you've been in a car accident or if you're facing a fire or if you need search and rescue services, you don't stop and ask that person: wait, are you a volunteer, or are you a part of which service? All you care about is getting the help you need. So this is a way that we can show our support, through this piece of legislation by considering this amendment.

Mr. Chair, I think these are good changes through this amendment to this legislation. I'm happy to hear debate on this, and I would certainly ask for the support of my colleagues as we consider this amendment moving forward.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: On amendment A1, the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise and to speak to Bill 213 and to amendment A1. It was actually a question that I was going to bring up to the government when we were entering into debate, and I'm glad to see that the member has decided to do this amendment. I recognize that, obviously, when the member was drafting this piece of legislation and had submitted it to the Chamber, the federal increase from $3,000 to $6,000 probably hadn't happened yet and that that was a recent change that has happened at the federal level. I had been hearing the same thing as he had been hearing around the fact that it made sense to align the tax credit between the province and the federal government.

As we know, there are other jurisdictions that have done this as well. Manitoba recently moved theirs up to $6,000, and Saskatchewan has also matched it up to $6,000. There are some other provinces that have numbers that sort of vary around that, but we know that by moving it up to $6,000, it saves voluntary firefighters about $900 annually, which I think is important. We also heard often from many jurisdictions across the province that this is actually a really great recruitment tool. It's an opportunity to support individuals that are thinking about volunteering but are also, you know, taking time off work to respond or they're responding to an emergency in the middle of the night and then they have to go to work the next morning. There may be child care implications attached to it. There are issues around work-life balance and: what does that mean for their families? It gives one more opportunity to say: well, there's also this benefit, and this is why it would be helpful to have you join us as a volunteer. I agree. I think it's important.

I'm also glad to see that the member has decided to align it with January 1. I think that makes sense. I mean, it is the fiscal year, and it would be a matter of when. It can come into force as soon as it can. Even if the bill isn't proclaimed right away, at least we know that January 1 is the start date, which means that these volunteers can start claiming it within that fiscal year, and I think that that is beneficial and helpful as well. I agree with this, and I would encourage all members of the House to vote in favour of it. Like I said, it was a question that I was going to have to the member about whether or not this amendment was going to be coming forward, so I'm glad to see it's happening.

I will sit down, and hopefully we'll be able to move forward on the general bill.

The Deputy Chair: On amendment A1, are there any others wishing to make comments?

Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Any other comments, questions, or amendments to be offered? The Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

3:10

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my honour to rise and speak to Bill 213, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Emergency Services Volunteer Tax Credits) Amendment Act, 2026. I thank the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for bringing this forward. Indeed, this is legislation that we know was being asked for from the community. Just this past spring we had the opportunity to meet with the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association and talk with them about some of their concerns and some of the things that they wanted to see be done by government, and this was one. They noted that they have folks and, as we've talked about, there are many folks in smaller towns, smaller jurisdictions in the province who are volunteering their time, indeed recognizing the challenge they could face but recognizing the commitment that they have to supporting safety in their community.

The chiefs also noted, though, that, as we are seeing in so many other areas that require volunteers these days, it is becoming more challenging to recruit. Understandable. For individuals, folks are struggling with the cost of living. Folks are facing challenges on many other fronts. So it makes it harder to be able to find reasons to be able to give their time or for them to be able to follow through on that even if it is something that they indeed would like to do. Providing these tax credits helps with that, helps provide an incentive, I think, a worthy reward for people who volunteer their time to support their community, and helps deal with some of those financial challenges that people are facing today so that instead of having to put in a few extra hours of overtime, they can volunteer their time to help support their community and still realize a financial benefit that allows them to look after themselves and their family.

I also recognize that this applies to folks that work in search and rescue. You know, Mr. Chair, I had the honour this past June to take part in and speak at the 30th anniversary celebrations for the Edmonton Regional Search & Rescue Association. Admittedly, I hadn't known too much about how search and rescue works. I've known a few people who had dogs, who had themselves at one point participated. But it was wonderful to have a chance to have those conversations with a number of these folks, some of whom have been volunteering in search and rescue in this province for decades. These are folks who, when we have a lost child or someone who has lost their way in the wilderness, we're looking for missing people, volunteer their time to go out and search. These folks also spend a lot of their own free time and indeed their own money on equipment, training their animals, working hard to be sure that when we need them, they'll be there. That is honourable work. That is respectable work. It is work that is worthy of recognition and support.

Again, I'm very happy to support Bill 213 and recognize the folks that choose to step up, support our first responders, volunteer their time and their energy, their passion to help support their communities and protect Albertans. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm proud to rise today in support of Bill 213, the Alberta personal income tax amendment act, 2026. I want to thank my good friend and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for bringing this important legislation forward as this topic is important to my constituency. In Lesser Slave Lake we've learned first-hand who we can count on in an emergency to protect our families and our communities.

In May of 2011 a wildfire tore into the town of Slave Lake and burned about a third of the community. I was there that day, Mr.

Chair. Many of my friends and even some family lost their homes in a devastating fire. The entire southeast, that I lived in, was almost completely destroyed. Nearly 400 homes and businesses were lost, and almost the entire town had to flee. The fires that spring reached far beyond our town. Through it all firefighters from across the region stood between those fires and everything our families had built. A lot of them were volunteer firefighters. Many of them were our neighbours fighting for the streets they grew up on or the streets where they were raising their own families. That spirit has never left our region. It shows up every time a call comes in.

Volunteer firefighters give up birthdays, holidays, and their kids' hockey games to protect our communities, Mr. Chair. In the winter they leave warm beds at 2 in the morning to save lives on dark, frozen highways. In the summer they wade through forest infernos to keep devastating fires from reaching our homes and devastating our communities.

Mr. Chair, they are heroes, and they redefine courage. Mark Twain says, "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear – not absence of fear." Normally I'm more of a Shania Twain fan, but this Mark Twain guy, whoever he is, hits the nail right on the head here about courage and bravery. They see things most of us never will, and they show up for their regular jobs the next day. In a small town like Slave Lake or High Prairie, if there's a bad accident on the highways, the chances are these volunteer firefighters know, probably, the people who are in them. Without asking for anything in return they volunteer day after day, putting their lives on the line to keep our communities safe.

Across rural and northern Alberta volunteer firefighters make up most of the emergency responders in our remote areas. As I said before, they're the first on the scene at collisions on our highways, and they support our province's wildfire response. They do it all while holding down full-time jobs, raising families, and volunteering at numerous other organizations. They usually wear many hats. As one can imagine, keeping those volunteers is getting harder. Every hour they give is an hour away from work and home, and the cost of fuel, gear, and time add up.

It's not only the volunteer who gives up something, Mr. Chair. It's the partners of those volunteers who hold down the house while they're out during a long call. It is the employer who lets a worker leave a job site to respond to an emergency. Whole families and communities carry part of the load, and they deserve to know that it is noticed.

Most provinces in Canada already recognize that commitment through their tax system. As the Member for Leduc-Beaumont mentioned earlier, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, and others all offer a provincial credit for volunteer firefighters. Bill 213 would add Alberta to that list. If passed, it would create two new nonrefundable provincial tax credits: one for volunteer firefighters, and one for search and rescue volunteers. Each would be based on a $6,000 amount and would sit alongside the federal credit that they can already claim.

To qualify, a volunteer would need to complete at least 200 hours of eligible service in the year. For firefighters that means responding to emergencies and being on call, attending department meetings, and completing required training. For search and rescue volunteers it means the same kind of commitment to an Alberta-based search and rescue organization, an organization that is recognized by a provincial, municipal, or public authority or that belongs to a national association; for example, the Search and Rescue Association of Canada or the Civil Air Search and Rescue Association. Mr. Chair, those hours can come from firefighting, search and rescue, or a combination of both. That matters in a northern community like Lesser Slave Lake, where the same person might answer a structure fire on Tuesday and a water rescue on Saturday.

The bill also keeps things simple and accountable. If asked, the volunteer would provide a certificate from their fire chief or search and rescue team lead confirming their hours, and each volunteer can claim one of the two credits per year but not both. It's straightforward recognition for people who have done more, and they definitely earn it.

Mr. Chair, let me talk about what this means for the first responders of Lesser Slave Lake. The Lesser Slave Regional Fire Service covers Slave Lake, Widewater, Smith, Flatbush, and the surrounding area along with a strong search and rescue team. In 2024 it responded to a record 714 incidents, from fires to collisions to water and ice rescues. Its crews also deployed to provincial wildfire incidents, including the devastating fire that hit Jasper that same year.

Beyond Slave Lake volunteer firefighter departments in Wabasca, Sandy Lake, Calling Lake, and Red Earth Creek protect communities that are hours from the nearest big city. In Big Lakes county volunteers in Enilda, Joussard, Grouard, Faust, and Kinuso cover huge stretches of our region alongside the fire department in High Prairie. Those are not abstract numbers; they're the people who protect our communities and our families. Bill 213 tells them that Alberta sees what they do and values their service.

It also fits squarely with what our government has been working towards. We've been clear that Albertans should keep more of what they earn, and we introduced a new 8 per cent tax bracket to help do just that.

We've also invested in wildfire preparedness and response because we know how much is at stake for communities like mine. Budget 2026 provided $169 million for wildfire management, and our government is investing $400 million in five new made-in-Alberta water bombers. We're also offering municipalities up to $125,000 each through a new mutual aid pilot to support wildfire response, and we've committed to standing up for rural and northern Alberta, where volunteers carry so much of the load.

3:20

Mr. Chair, volunteers in my region don't need more speeches. They need recognition for everything they do. Recruitment and retention remain real challenges for volunteer fire departments across our province. Every bit of recognition helps keep an experienced volunteer on the roster and encourages a new one to sign up. The people of Lesser Slave Lake know what it means to rely on their neighbours, their communities, and their first responders. We saw it in 2011, and we see it every time an emergency affects our communities. I see them step forward every year and help others around them as well. Bill 213 is a way for our government to say thank you not just with words but the real support they deserve.

I urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 213. Let's give back to the people who give so much to this province.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's very much a pleasure this afternoon to speak to Bill 213, Alberta Personal Income Tax (Emergency Services Volunteer Tax Credits) Amendment Act, 2026. As many members in this Chamber will know as well as many viewers at home who do watch our Assembly TV or Assembly online, we all know that my original hometown was the small village of Thorhild, which, of course, relied upon a volunteer fire service.

We are approaching the Christmas season fairly soon, Mr. Chair, and I do recall one Christmas Day when in my grandparents' home, known as the big house in Thorhild – they had the post office,

actually, as part of their house in that village, and the house had extra rooms for people that they would have come to town who needed rooming, needed lodging. It was a big house, and it had a big dining room, and of course my grandparents, being the postmasters in town and my grandmother being deputy mayor, would invite local townspeople for Christmas dinner with our family, which had six kids, so the room was full of folks on Christmas Day about 1965, I recall. Many of the people who were in that room came from other walks of life in town, and it had a lot of volunteer fire department members around that dinner table.

Just as we were launching into the first course of Christmas dinner, somebody noticed smoke coming from the basement window across the street from where we were eating our dinner, from the county office. Of course, half the dinner guests jumped up in a hurry because they were for the most part volunteer fire department members, and many of them rushed in a truck to the fire hall, the village office to ring the bell and pick up the fire truck, get geared up to get back to the fire. A few of them rushed into the county office to make sure nobody was at risk and do what they could immediately to try to control the fire.

Fortunately, Mr. Chair, it was a relatively small fire which ended up being put out quickly, but it shows from that day, that Christmas Day, that the volunteer fire department members have for many, many decades been at the ready no matter what time of day or night, no matter what day it is to defend their communities against the risk of fire or other emergencies that require their services. I'll never forget that day because my own father and grandfather were part of that volunteer fire brigade which took off to put that fire out in the county office in Thorhild in 1965.

Now, Mr. Chair, we face new risks to volunteer fire department members and also to those who are search and rescue volunteers. Notably, many different toxic fumes are faced on a daily basis by our firefighters, notably from EV batteries. The toxic fumes and the type of fire that the fire volunteers face are new and demanding upon the equipment that individuals and communities have at the service of the volunteer fire department. Of course, that type of equipment isn't something we expect the volunteers themselves to purchase, but there are other pieces of equipment and other expenses that go along with being a volunteer fire department member or a search and rescue volunteer. This Bill 213, I think, addresses the reality that there's a lot of money that individuals who are volunteering on behalf of their community as volunteer firefighters or as search and rescue responders pay out of pocket to make sure that they are properly equipped and dressed for the job at hand, so I welcome the measures in Bill 213.

I do feel gratitude as well that the numbers have been doubled to reflect a matching number of the federal government benefit of $6,000. It is interesting, let's say, that it was an amendment to a piece of legislation that was added on, in this case a good amendment that helps the volunteer fire department but an amendment nonetheless to a piece of legislation that was recently introduced, something that seems to be a bit of a pattern in this House. I think that's something we'll be watching for on this side of the House, that legislation actually comes to this place in final form rather than having to be amended at the last minute.

In this case, however, we're happy to join in the changes to the legislation proposed in the amendments which just passed in this House to increase or double the amount of the benefit to firefighters for their tax relief as well as to make sure that the timing of the implementation is accelerated to January 1 so that it coincides with the tax year and allows the volunteer firefighters who receive this benefit to actually receive it in this current coming tax year.

I would hope that all members will support this measure. Right across the country there are similar tax credit measures that are in place to relatively different degrees. This would put Alberta, I think, right at the top with Manitoba, of the provinces which support their volunteer firefighters with a $6,000 tax benefit, and I think that's where we should be. Saskatchewan is also at the $6,000 level as well, so it's good that the amendment was brought forward and passed.

The 200 hours of service allows a member of the volunteer fire department or a volunteer search and rescue member to be eligible to receive this tax credit, and it is a significant amount of time, 200 hours. If you're looking at 40 hours a week, that's five weeks of service on an annual basis. That's a significant amount of a person's lifetime dedicated each year to not only training but also to actually being in the field responding to an emergency.

It's not something that's given to individuals who are just taking the service lightly. Individuals who dedicate themselves to volunteer for fire service or search and rescue service are dedicating a significant amount of time, and the 200 hours represents a minimum. Many of these individuals are serving a whole lot more than 200 hours on an annual basis. We certainly want to recognize that service by passing Bill 213, and I hope that all members will see fit to do so.

The final thing that I wanted to say is that we recently met with the members of the Fire Fighters Association at a function, and members of both sides of the House were there. One of the things that I wanted to relay to the House is that not only do we have a responsibility to remember the individuals who are perhaps injured or die in a tragic fire or accident, but the firefighters related to me that they also felt that the first responders needed to be recognized. Don't forget in those tragedies that every time there's an injury or a death behind that incident, there is a cadre of firefighters and first responders who also were there at a very, very difficult time, and those memories are with them always.

I thought that was important to note as well in terms of what we do here to recognize the value of our firefighters and volunteers and also to encourage all members of this House, when the opportunity arises in your community, as it does in Edmonton on a fairly regular basis, to take a course that's offered by your local firefighting department. In Edmonton it's called Fire Ops 101. I know that current Mayor Knack and myself in 2016 participated in that half-day program, where you basically got to train alongside firefighters for a day in the three- or four-storey training centre where they light up the wall of fire, and you're on your hands and knees fully equipped with a breathing mask on. You can't see through your mask, and you first of all have to put the fire out; then you've got to crawl on your hands and knees back out of that building. I mean, believe me, it's an experience I've never forgotten. Any time a measure like this comes up, I'm happy to support the firefighters in terms of financially compensating them for expenses that they undertake to do their work in support of our society. If you can take advantage of an opportunity to go to a Fire Ops 101 course, I would think it's truly valuable.

3:30

Don't forget the human needs of our volunteers. I encourage you to support the volunteer firefighters by supporting Bill 213 in an effort to hopefully improve the recruitment and retention that is an issue right now.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, thank you, Chair, and thank you to all the men and women who wake up day in and day out to protect this province, the firefighters who have put their blood, sweat, and tears into keeping everyone safe. Thank you for the long nights and early mornings and the time spent away from your families, for the milestones missed:

the hockey games, the graduations, dance recitals, and birthdays. Your sacrifice does not go unnoticed. This last summer may have been a calm wildfire season compared to recent years, but I still look back at the horrific destructions that fires have caused: the Jasper fire, the Fort Mac fire, the Slave Lake fire, and all the millions of hectares burned over the years.

When Albertans think about emergency responses, they often picture firefighters arriving at the scene, but what many people may not recognize is just how many Albertans depend upon our volunteer firefighters. Mr. Chair, there are over 10,000 volunteer firefighters in this province with 90 per cent of Alberta falling in their protection. Across our province thousands of volunteer firefighters serve their communities while holding regular jobs, raising families, running farms, operating small businesses, and contributing to local economies. When the pager sounds, they spring into action, dropping everything to answer the call.

These remarkable Albertans are not volunteers because the work is easy. They volunteer because they care about their neighbours. They volunteer because they understand the importance of community. They volunteer because they believe that when someone is in need, somebody must answer the call.

For rural Alberta the volunteer fire department is the difference between life and death. Volunteer firefighters are the first people on the scene at a collision, the first people arriving at a house fire, and in many cases the first on the scene for medical emergencies as well. They are often the first line of defence against grass fires, barn fires, crop fires, and farming accidents. They stabilize emergency situations, protect lives, and assist other emergency services long before additional resources arrive. That's why our government recognizes the importance of volunteer emergency services and protecting what matters most to Albertans.

Volunteer firefighters and volunteer search and rescue members dedicate countless hours to training and preparedness. They attend courses, drills, and exercises to ensure that they are ready when somebody needs help. Yet despite the responsibilities they take on, they continue to serve because they believe in helping others, not for self gain but for the betterment of the community to ensure that everyone can rest easy and feel protected.

That's why I stand in support of Bill 213, because their commitment deserves recognition, which is why we have proposed a $6,000 tax credit for volunteer firefighters and volunteer search and rescue personnel. This proposal is about acknowledging the extraordinary contributions that these Albertans make to our communities. It's about recognizing that when emergencies happen, volunteer fire responders are often the ones standing between tragedy and safety. It's about paying back in some small way those who give so much of themselves to keep our neighbours safe.

The 200-hour threshold established in Bill 213 is not a symbolic requirement; it represents a significant commitment of personal time and service to Alberta communities. Two hundred hours is the equivalent of five full weeks of work. It means evenings spent training and exercising instead of being at home with their family. It means weekends dedicated to emergency preparedness, equipment checks, fundraising events, and community outreach. For many volunteer firefighters those 200 hours are only the beginning, with many putting in hours that go above and beyond this requirement.

The proposed tax credit is not intended to compensate the volunteers for their time. No tax credit could truly reflect the value of what they provide; rather, it serves as a meaningful acknowledgement of the sacrifices they make and the vital role they play in keeping our community safe. For many volunteer departments recruitment and retention remain ongoing challenges. Recognizing those dedicated hundreds of hours each year to emergency services sends a clear message that Alberta values their contributions. It tells these volunteers that their province recognizes their commitment, appreciates their sacrifice, and understands the critical role they play in protecting lives and property across Alberta.

Mr. Chair, when we talk about firefighters, we must also recognize the vital role they play in professional firefighting across Alberta. Members of the International Association of Fire Fighters have spent generations serving communities, mentoring young firefighters, advocating for firefighting safety, and strengthening emergency response systems across our province and our country. Their commitment extends well beyond the response time. The IAFF have championed improvements in firefighting health and safety, advocating for equipment standards, supporting training initiatives, and working to ensure that firefighters receive the resources necessary to perform their difficult jobs safely and effectively.

In that regard, it is important to recognize leaders who have dedicated themselves not only to firefighting but also to support those who serve. One such individual is Curtis Oscar Noble. Curtis Noble served as a firefighter with Medicine Hat Fire and Emergency Services as president of the IAFF local 263 and as the executive vice-president of the Alberta Professional Fire Fighters & Paramedics Association. Through his work and volunteering with the International Association of Fire Fighters Mr. Noble helped contribute to the culture of professionalism, service, and solidarity that continues to benefit firefighters in the communities they protect.

Individuals like Curtis Noble remind us that strong emergency services are built not only through equipment and infrastructure but through leadership, mentorship, and commitment to public service. His colleagues remember him as a tireless champion for mental health supports, someone who worked to ensure firefighters felt comfortable seeking help when they needed it, and he understood that courage is not only demonstrated at the scene of an emergency. Sometimes courage means speaking openly about the challenges first responders face and ensuring others know that they are not alone. He was a tireless advocate for firefighters.

When he passed a few years ago, his vision did not fade. His brothers and sisters continue to uphold the traditions of excellence and stand up for supports through the new legislation. Today when firefighters across Alberta benefit from stronger mental health supports, improved occupational cancer recognition, and greater public understanding of the risks associated with the profession, they are building upon the foundation shaped by leaders like Curtis Noble. His legacy reminds us that supporting firefighters means more than thanking them for their service. It requires meaningful action to recognize the sacrifices made by those who dedicate themselves to protecting Alberta communities.

Mr. Chair, Bill 213 is about recognizing Albertans who step forward when communities need them most. While no monetary value or thank you can truly show how grateful we are for these courageous men and women, we can try and show our gratitude by continuing to put forward legislation such as Bill 213. We can continue to provide a listening ear to those within the IAFF that continue to advocate for cancer screening, mental health support, family resources, and early screening, and we can continue to listen to the challenges of rural fire departments as well.

3:40

Mr. Chair, this year's tame fire season was a gift, but it's not the new normal. We will have years where communities will be threatened and millions of hectares will be lost, but we are committed to those who defend this province and will provide them with every support they need. I will be supporting Bill 213, and I urge everyone in this Chamber to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any others? The member for Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: That's good. Yeah.

The Deputy Chair: Close enough?

Mr. Rowswell: Close enough.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak in support of Bill 213. I want to thank the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for bringing it forward. Let me start with a picture. It's 2 in the morning. A pager goes off on a kitchen counter. Someone climbs out of bed, pulls on their boots, and quietly checks on their sleeping kids. Twenty minutes later they're on a dark highway kneeling beside a crashed car, holding a stranger's hand. They are not doing this for money. They may not even be thanked. And in a few hours they have to be at their regular job. That is a volunteer firefighter. It could just as easily be a search and rescue volunteer climbing a ridge in the rain to find a lost hiker.

Bill 213 creates two provincial tax credits, one for volunteer firefighters and one for search and rescue volunteers. The message is simple. If you give your time and risk your safety to protect your neighbours, Alberta recognizes you for your courage and your service. Volunteers are crucial to keeping Alberta safe. Eighty per cent of our firefighters are volunteers. Ninety-seven per cent of our fire departments are run by volunteers. That is more than 450 departments. Search and rescue works the same way. Search and Rescue Alberta is 100 per cent volunteers, with about 1,400 members on roughly 32 teams. In much of this province when you call 911 about a fire or a crash, the people who answer have day jobs. They are mechanics, ranchers, and construction workers.

I'll just relay a bit of a story. I drove to a little village in my constituency called Clandonald, and as I was coming in, a fire engine was going out. As I got close to the fire station, there was a person coming in to get the next fire engine. He's a local farmer that I knew. It was a particularly bad year that year for grass fires. I was talking to him as he was getting ready, and he said, "Boy, I don't know if I'll get my seeding done this year," because that was the main job. But he knew that his neighbours would have his back if he needed help. It's kind of a community event. But they do leave their work or leave supper, and they go.

And the demand keeps growing. In 2023 Alberta had its worst wildfire season on record. More than 2.2 million hectares burned. That is 10 times the five-year average. Over 38,000 Albertans were evacuated across 48 communities. The next year 19 volunteer search and rescue teams answered 71 requests for help with wildfires and gave more than 13,000 hours.

Here's the problem. These volunteers are getting harder to find. The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs reports that about 9,500 volunteer firefighters left the service across Canada in 2023 alone. We have seen what that can mean here. In 2018 Lacombe county had to close a fire hall because it could not keep enough volunteers to run it safely. We're a bit understaffed, I know, throughout my constituency as well. When a hall closes, the next crew is further away. In a fire minutes matter.

A system that runs on volunteers is only as strong as the next person who says yes. Right now fewer people are saying yes, so let me talk about what we are asking them.

Under this bill a volunteer must serve at least 200 hours in a year to qualify. That is almost four hours every week, all year long, answering calls, going to training, showing up for meetings. Many give more. Remember these people. These are people with jobs, kids, and mortgages. Every hour at the hall is an hour away from their home. When the pager goes off, they do not ask what time it is or whose house is burning. They just go. This might mean a missed birthday, a supper that goes cold, a spouse waiting until the small hours of the morning for their loved one to return.

This tax credit gives back to our volunteers and their families. Even in our big cities these volunteers matter. When a wildfire threatens, when a child goes missing in the mountains, when a flood comes, help arrives from every corner of Alberta. These are our neighbours. Whatever side of this House we sit on, I think we can agree that they have earned our thanks. Bill 213 lets us say it in a way that shows up in their pockets, not just through speeches.

What does the bill do? It does two things. It creates a volunteer firefighter tax credit, and it creates a matching search and rescue volunteer tax credit. Here's how it works. The bill sets an amount of $6,000. The amount is multiplied by a set rate, which is now 8 per cent. This results in a credit of up to $480 off volunteers' provincial income tax each year.

To claim it, a volunteer must serve at least 200 hours in that year. Those hours can come from firefighting, from search and rescue, or from a mix of both. That matters because some people serve in both roles, and they should not be penalized for it. What counts is service. Responding to calls and being on call, attending a department or team meeting, completing required training: that is real work, so that is what the bill counts.

For search and rescue, the team must be based in Alberta. It must either belong to a recognized group like the Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada or be recognized by a provincial, municipal, or a public authority. That ensures the credit is going to trained and accredited teams.

Mr. Chair, other governments are using tax credits to recognize their volunteers. Eight provinces and one territory have them as well as our federal government. I want to see this province be next. Some may wonder if this affects eligibility for federal tax credit. It does not. The credit proposed in Bill 213 and the federal tax credit work with one another, and no volunteer will have to choose between the two. This benefit will act as a welcome provincial counterpart to existing federal benefits.

Mr. Chair, I want to close with a summary. Alberta runs on volunteers: 80 per cent of our firefighters and every member of Search and Rescue Alberta are volunteers. They are getting harder to find while the work gets harder to do. Bill 213 answers that with a clear, simple tool: a tax credit for anyone that serves 200 hours or more. It has safeguards, it is affordable, and it puts us in line with most of the country.

Mr. Chair, no tax credit could repay someone for a night on a cold highway. No bill can give back a missed birthday, but we can say in law that Albertans see what these volunteers do and that it matters. They answer when we call; today we will let us answer them. I encourage every member in the Legislature to support Bill 213, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Emergency Services Volunteer Tax Credits) Amendment Act, 2026.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak in support of Bill 213, to explain why this legislation matters to the volunteers who help keep Alberta communities safe. This legislation is about service, it's about recognition, and it is about supporting the Albertans who step forward when their neighbours need them most.

Across Alberta there are thousands of people who answer emergency calls not because it's their full-time job but because they choose to serve their communities. When the pager goes off in the middle of the night, they answer. When a wildfire threatens homes and livelihoods, they respond. When a vehicle collision occurs on a

rural highway, they are often among the first people on the scene. And when a search is under way for a missing person, they drop everything to help bring someone home safely. These individuals do not volunteer because they are seeking recognition. They volunteer because they care about their communities. They volunteer because they understand that when emergencies happen, someone needs to step forward, and they volunteer because protecting their neighbours matters.

3:50

Many Alberta communities depend on that commitment. For countless towns, villages, counties, and rural areas, volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers are not a supplement to emergency services; they are the emergency services. They represent the difference between having help available and having no help at all. They are often the first people to arrive when lives are at risk. They are often the people standing on the front lines during natural disasters, and they are often the people providing reassurance and support during some of the worst moments a family can experience. That service deserves recognition, that service deserves respect, and that service deserves support. That is exactly what this legislation seeks to provide.

This bill would create a provincial nonrefundable tax credit for volunteer firefighters and volunteer search and rescue personnel who dedicate significant time each year to serving their communities. The purpose is straightforward: to recognize the extraordinary contributions these volunteers make, and to support the recruitment and retention of individuals willing to answer the call when emergencies occur.

Albertans rely on these volunteers every day, yet many people do not fully appreciate the commitment that comes with these roles. Being a volunteer firefighter or search and rescue volunteer is not simply about showing up during an emergency. It involves ongoing training. It involves attending meetings. It involves maintaining readiness, and it often means being on call while balancing employment, family responsibilities, and community commitments. These volunteers make significant personal sacrifices. They give their time, they dedicate their energy, and in many cases they place themselves in dangerous situations to protect others.

This legislation recognizes that commitment by providing a tax credit for individuals who complete at least 200 hours of eligible volunteer service during the year. That threshold is important. It reflects a substantial contribution to the community. Two hundred hours is no small commitment. It represents evenings away from family, weekends spent training, hours spent training for emergencies, and time devoted to helping others without expecting anything in return. This legislation acknowledges that commitment and provides meaningful recognition for those who serve our communities.

Mr. Chair, what makes this proposal especially important is that it supports the long-term sustainability of emergency services in communities throughout Alberta. Many jurisdictions across Canada continue to face challenges recruiting and retaining volunteers, and Alberta is no exception. We need dedicated individuals willing to serve. We need people prepared to answer emergency calls, and we need strong volunteer organizations capable of responding when disasters strike. Supporting volunteers helps strengthen those organizations and sends a message that Alberta values the contributions these heroes make.

Mr. Chair, we often speak in this Assembly about public safety. We discuss investments in infrastructure, we discuss emergency preparedness, and we discuss protecting communities. Volunteer firefighters and search and rescue teams are an essential part of that conversation. Without them, many communities would face significant challenges providing emergency response services. These volunteers help protect lives, they help protect property, and they help protect communities during emergencies large and small. Whether it is fighting a grass fire, responding to a collision, assisting during a flood, supporting wildfire operations, or searching for a missing child, their contributions are invaluable.

One of the things I appreciate most about this legislation is that it focuses on people. It recognizes people who quietly make our communities stronger. These are people who rarely seek the spotlight. They are people who simply answer the call because they know someone must. Albertans understand and appreciate that kind of service. We see it every time communities come together during emergencies. We see it every time volunteers leave work or family gatherings to respond to a call. And we see it every time first responders put the needs of others ahead of their own. That spirit of service is one of the things that makes Alberta such a strong province.

Mr. Chair, while no tax credit can fully capture the value of what these volunteers contribute, it can serve as a meaningful acknowledgement of their efforts. It can demonstrate appreciation. It can provide support. It also encourages a continued participation in organizations that deliver those critical services across our province.

This legislation also takes a practical approach. It establishes clear eligibility requirements. Volunteers must complete a significant level of service. Appropriate documentation can be provided when it's required. And the framework aligns with the objective of recognizing genuine volunteer contributions while maintaining accountability.

At its core this legislation reflects a simple principle. When Albertans step forward to serve their communities, their efforts should be recognized. When they sacrifice their time to protect others, their province should support them. And when communities depend on volunteers to provide essential emergency services, government should do its part to help sustain those efforts.

This bill does exactly that. It recognizes service. It supports recruitment and retention, and it demonstrates respect for the Albertans who help keep our communities safe every single day. Volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers represent the very best of Alberta. They embody service, commitment, courage, and community spirit. This legislation honours those values and, importantly, it recognizes the people who live them.

For these reasons, I am proud to support Bill 213 and encourage all members of this Assembly to do the same.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just very briefly, I would like to weigh in on this bill as well. I am grateful to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for putting this forward. I think I can echo the calls of everybody in this Chamber who have very much acknowledged what our volunteer firefighters and our search and rescue volunteers do for us each and every day.

I was recalling the fact that during COVID I would often start all of my debates by thanking those on the front lines and just, you know, how much they show up for us each and every day. I think it's a good habit to get back into because we do often take for granted the folks that are working on the front lines and, in particular, the people that are volunteering their time, just to reiterate the support of our caucus, the Alberta NDP caucus as well as the government side.

You know, I do have to say that it is still a challenge for me, having been an opposition member since 2019, that we continue to support some, many, actually, of the UCP's private member's bills. We've supported many of them. We've worked with them. We've offered amendments. It's been really collaborative. However, I can't say the same on their side. We have proposed countless private member's

bills over the years since I've been an MLA, since 2019. For those wondering how many of our private member's bills the UCP has supported in the nearly eight years I've been an MLA, the answer is zero.

I would like to use this opportunity just to remind that side opposite that it's okay to work with us. It's okay to support us just as we have supported you with some of your private member's bills because we know there have been a few examples, including one recently, where the UCP refused to support our private member's bill but then took that idea and put it into a government bill. They did that on some consumer protection measures recently. I do have to get that on the record because it is troubling to see that.

I just want to note as well, you know, coming back to Bill 213, that I've been someone who spent a lot of time in rural Alberta in particular, and I know that in rural Alberta volunteer firefighters are often the backbone of the communities. The Member for Leduc-Beaumont talked about his time in Forestburg and his family members and others who are volunteer firefighters there. He knows that I lived there for a year as well, and I saw first-hand just how important those folks are because they're often juggling other jobs. They're doing a whole lot of other things, but their first commitment is to their communities, and I think that deserves to be commended. So, with that, thank you to those heroes on the front lines. Thank you to those volunteers who are doing so much for us each and every day.

I'm hoping that all members of this House will support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4:00

The Deputy Chair: Are there others? Are you ready for the question on Bill 213, Alberta Personal Income Tax (Emergency Services Volunteer Tax Credits) Amendment Act, 2026?

An Hon. Member: Ready.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 213 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 213.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 213. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 214
Alberta Health Care Insurance (Protecting Public Health Care) Amendment Act, 2026

[Adjourned debate November 16: Mr. Amery]

The Acting Speaker: Any members wishing to comment with respect to Bill 214? The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I rise to speak to Bill 214. Following 213, I want to use that camaraderie and collaborative spirit, and hopefully Bill 214 will follow suit with Bill 213, right?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

An Hon. Member: Yeah.

Mr. Haji: Yeah. With that, Madam Speaker, the government continues to speak to the fact that they believe in public health care. The government campaigned on, signed a guarantee of public health care. The concern is that every single bill that was tabled by the government over the past two years has not been pointing in that direction. It was completely pointing in a different direction. And for a conversation to – this will be an opportunity where we switch the direction and make sure what they have campaigned on and ensure a public health guarantee.

Madam Speaker, the reason why I say that. In May 2025 we had Bill 55 that allowed hospitals to be operated by administrators and corporations. That would be outside of health authorities, which is regulated in our bills. That has given the signal of where the government wants to go and the direction that our government wants to take.

It didn't stop there. In December 2025, six months after, Bill 11 came in, which was enabling the doctors who will be operating in those hospitals – whether they can charge out of pocket or not, allowing them to charge out of pocket, which is arguably a two-tiered system, where some people will be covered by the public health insurance plan, whereby others will be either privately insured or out of pocket. We argued that that is a two-tier model. It's a model that is not in alignment with what the government campaigned on. In defence, the government has continually been communicating and talking about how that is not a two-tier system.

Questions were asked in the House, Madam Speaker, and those questions were around whether family physicians are included in this dual practice or not. The response that the ministers of health have continually given was: no, no one would be asked to be out of pocket to see a family physician. Well, I can see the minister of education nodding and saying that that is true. So if that is the case, I want to see how he will be voting on Bill 214. It's contradictory, again, similar to the contradiction that we were seeing. If you don't support Bill 214, then you are enabling family physicians to also charge out of pocket.

That is why Bill 214 is tabled by – it's a private member's bill by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. It was a well-thought bill about making sure that this question dies and that we are not asking a question of family physicians if that is amended into Bill 11 that was passed because it wasn't included. In quite a number of conversations we thought at some point maybe there was an omission of not understanding whether this should have been included in the bill or not. Bill 214 came in response to that, to ensure that that is amended and that family physicians are not allowed to do a dual practice and charge out of pocket. I want to make sure that – the bill that is also in

debate, Bill 39, is actually contrary to this, which is asking now family physicians to be included in the dual practice idea that the UCP government has tabled and passed many times.

We've raised many times, Madam Speaker, in this House that the challenge that Albertans are facing, whether it is wait times in emergency rooms, whether it is overcrowded emergency rooms, hallways, people waiting to get care – to some point some Albertans even died while waiting for care in December last year. So in that context it's worth while to speak to the challenges that we face. We don't think that the solution is a privatized system to address the current crisis that our health care system is facing.

On this side of the House, Madam Speaker, we believe that we can shorten wait times for surgeries and emergency departments as well as access to family doctors. We can deliver a better health care system that works for all Albertans, without dual practice and without privatization. The public health care system does that. On this side we believe that we need to stop this privatization road map that is completely hidden from the public eye. You'll wonder when the government was working on Bill 55. That was in May 2025. The government was touring across the province, the Premier was holding these town halls to discuss what is important for Alberta, and this never came while the ministers are drafting Bill 55, which enables private corporations to run hospitals.

4:10

Bill 214 amends the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. This is a private member's bill. It will reverse the UCP's changes that enable privatization of the public health care system. Bill 11 gave the physicians the option to practice in the public and private health system, at that time, and the thought was maybe this is a mistake. Or what's the intention? If it was not the intention and the government believes in public health care, they should support this private member's bill tabled by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

No other province in Canada allows physicians to provide health services in both the public and private system, and the PMB enforces Alberta's confidence, the people in Alberta and the confidence that they have in our public health care system, by ensuring that medical advice focuses on patient needs rather than on opportunities to buy uninsured or private services. That is the intent of this bill, Madam Speaker.

The government continues to say that this is not two-tier, American-style. We do believe it is two-tier, American-style. The government points to Denmark and Sweden, but contracts American companies. I struggle. Why will American companies develop a European style? It just doesn't make any sense. The billing system that is being developed by the American medical association, which is a lobby group that is known globally in terms of its fight since the 1960s against any single payer of universal health coverage, and the minister admits that they're working with the AMA, the American Medical Association, in developing our billing system.

The billing system is not a software thing, Madam Speaker. It is how money is transferred, it is categorization of services and schedules, it is transfer of those schedules into a cost, and it is how that costing system is transactioned between insurer as well as patients. It is not a software development that an American company somewhere develops and then leaves. It is a way of determining what is necessary and what is not necessary, what services should be covered and what services should not be covered within our public system, and how all of those are kind of, like, divided . . . [Mr. Haji's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate? The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to join the debate and speak against Bill 214, the Alberta Health Care Insurance (Protecting Public Health Care) Amendment Act, 2026. The members opposite continue to mischaracterize Bill 11. In fact, what Bill 214 would do would be to propose to reverse the important changes introduced through Bill 11, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2). It would restrict the flexible dual practice participation framework that our government has established for eligible physicians and change how certain services can be classified and provided outside the Alberta health care insurance plan.

At its core this debate is about how we expand access to care, how we make the best use of our health care workforce, and how we ensure that our publicly funded system remains strong and sustainable. Madam Speaker, our government remains committed to publicly funded health care. That is not changing. Public coverage is the foundation of Alberta's system. No Albertan will be denied medically necessary care, but protecting public health care and preventing innovation in how services are delivered are not the same thing.

We believe Alberta can maintain a strong, publicly funded health care system while exploring additional ways to expand capacity, improve access, and give both patients and physicians more options. Madam Speaker, I'm glad to say that we have more physicians, more nurses, more workforce in our province, and more coming all the time.

Madam Speaker, we know that demand for health services continues to grow. Our population is increasing, Albertans are living longer, and more people require access to surgical procedures, specialized treatment, and ongoing medical care. We also know that surgical backlogs and wait times are not unique to Alberta. In fact, they are challenges facing health care systems right across Canada. These challenges require more than simply maintaining the status quo, and that's what the members opposite want to do. They want to maintain the status quo. In fact, what we need to do is explore ways to expand capacity, recruit and train health care professionals, make better use of available facilities, and consider different ways of delivering care.

Alberta continues to invest in its health workforce, expand our surgical services, and create opportunities for health professionals to deliver more care. In fact, Madam Speaker, we are increasing the number of surgeries at a record pace, outpacing all other provinces in Canada, and I'm happy to say that. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, which recently released their latest report – it actually stated that in physician data the government of Alberta has a record growth in 2025. We saw 12,494 physicians included in its workforce reporting, including 6,112 family physicians and 6,382 specialists. I'm happy to say that as of October of this year, we're actually at 14,600 physicians, with over 7,000 family practitioners and over 7,000 specialists.

Our nursing workforce is also growing, with a reported 63,200 regulated nurses in Alberta in 2024. These numbers demonstrate Alberta's strong ability to attract, train, and retain skilled professionals, and we pay them well, Madam Speaker. In fact, I was happy that we were able to have a negotiated agreement, one of the first negotiated agreements in a very long time, with the union of Alberta nurses.

We must also create an environment where those professionals have the flexibility, resources, and opportunities to practice and deliver. Bill 11 introduces significant changes to modernize Alberta's health care legislation and establishes the legislative framework for a flexible participating physician model commonly referred to as dual practice. Under this model eligible and approved physicians can provide publicly funded surgeries through the Alberta health care insurance plan and privately paid surgeries in

approved settings subject to very specific requirements. Physicians can also continue to practice entirely within the public system, or they can also practice entirely out of the public system, which has been occurring for decades, Madam Speaker. If eligible, as I've said, and approved, they can participate flexibly.

The intention is to create additional opportunities for physicians to provide services and increase the total amount of surgical activity taking place in Alberta. We are not proposing to remove publicly funded care, contrary to what the members opposite continue to say. We are creating an additional pathway for eligible physicians to provide services while maintaining their responsibilities to the public system. The objective is to make more care available in Alberta.

We know there are physicians who want greater flexibility in how they practice. In fact, Madam Speaker, I have heard from retired physicians who said they want to come back and participate as a dual practising physician. We also know there are physicians who provide privately funded services in other jurisdictions. Our approach creates an opportunity for those services to be delivered here in Alberta under Alberta's regulatory framework rather than requiring patients or physicians to travel elsewhere. It also provides an opportunity to attract and retain physicians who value professional flexibility. We should be asking how we can make the best use of the skills and experiences of the health professionals we already have while continuing to recruit and train the next generation.

The member opposite has inadequately framed Bill 214 in an attempt to turn the clock back. It would restrict physicians from the choice of electing flexible participation. It would also change the legislative framework governing the relationship between insured and noninsured plans. The question we must consider is whether removing those options would actually improve access to care for Albertans. Our government's approach is to expand the overall capacity of the health system, not simply restrict the ways in which eligible professionals can provide services.

4:20

Dual practice is not an unrestricted arrangement. Physicians must – must – meet eligibility requirements and receive approval before participating. They must maintain their public service commitments, including their previous fiscal year's public service levels and applicable minimum public surgery hour requirements. They must also continue meeting other responsibilities within the public system, including consultations, referrals, and other required clinical services.

There are also important restrictions on which physicians can participate. Family physicians are not eligible for flexible participation. I heard the member opposite claim that they were, and that is not true. There are also specified exemptions for family physicians who have a subspecialty in anaesthesia or surgical assistants. Those are the only ones able to. Importantly, emergency and urgent and life-threatening procedures, including cancer surgeries, remain entirely within the publicly funded system. These safeguards are central to the framework.

We are also requiring the separation of public and private services, appropriate records, fee disclosures, and reporting. That has not happened in the past in the area of private surgeries. Private service records must be integrated into provincial health information systems to support continuity of care and ensure that health professionals have the information they need to provide appropriate follow-up.

We recognize that new approaches to health care delivery must be accompanied by accountability. That's hugely important. That is why Acute Care Alberta has a role in operationalizing the framework, reviewing applications, monitoring physician commitments, and assessing the impact of dual practice on the overall health system. The agency will collect and review information about public and private surgical activity and conduct regular reviews of program performance. If monitoring identifies concerns about the impact on publicly funded services, we can adjust and take corrective action as needed. Our responsibility is to ensure that the model achieves its intended objectives while protecting access to public care. That is why we must evaluate this model based on evidence and results rather than assumptions about what may or may not happen.

Madam Speaker, the opposition also suggests that private options necessarily undermine the public system. Publicly funded health care and private delivery are not mutually exclusive concepts. A number of universal health care jurisdictions and, I must add, high-performing health care jurisdictions, including Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Australia, permit forms of mixed public and private physician compensation and practice.

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

Member Tejada: Calgary-Klein.

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. Yeah, Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to rise in support of Bill 214, the Alberta Health Care Insurance (Protecting Public Health Care) Amendment Act, 2026, as proposed by my esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Glenora. I want to thank my colleague for her work done on this legislation, which rightly urges the government to reverse course on the dangerous changes they've already made to our health care system with the ever-expanding creep of privatization and her work to ensure that our publicly funded health care system is protected and strengthened so that it delivers well for Albertans. I will say that this bill has received support from the United Nurses of Alberta, many doctors, health care workers, and Friends of Medicare.

I'll just go into a little bit of what this bill does. It amends the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. It would, as the minister of health asserted, reverse the UCP changes that enabled privatization of Alberta's public health care system. It would reverse what Bill 11 did, which was give physicians the option to practise in the public and private health care system at the same time.

The labelling of flexible practice – I always laugh at the word "flexible." I think sometimes rules are flexible, and sometimes commitments to publicly funded health care are also flexible. I'll say that no other province in Canada allows physicians to provide health care services in both the public health care system and as a private health care model. What this bill does is that it makes insured health services and non-planned services mutually exclusive, an important point.

Bill 214 brings the foundation of what our health care system should be into focus and highlights what that focus should be for any government, but especially how Alberta's New Democrats legislate to serve Albertans. Madam Speaker, this is about having the right priorities, and the biggest priority for Alberta's New Democrats is a commitment to delivering better publicly funded health care for Albertans.

This is a quality-of-life issue, Madam Speaker. Health and health care is foundational to how we function in all other facets of life. As Canadians we have universal health care and happen to be the envy of the world for that. I am so glad to be part of a caucus that holds true to that Canadian value even in the face of a UCP government that is instead committed to privatization and decisions that serve to profit a select few, often their friends, as evidenced by the corrupt care scandal.

I will note as well that the Canadian Health Coalition and Friends of Medicare has called on the federal government to intervene and to prevent the UCP from implementing dual practice, which they describe as the biggest threat against health care since the Canada Health Act was passed in 1984. That's significant. The federal health care minister also expressed concern that Bill 11 could undermine the principles of the Canada Health Act and urged Alberta to protect the public health care system so that it is delivered and determined by medical need rather than the ability to pay.

Albertans want access to family doctors, to shorter wait times for procedures, and they want this as part of a publicly funded health care system, where your access to health care is based on your need, delivered when and where you need it, and it is not determined on the speed with which you produce a method of payment.

Albertans deserve no less. Alberta's New Democrats are advocating for faster access to services and procedures that are covered by Alberta's health care insurance plan. For that reason we reject the UCP's agenda to privatize our health care, most notably through Bill 11. That is why my colleague has introduced this bill. We need to protect and maintain that public health care system, not whittle away at it through privatization that reduces access and takes resources away from that system.

I'll talk a little bit about one of the big concerns, which is workforce allocation. Alberta faces a continued shortage of operating room nurses, anaesthesiologists, surgical staff, family doctors, nurse practitioners, and diagnostic personnel. Dual practice actually incentivizes a redistribution of that very scarce personnel rather than creating more health human resource capacity. Now, I did hear the minister of health talking about recruitment and retention. What I would have to say to that is that I'll believe it when I see it. You have to create the conditions for that to happen, and that's not through overloading the workforce that we have or through scaring away those who want to make Alberta their home with anti-immigrant rhetoric and not doing meaningful work towards removal of barriers so that people can work. I'll just make a quick reference to credentialing in that case and removing the barriers for newcomers to work here to fill those gaps.

I'll add that a general respect for our public services and institutions, namely public education, I would say as an example, would be a start. We lose potential at every juncture that public services are undermined.

Access to health care should be determined by medical need, not by ability to pay. Under Bill 11 and privatization schemes by the UCP government, people with financial resources can pay to get care sooner, where physicians will also have financial incentive to encourage and provide health care that is privately delivered. In that case, Albertans with serious health care needs would have to wait for longer. It's not controversial to say that Albertans should have access to health services regardless of their income, place of residence, or their circumstances. Protecting universal access to health care services should be the baseline, so taking risks with it by introducing measures to privatize aren't improving wait times unless the UCP is only measuring wait times for those who can pay.

4:30

Strengthening and investing in public health care actually strengthens public confidence in our health care system. Sadly, what I'm hearing day in and day out from the good people in Calgary-Klein and all over Alberta is that they don't trust the UCP with their health care. They don't trust that decisions made by this government are made with the ultimate goal of excellent public health care for every Albertan. Why is that? That's because the Premier and her government have broken that old UCP promise that ". . . under no circumstances will any Albertan ever have to pay out-of-pocket to see their family doctor or to get the medical treatment they need."

This government, sadly, is full steam ahead with two-tier health care. It is two-tiered, American-style health care, though they seem to not like that phrasing. In creating that two-tiered health care system – I've said this before when Bill 11 was being debated – it creates two tiers of Albertans: those who can pay and those who can't, those who come first and those who come last, those who will have to wait much longer to receive the health care they need.

Our position is clear. Every single Albertan deserves access to public health care, shorter wait times, access to doctors, and none of that should be expedited by pulling out a wallet. We have a plan for shorter wait times for surgeries, in emergency departments as well as access to family doctors, and to deliver a health care system that works for everyone. We will stop the UCP creep towards American-style private health care. Albertans shouldn't have to pay out of pocket for any health care, especially that is medically necessary, just because the UCP decided it wanted to privatize health care. Every Albertan should have access to the best available diagnostic testing, screening, and surgeries without having to pay. Albertans want more doctors, less time waiting, without paying for health care, and can count on Alberta's New Democrats to fix what the UCP has broken.

Let's make no mistake about that. The UCP has broken our health care. They've broken confidence. They've broken, in many cases, the will of Albertans and the hope that Albertans have and the confidence that they have in publicly delivered health care because they see every day how this government is willing to undermine it, to poke holes in a publicly delivered system, and then to have the gall to blame that public system for what they have broken.

Alberta's New Democrats will fix what the UCP has broken. We will build a public health care system that works for everyone.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? Seeing the hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge, correct? You're in.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today in strong support of private member's Bill 214, a bill that goes to the very heart of what Albertans believe: health care should be public, universal, accessible, and available based on need, not the size of someone's wallet.

This debate is not just about legislation; it is about values. It is about whether a senior in Falconridge, a young family in Edmonton, a farmer in rural Alberta, or a newcomer working two jobs in Calgary can get the medical care they need without first asking: can I afford it? That has always been the promise of Canadian health care, and it is a promise this UCP government is breaking.

The government likes to tell Albertans that their changes are about choice, but let's be honest with Albertans about what is really happening. When this government talks about choice, whose choice are they talking about? The choice of a wealthy individual to jump the queue? The choice of insurance companies to make bigger profits? The choice of private clinics to expand their market share? It certainly is not increasing the choices available to the single mother who cannot afford extra fees, it is not increasing choices for the senior living on a fixed income, and it is not increasing choices for the thousands of Albertans who still cannot find a family doctor.

Madam Speaker, patients do not need more billing options; they need health care. This government created Canada's first dual practice framework through Bill 11. For the first time physicians can move between publicly funded care and privately funded care. The UCP claims that this will reduce wait times, yet they have produced no evidence that it does. No evidence. What we do know is simple economics. We have a limited number of surgeons, we have a limited

number of anaesthesiologists, we have a limited number of operating room nurses, and we have a limited number of diagnostic technologists. You cannot split the same workforce in two and somehow create more capacity. This is not innovation. This is arithmetic failure.

Madam Speaker, when scarce health care professionals spend time providing private services, they're spending less time treating patients in the public system. The result is predictable. The people who can pay get faster access. The people who cannot pay wait longer. This is not a stronger health care system; this is a two-tier health care system, and that is exactly where the UCP is taking Alberta.

There is a saying that an elephant has two sets of teeth, one to show and another to chew. Unfortunately, the same can be said about this UCP government. One set of teeth is for public relations, another is for their real agenda. In public they tell Albertans that they support universal health care; behind the scenes they systematically weaken it. In public they tell Albertans they care about accessibility; behind the scenes they create financial barriers. In public they promise no Albertan will have to pay out of pocket for medically necessary care; then they pass legislation that moves Alberta toward exactly that outcome. Their word says one thing; their actions tell a completely different story, and Albertans are noticing.

Madam Speaker, the most troubling part is that this is not happening by accident. When emergency rooms are overcrowded, patients lose confidence. When they cannot find a family doctor, patients lose confidence. When surgeries are delayed, patients lose confidence. And when confidence falls, this government points to the problems they helped create and says: see, public health care isn't working. Then their solution is privatization. It is a strategy Albertans have seen before. Create the crisis, mismanage the system, then use the frustration you created to justify selling off parts of the public service. Albertans deserve better than that.

The UCP says that private delivery is the answer, but if privatization were the answer, why are Albertans waiting longer today than they were years ago? Why do hundreds of thousands of Albertans still lack access to a family doctor? Why are front-line workers burning out? Why are hospitals struggling to recruit and retain staff? The answer is because the problem is not that public health care has failed. The problem is that this government has failed public health care.

Madam Speaker, many Albertans are increasingly concerned that this government appears fascinated with importing ideas from the U.S. health care model. The Premier and many members opposite spend an extraordinary amount of time talking about American political figures and American political movements. They seem captivated by them. They admire them. They imitate them. Increasingly, Albertans worry they want to imitate America's health care system as well. The problem is Albertans do not want American-style health care.

Albertans do not want a health care system where families worry about bankruptcy because someone got sick. They do not want a system where insurance companies decide what treatment is covered. They do not want a system where access depends on income. They do not want a system where a credit card becomes more important than a health card. Albertans look south and see millions of people who delay medical treatment because of cost, people rationing medication, people facing impossible bills after medical emergencies, people choosing between paying rent and receiving treatment. This is not a model to admire; this is a warning. Yet every step toward privatization moves Alberta closer to that reality.

4:40

Madam Speaker, let us also talk about who benefits. The UCP tells us that patients benefit, but, really, do they? Who benefits when private insurance products become more necessary? Insurance companies. Who benefits when more services migrate into private markets? Corporate providers. Who benefits when health care becomes another business opportunity? Investors. Meanwhile ordinary Albertans face more uncertainty, small businesses face rising insurance costs, families face higher expenses, workers face more barriers.

Instead of reducing pressures on Albertans, this government is creating new ones. At a time when families are already dealing with affordability challenges, housing costs, utility bills, and grocery prices, the last thing Albertans need is anxiety about whether health care will become their major expense. Health care should provide security; this government is creating insecurity. Health care should never force people into impossible choices. No Albertan should have to ask: can I afford this appointment? Can I afford this test? Can I afford to see a specialist? Can I afford a surgery that will help me return to work? Those are questions people ask in two-tiered systems. Those are questions people ask when access depends on wealth. Those are not questions people should ever have to ask in Alberta.

Madam Speaker, private member's Bill 214 offers a different path. It restores a clear distinction between publicly insured care and private care. It ensures that physicians providing publicly funded insured services remain focused on the public system. It eliminates the unique dual practice model created by the UCP. Most importantly, it reinforces a simple principle. Medical decisions should be based on patient need, not profit opportunity. A doctor's advice should never be influenced by whether private service can be sold. A patient's place in line should never be determined by income. And access to treatment should never depend on the balance of a bank account.

Madam Speaker, the Alberta New Democrats believe every Albertan deserves the best care available regardless of who they are, where they live, or how much money they make. We believe a child from Calgary-Falconridge deserves the same access to care as a corporate executive. We believe a senior deserves the same access as a millionaire. We believe a health care card should be all that is required to receive medically necessary treatment. This is fairness. This is equality. That is Canadian health care.

The choice before this Assembly is clear. Do we support a health care system built around patients or one increasingly built around profits? Do we strengthen the public system or continue down the road of privatization? Do we stand with ordinary Albertans or with insurance companies and private interests waiting to profit from a weakened public system? I know where my colleagues and myself stand. We stand with patients, we stand with families, we stand with seniors, we stand with front-line health care workers, and we stand with every Albertan who believes health care is a right, not a privilege. That is why I urge all members of this Assembly . . .

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

Member Campbell: Thank you, Madam Speaker. At the start of this bill debate I asked myself a question. My question was: who asked for privatization? It certainly hasn't been the many constituents who have written into my office saying: if only we could pay more out of pocket, jump the queue. I have yet to receive an e-mail that looks like that. Instead, I've heard lots and lots of concern about: what will happen to my health care coverage or my wait times because I don't have thousands to pay for diagnostic imaging, because I don't have thousands to pay to get my knee surgery taken care of ahead of time? I've met a lot of folks while out knocking doors, which is the most common way to accumulate health care stories. As soon as someone says that they had an interaction with the health care program, I think one of the best and quickest questions to ask is: what has your experience been like?

It is rare to see folks who have had timely access to medical care under this current government. It is very common to find people who are waiting a year to 18 months to get an MRI or a CT scan. So then I asked: is the privatization of our health care system going to make this better or worse? I think it's quite clear that for some folks it will make the problem better. Folks that can bring out a credit card or pay by cash or cheque will see timely access to care, but for those who are accessing the public side of the sphere, they will see slower access to care because their practitioners will have been peeled away from public service to for-profit clinics.

Now, one of the questions that is always asked in private health care is: what is the cost of human life? What is cost-effective treatment? Prior to being an MLA, I worked in consultation for the delivery of private health care through employer-sponsored programs. I often think about one chart in particular that's quickly glossed over but expands several pages, actually, of an employee benefits contract, and that is how your accidental death and dismemberment will pay out in the event of an accident. It's weird to see a chart that says "if you lose a thumb" or "if you lose three fingers" or "just one ear" or "half a leg."

These are the kinds of things that you see all the time in private health care that never pop up in our public space. We've never had to go to the hospital and say, "I'm sorry; I've cut one of my fingers," and the person at the triage desk says, "You know, unfortunately, you need to lose three fingers and the feeling in two toes in order to seek care today." I would hate to see this type of threshold being applied to our health care system where we get treated based on need and not on profit or profitability metrics.

How often do we see Canadians currently going bankrupt for health care? Very infrequently, if ever at all, but this trajectory that the UCP government is taking us on leads us to a path that we see so frequently in the United States of thousands and hundreds of thousands of families who deal with medical bankruptcy every single year. I would never want to open the door to that scale or that type of problem here in our province, and I would really never want to be the face of it as it emerges right now.

I've met many, many Americans who struggle with personal health care costs, whether their work program costs them thousands of dollars but they still have those high deductibles where you've got to pay the first $5,000 out of pocket, or people who manage chronic illnesses. I've spent time in their homes and chatted with them face to face as they struggle to pay their own family bills, to put food on the table, and then on top of it, to pay their medical bills. We just can't have that here in Alberta. It's bad for people, it's bad for families, and as I'll talk later, it's actually bad for business.

Do we want to trust this government to oversee changes to health care? I think that we've received so much frequent feedback that Albertans' trust in this UCP government to make effective, outcome-driven decisions in health care is just not there.

I've been in these overcrowded ERs, and I have seen many of my fellow Albertans there. Whether it was in my personal health journey where I was at Rockyview general hospital, Foothills hospital, or South Health Campus, the problem is widespread. It doesn't matter where you go in the city. You can actually open up your phone right now and just search "Calgary ER hospital wait times," and there's a live tracker.

Actually, I've heard from physicians in outlying communities like Okotoks and High River that say the advent of that wait-list tracker has made their lives more difficult because people can clearly see that they can go to their nearby hospital and spend six to eight hours waiting just to see a doctor or they can drive 30 to 50 minutes outside the city to their urgent cares or regional hospitals where they're not designed to take an overflow from the cities into their rural health care systems. Yet this is the exact type of behaviour that's being incentivized by our current health care system. People know how to take care of their own needs. They know that waiting eight hours for medical care is untenable. So it has big knock-on effects for the surrounding communities of large municipalities.

That says nothing to the smaller rural municipalities that see frequent closures in their ER departments. You know, you could be rolling up and be totally shocked on your summer holidays if you had a medical emergency while camping or quadding or ATVing, and then you find out that the hospital that you need for life-saving care is closed because it cannot be staffed. Our privatization of health care does not improve staffing in our public system. It does not improve these closures in rural ER departments. It does not help in the cities who struggle with long wait times.

4:50

I've been in the ER department with my boys. You know, children are prone to injury. It's just part of growing up. I listened to a really great book that talked about how public health care improves childhood because no longer does their playtime result in gigantic medical bills for the parent. Imagine your child fell out of a tree, because that's just what happens, and broke their arm. Is that now a $10,000 family medical expense? This is the kind of outcome that we are seeking to prevent with this private member's bill, that we do not want accidents and childhood to bankrupt families.

It's unavoidable that kids are going to get hurt, whether it's getting stitches at the hockey game or breaking an arm while bicycling or whatever it might be. Even when wearing a helmet – the most recent time that my son went to the emergency department, he was wearing his helmet and fell on his scooter and had a huge gash in his forehead. We waited four hours to talk to a physician. When we were finally in there, the treatment plan was pretty straightforward: we're going to stitch him up. So they administered local anaesthetic. The problem is that the doctor that administered the anaesthetic and the doctor who completed the stitches were two different individuals, and while they waited for – actually, no. It was the same individual. When they left and waited for the anaesthetic to set in, they were helping another patient because they're worked off their feet.

Now, by the time they came back, the anaesthetic had reached its peak point of efficacy and then was beginning to wane. So as they started to do stitches, there were protests of pain from my nine-year-old: "This hurts. I can feel this." Getting stabbed with a tiny needle in the eyebrow would be unsettling for an adult, let alone a nine-year-old. So the physician had to administer anaesthetic again, and again we completed the same routine where the physician leaves the room because they're run off their feet and by the time they came back, again the anaesthetic was waning. This created a cascading level of intervention, where the final anaesthetic that was given was much, much more powerful than the two previous iterations. Now, this isn't because the previous two iterations of anaesthetic didn't work but because the medical practitioners were so overloaded with work that they couldn't keep up with the demands placed in front of them.

That gap in delivering of care showed up in the life of a nine-year-old child. The gaps that are created by how health care is being treated right now in this province will show up in the lives of children, of seniors, of the chronically disabled, and of the everyday Albertan. As they have accidents and injuries in their life, they will feel first-hand the enormous gaps that are in our health care system, and none of them will say: I just wish we had private health care so I could pay out of pocket for my injury. None of them will say: I'm so glad that I got to pay $10,000 to get my chronic illness treated.

When I was undergoing cancer diagnosis, I was given a timeline of three weeks to get an MRI done to determine what the heck I even had. I had siblings that said, "You know, you could just pay a thousand bucks and get an MRI tomorrow, and we could have this answer right now." What a terrible situation to be in. Do you have to pay a thousand bucks to get timely medical care in this province? Under many of the changes that are happening from this government, the answer is yes.

I've met many folks who are waiting 18 months. You know, they might be retired and they have a problem with their knee. They've worked their whole lives, and now they finally saved up enough to retire . . .

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

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is with great pleasure I stand and talk about protecting public health care today. When I go out to speak to constituents in the community, the most common thing I hear is the concern over the state of our health care here in Alberta. Calgary-Edgemont constituents are routinely disappointed with the UCP government's decision to pursue a two-tiered health care system. Lately I have been thrilled, especially over the summer, to tell them that, you know, we're going to get a provincial election soon and that the Alberta NDP has a plan, that an Alberta NDP will deliver better publicly funded health care for all Albertans.

I thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity for her extensive work on the future of health care, that you can read on the albertandp.ca website, seeing what we will do once we form government. As well, I really need to thank the Member for Edmonton-Glenora for bringing forward this very important private member's bill to protect public health care.

The UCP's American-style two-tiered health care undermines access. It's going to pull resources out of Alberta's public health care system, and it's going to lead to longer wait times and poor health outcomes.

I cannot support the UCP's health privatization agenda. I don't think most people – well, nobody on our side of the House supports that. It's just another MAGA agenda, and I know that my constituents of Calgary-Edgemont as well do not support this. To Albertans and to constituents of Calgary-Edgemont: who would like shorter wait times for surgeries and in emergency departments? Hands up. Would you like to have access to a family doctor? Guess what? The Alberta NDP has a plan for a better health care system that works for all, a future in health care for all Albertans. Calgary-Edgemont, I promise you that an Alberta NDP will stop the UCP's creep towards American-style privatization of health care.

The UCP decided to privatize health care, but I don't remember that that was one of the campaign promises in the last election. In fact, I'm very sure Albertans heard the Premier say that under no circumstance will any Albertan ever have to pay out of pocket to see their family doctor or to get the medical treatment that they need. But here we are. Albertans are paying out of pocket for medically necessary care.

Regardless of your income, where you live, your personal circumstances, you should have access to health care services. Albertans who can afford to pay or who have private health care insurance are now able to skip those long wait times, making it harder on the public system. Meanwhile Albertans who cannot afford to pay out of their pocket are going to be waiting for those surgeries. It is thanks to the UCP, now having this unequal access to health care based on ability to pay. An Alberta NDP will protect universal access to health care services. We're going to strengthen public confidence in Alberta's health care system.

Health care advocates, medical professionals, and the federal government have raised concerns that the Alberta's dual practice system could undermine access to publicly funded health care. It's going to worsen our wait times. It's going to create unequal access based on the ability to pay. Doctors and nurses, health care workers, validated the bill. UNA, AUPE, CUPE, Friends of Medicare, physicians all stood to say that they support this bill.

Bill 214 would amend the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. It would reverse UCP changes that enable privatization of Alberta's public system. This bill is giving the UCP an off-ramp for the destruction that we are seeing in our public health care system. You can take the off-ramp right now, and we can just all sit down and save public health care.

Albertans can count on the Alberta NDP to fix what this UCP government has broken. We will build a better public health care system. The Alberta NDP has got our plan, our future health care plan for us to go and fix public health care.

To the many, many people that wrote my office – a letter from Shannon.

> Premier, you promised to fix Alberta health care in 90 days. It's been nearly five years and we're still waiting. Rather than increase the number of hospitals, beds, health care providers, all you've done is made it easier for the wealthy to access surgeries, diagnostics, and care. That's not fixing health care. That's pandering to a small base, something you've proven as at. Just a quick reminder that the middle and the lower classes also require health care. Call an election.

I think, Shannon, that I can let you know a lot of people would like that election to be called as well.

As well, I appreciated the letter from Susan.

> Instead of spending public dollars on our public systems, we've wasted money on privatization experiments that didn't work. Please put an end to this chaotic restructuring and privatization schemes and stabilize our public health care system now. Continuing to undermine it is insulting, expensive, and it's dangerous.

Susan, many people in Calgary-Edgemont and Alberta agree with that statement as well.

> I also just wanted to quickly say that frankly, you know, dual practice is going to kill universal public health care.

Alison, thank you as well for your e-mail of detail to me.

Once again, the bill is giving the UCP an off-ramp for the destruction of our public health care system.

5:00

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Oil and Gas Tax Liability

515. Member Ellingson moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly
(a) acknowledge that
(i) municipalities and taxpayers across the province continue to bear the financial burden of outstanding property tax and lease payments owed to them by oil and gas companies, and
(ii) unpaid property taxes of oil and gas companies have resulted in a taxation deficit to municipalities of hundreds of millions of dollars,
(b) recognize that actions taken by the government and the Alberta Energy Regulator have to date insufficiently

addressed the issue of outstanding property taxes and lease payments of oil and gas companies, and

(c) urge the government to

(i) engage with municipal and industry stakeholders to address the issue of outstanding tax and lease payments,

(ii) ensure consistency in the application of the Alberta Energy Regulator's rules and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that overdue property taxes are paid and that no new wells may be granted to an oil or gas company that has exceeded the allowable tax liability limit, and

(iii) reduce red tape within the Land and Property Rights Tribunal to ensure that private citizens to whom oil and gas companies owe lease payments are paid in full in a timely manner.

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

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and speak to Motion 515.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, for years municipalities have been calling on the government to work with oil and gas operators to pay their municipal taxes. A report prepared by the Rural Municipalities of Alberta notes that more than $250 million was owed to municipalities across the province in 2025.

Let's put that into perspective for everyone. In the most recent '26-27 budget, approximately $800 million in capital funding was allocated to municipalities. All municipalities. It is fair to say that rural municipalities likely received no more than one-third of this funding, which would be approximately $250 million. The municipal taxes owed to rural municipalities by oil and gas operators is equivalent to a year of provincial grants for infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, that is significant. Imagine what it would be like for the members opposite to receive only half of their salary for the year. That's what we've been doing to rural municipalities. Over the course of the last year this government has forced rural municipalities to operate with one arm tied behind their back, with only half of the revenue they could have received.

Now, before getting too far into this debate, the government is going to tell us that we don't know what we're talking about because just a couple of weeks ago a ministerial order accompanied by an AER bulletin, 2026-46: oil and gas operators seeking a new licence or seeking to transfer their licence to another operator must be in good standing with respect to their municipal taxes. This is in response to the recommendations found in the March 2026 property tax accountability strategy report, their working group. In part, that report recommended clarity on the definition of "good standing" with respect to property taxes owing. The AER bulletin defines good standing as not owing more than $5,000. Mr. Speaker, why is that threshold higher than zero? If anyone in this Chamber was owing $5,000 in municipal property taxes, I don't think that their municipality would consider them to be in good standing.

Let's also remind the members opposite that this UCP government made a weak attempt to address this issue in 2023, setting that same bar for good standing at $20,000: completely ineffective because the RMA reported municipalities were owed $250 million in 2025 after that 2023 rule came into place. In March of 2025 a survey by RMA said that the problem was not improving, that over 200 companies remained active that owed more than $100 million. Red Deer county essentially gave up, writing down taxes owed in excess of $1 million. Clearly the government has failed on this file. Oil and gas operators continue their business without paying their municipal taxes. The property tax accountability strategy also recommended that property taxes be a condition to hold or maintain an AER licence. The AER bulletin does not address that recommendation. The bulletin applies to companies seeking a new licence or seeking to transfer their licence to another operator.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come for the government to take real meaningful action on this file. It is inexcusable that an operating company earning revenue from a producing well continues to operate without paying their municipal taxes. Why didn't Ministerial Order 086/2026 and subsequent AER bulletin 2026-46 apply the recommendation from the working group and make property tax payment a condition of holding or maintaining an AER licence? Why was the definition of "good standing" set at $5,000? "Good standing" should mean that taxes have been paid in full. It should apply to all companies, not just those companies seeking a new licence or seeking to transfer their licence.

Payment of municipal property taxes, Mr. Speaker, is only part of this story. Oil and gas operators also owe landowners surface rights payments. Earlier this year the government also created the Surface Rights Advisory Panel. That panel has yet to issue a report or offer recommendations. However, the Alberta Surface Rights Federation did write to the Premier on November 12, 2026, in a letter titled Surface Rights, the Mature Asset Strategy, and the Alberta Government's Failure to Address the Consequences of Energy Development. In that letter they discuss the historic grand bargain that required landowners to accommodate energy infrastructure, access they cannot refuse, in return for fair compensation. Why does the government continue to fail landowners on this file?

According *to The Tyee,* in 2025 the Land and Property Rights Tribunal issued more than 3,100 direction-to-pay orders of approximately $23 million in surface lease payments owed to landowners; 3,100 issuances for $23 million. Investigations found that almost 500 companies had unpaid lease obligations in 2025. I might note that the ministerial order and AER bulletin does not address surface landowners and those lease obligations. Those unpaid obligations, Mr. Speaker, are transferred to taxpayers. So, Albertans, if you're listening or reading *Hansard,* you should know that those taxes covered almost $50 million in unpaid lease obligations from delinquent oil and gas operators in fiscal year 2025-26.

Mr. Speaker, in the last year oil has averaged over $90 a barrel. Operators are making record profits. Landowners are owed fair compensation for access to their land, which again they cannot deny. They must give that access. And they were supposed to be paid lease obligations for that access. Alberta taxpayers shouldn't be on the hook for those obligations. Oil and gas operators should make good on their lease commitments. They should also be making good on their environmental commitments. This motion responds to what municipalities are asking for and what surface landowners are asking for. The ministerial orders to date have not. The AER bulletins to date have not. Municipalities are asking for this just compensation. Landowners are asking for this just compensation. This motion is going to help them get there, that municipalities be paid, landowners be paid, and that taxpayers in Alberta are not on the hook for it.

5:10

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and speak on this excellent private member's motion 515, unpaid oil and gas property taxes.

At this moment I'd like – of course, we are in the Chamber, so don't take this literally, but pour one out for the responsible oil and gas operators out there who, frankly and honestly, comprise the vast majority of oil and gas operators. Most operators are responsible. Most operators enter into agreements with the full intention of keeping them, fulfilling their obligations on them, including property taxes and lease payments to landowners. Most operators are, in fact, responsible, good stewards of their assets, good stewards of the land, have a commitment to properly abandon wells when their economic life is complete, and follow the law and follow the regulations, which is why it's especially absurd to me that this government allows the small set of irresponsible operators to dominate the conversation in this way.

I remember asking the Municipal Affairs minister at the time last year: "Hey, look. Like, there are a lot of unpaid property taxes in the oil and gas file. What do you think is reasonable here?" His answer was that if any of us don't pay our taxes, we can expect to go to jail. If any of us don't pay our taxes, we can expect to see, you know, the strong arm of the government showing up at our door and suggesting first gently and then less gently that maybe that's something that we ought to do. Ultimately companies that don't pay their business taxes, that don't pay the property tax that they owe, are ultimately not going to be in business very much longer. In fact, there are sometimes provisions that hold boards of directors and officers personally liable for those obligations.

I am mystified why, for the benefit of the worst actors in the space, this government is bending over backwards to allow them to default on their obligations. It's pretty bad. We're talking about hundreds of millions of dollars that this government is not collecting from oil and gas operators, the least responsible oil and gas operators, by the way, certainly the smallest set of them, who are failing to do the most basic thing, which is to pay their property tax bill.

Money is fungible. It's like a balloon, right? You poke in one place; it pops out in the other. Money that doesn't come from oil and gas property taxes, well, that has to be paid by other people. In Calgary-Elbow property taxes have gone up by an average of over $500 this year, $500 last year. For what?

Well, $50 million held in the hands of a Turkish Tylenol guy just for walking around money: government's not getting that. Hundreds of millions of dollars in unpaid oil and gas taxes: the government's not getting that. Why do the constituents of Calgary-Elbow have to pay more because of deadbeat companies that aren't paying their property taxes? Why is that okay?

I'm a little old school. Sometimes I get a tax bill from the federal government and it's got a provincial tax on there, too. My income tax. I file my return. I get what that number is, and sometimes, you know – actually, every time. Every time I have looked at that number, I decided that I didn't like that number very much. I strictly prefer that number to be less rather than more, but I've never once written a letter to CRA saying: "Yeah. So, do me a solid. Can you do me a solid and, like, you know, instead of this number allow me to pay a certain lower number?" Because that would be crazy. It would be a crazy person who would write a letter like that. Even more nuts would be if I had just said: "You know what? I'm going to test the system. I'm going to see how long it takes them to come after me for not paying my taxes."

Member Miyashiro: Good luck.

Member Kayande: Yeah. From the Member for Lethbridge-West, he offered me some life advice: good luck with that.

Member Ellingson: About six weeks.

Member Kayande: Yeah. It comes at you pretty fast, and you know what? The CRA, if I'm a big enough jerk about it, can actually go into my bank account and just take the money out. They can do that. For some reason – for some bizarre reason – this government is not requiring deadbeat companies to pay their property taxes, and I can't figure out for the life of me why they would do that.

There's no good answer as to why, in a world where $500 million of our health budget now goes to paying 11 or 14 CEOs when there used to be one, when the bureaucratic bloat, the $10,000 cab rides, the $5,000 bourbon tours, and the $500,000 red carpets, and like the insane amount of crazy spending in this government that goes on, and oh yeah, the $50 million that the Turkish Tylenol guy has for walking around money, when constituents of Calgary-Elbow and residents of Calgary are seeing their property taxes go up by $500 a year. How does this go around? How is it possible that this government is failing taxpayers so much that it's just going to a bunch of guys who, you know, owe $250 million in property taxes: "Like, don't worry about it. I know you're good for it. Let's talk next year."?

Not only do we have companies that are avoiding paying their property taxes, it impacts rural municipalities disproportionately. That part of the conversation, you see, the Member for Calgary-Foothills spoke very ably. He spoke very well on how important it is to municipal budgets that these property taxes be paid because the level of services that oil and gas development requires has an infrastructure burden. You need roads for that. You need pipelines. You need other additional equipment. You need emergency response. You need a communications facility. You need all of these things in a, you know, relatively small municipality.

That's why the property tax exists, to alleviate the public burden of some of these private assets. It's part of the grand bargain. It's part of the social contract. When deadbeats can just walk away from that obligation, well, the obligation doesn't go away. There are still emergency services that . . .

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

5:20

Member Miyashiro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] Thank you to my colleague for cheering me when I speak. You know, listening to my colleagues speak about this, I get inspiration from their analogies and how they want to, you know, just make the comparisons that people understand. I want to impress upon the people in this House that actually served on a municipal council, who should fully understand what happens when a municipality doesn't have the amount of money that it needs to run. These are the things that we've talked about today already – fire services and ambulance and things like that – right?

When we have so much owing to municipalities in unpaid property tax, it puts a burden on everything in that community: recreation facilities, roads, bridges, underground wastewater, water treatment, all of that stuff. One of my colleagues talked about the fact that there is about $250 million owed in unpaid oil and gas taxes to rural municipalities. Just think about that. The rural municipalities have an infrastructure deficit in the billions. They can't pay for that on their own and they need help from the government, and this government is not giving them the assistance they need to upgrade the infrastructure that they require to actually just function.

You know, my colleague from Calgary just talked about not paying your taxes to the CRA and seeing what would happen. I said to him: good luck with that. Could we withhold our provincial sales tax portion even? Could we do that?

Member Kayande: Income tax.

Member Miyashiro: The provincial income tax, absolutely. Can we do that and see what happens there? We'd go to jail.

You know, this also illustrates a bigger problem that we have with the oil and gas companies that aren't paying tax because it's like whack-a-mole. You have company A. They go under or they're going under and Company B buys them, and then all of a sudden after three transactions we don't know who that original company was that owed the property tax.

I'll talk about, in a second, that the government and the AER are actually trying to look at this to try to help, but that's part of the problem, right? You have all this whack-a-mole going on within the sector, and it's something that needs to be looked at in addition to this. If we keep allowing those companies to keep doing this and hiding who they are and hiding their assets and shuffling off their oil and gas properties to the municipalities, this is going to keep happening because we're not going to be able to catch up fast enough to those oil and gas companies.

Now, I know the government came out with an order the other day, a ministerial order, you know, that says that we're not going to license people if they have property tax in arrears over $5,000, which is fine. It's a good start. Let's be clear. I mean, five grand is not zero, but it's a good start, seeing that there have been companies that have had in the hundreds of thousands of dollars in arrears to various municipalities. Same company, but because of this lack of a system to co-ordinate that company throughout a variety of different municipalities, that company owed money all over the province until it was finally shut down, I think, last month. That's something else that this government needs to work on, too, that kind of oversight.

Let's think of something about this unpaid property tax. It also means that we're not collecting the education portion of that property tax. Although the government has put in some, I don't know, tax benefits or tax breaks – I can't remember the actual name of it. It's to enable municipalities to pay that, and then get a bit back, but it's a finite amount, right? It's not unlimited, and we need, really, to not just do that. We need to go after the companies, and you need a better system to track who these companies are and a better system to understand where they're going and who they become. Right? So, did they become this person or this company or this company? Track them that way.

The other problem that municipalities are having is that they're reluctant to write down these bad debts because there's this big hope that these companies might actually become solvent someday and repay the debt. The big problem with that, that some of the people in this room might understand that were on municipal councils, is that those delinquent properties stay on your tax rolls, which means they're included in how you're determining what your tax rate is going to be and where your property tax is going to be collected.

If you have a bunch of those properties in your municipality and you can't collect with them, you automatically have a deficit for those properties. So you're starting in a hole because the poor people doing their accounting are like: "Okay. We have this much value, but we're only going to collect this much because those guys over there aren't going to pay." Immediately your mill rate goes up because you guys are paying for those guys that aren't going to pay, but they're still on the books, right? I think that's something that that needs to be addressed as well.

There's been a working group for property tax accountability, and they've looked at, you know: how do we do the revenue shortfalls, and how do we deal with operational and administrative issues and reduced infrastructure and service capacity? All those issues related to it: they're looking at them, but they're not really coming up with a lot of solutions right now because there's such a big issue that they're all having to deal with.

You know, the president of the RMA a couple of years ago before the property tax accountability strategy group was formed recognized that the government had some good efforts to address this, but the problem keeps getting worse.

> Year after year, rural municipalities present clear, documented, and verifiable evidence that oil and gas companies are willfully . . .

That's the key word, Mr. Speaker. Wilfully.

> . . . avoiding their property tax responsibilities . . . [and] year after year, this issue persists due to a lack of proper industry regulation and accountability. While other property owners across the province face stringent penalties for non-payment,

perhaps my colleague over here,

> oil and gas companies continue to take advantage of legislative and policy gaps.

The president of the RMA continued:

> Tweaks to the system have not worked. It is time for government to dedicate the time and resources needed to work with RMA and other stakeholders to solve this issue . . .
>
> Unpaid property taxes are a pervasive issue that extends far beyond just a few isolated cases. This problem is widespread, with responsibility falling on companies across the industry and impacting municipalities on a significant scale.

She continues by saying:

> It is crucial that we recognize the scope of this challenge; it is a [systematic] problem with how the industry is regulated and held accountable, [and] that requires immediate attention and collaborative action to resolve."

So the government came out with a ministerial order. Good way to start. The AER put out a bulletin on Friday that re-explains the government ministerial order so that other people can understand. It goes into a little bit more detail, but you know what? It doesn't get rid of that giant deficit that's there. I think that the biggest problem with anything trying to address delinquent oil and gas property taxes is: who's going to pay for the stuff that's already owed? I mean, the minister of energy's own constituency has the worst delinquency in the whole province. I don't know if they care or what it is. Like, I think it's over $18 million or something like that, which is kind of interesting – right? – kind of funny.

You know who else is noticing this, Mr. Speaker? Farmers. Farmers are noticing that oil companies are getting a property tax break that they're not getting. My office in Lethbridge got an e-mail from a farmer because they're tired of it.

5:30

Let me read this to you. This is an e-mail from a farmer.

> My farm taxes are going up, yet across Alberta, rural municipalities are collectively owed hundreds of millions of dollars in unpaid oil and gas property taxes involving nearly 600 delinquent corporations.
>
> There are also significant lost revenues from well infrastructure that is either not being assessed or is exempt from taxation.
>
> Why are farmers and other rural property owners being asked to pay more while so much potential tax revenue goes uncollected?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Truly it's a pleasure to speak to this. I do want to just talk a little bit about what energy companies currently do as well for our communities. Also, at the same time I want to talk about municipalities and communities and what they operate and how oil companies engage with them as well.

Just to start off, many of the oil companies support our communities through various grants and also various ways forward. Not just jobs, but also they do a lot of work in our communities. It does feel that this is a little heavy handed from the opposition.

I do want to just give a shout-out. Our energy industry is important and many of them are incredible companies who are both paying their taxes and are also helping support the community and supporting our nonprofits as well. Mr. Speaker, we are holding these companies to account, too, and we do believe in action, not just in hot air motions like the opposition that are behind the times. They're just trying to get their social media clips. They want us just to be able to look terrible, but the reality is that if the NDP had been paying attention, they would know that we are already taking action on everything that this motion asks for.

I do want to say the vast majority – the vast majority – of energy companies are amazing partners for Albertans and are great partners. We're not talking about 50 per cent of companies. We're not talking about 60 per cent of companies. We're not even talking about 70 per cent of companies. We're talking in the vicinity of 99 per cent and more of the energy companies that are great partners for municipalities and are great neighbours to our nonprofits and the surrounding communities. They do their part, these over 99 per cent. They pay their taxes, they pay their royalties, and they take care of the environment around them as well. They employ people from the region and across Alberta and, interestingly, they both invest in the community but they also hire people from across Canada, which is fantastic.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are bad actors. Let's not deny the 1 per cent we're talking about here. It is important to note that the overwhelming amount is attributed to a small amount of companies in bankruptcy. These companies, to be frank, Mr. Speaker, are not coming out of bankruptcy. Also energy companies in Alberta do pay significant amounts of tax. They are paying roughly $1.8 billion a year in property taxes, not just royalties. That's far more than that. Not just business tax but about $1.8 billion a year in property taxes. Over the last six years that's over $10 billion that was paid to municipalities across the provinces by the energy industry. That's a significant amount of dollars.

Once again, I do agree that when municipalities are counting dollars coming in that don't come in, it can have a major impact on their budgets and on the taxpayers in the future. This is also why the ministries of Energy and Minerals and Municipal Affairs sat down with the Alberta Energy Regulator and Rural Municipalities of Alberta and developed the property tax accountability strategy. This strategy increases penalties on bad actors, adds tools for collection for municipalities, and greater authority to the AER for enforcement. Once again, we're ahead of the game, Mr. Speaker. These are things we've already done, and we're looking continually to the future to how to protect the Alberta taxpayer.

Now I just want to pinpoint a couple of facts. The old limit was $20,000 for a limit on tax arrears and applied only to wells. The new limit is $5,000 max, and it now covers wells, the facilities, and pipelines. In this conversation we do need to continue talking with the federal government to prioritize the repayment of property taxes when a company does become insolvent and to speed up energy and solvency procedures as well.

Now, this is also designed to stop that tab from ticking up higher. Much of the big figure being thrown around is belonging to companies that went bankrupt quite a while ago. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, we're not going to be able to get blood from a stone. We can't go backwards in time, but we are fixing the future here as well. We are encouraging the parties to come together and work together and collect those taxes.

Now, this is one of the interesting parts for me, one of the major parts of our mature asset strategy, and one of the very first of the 25 recommendations made that we acted on in that strategy. We have also added and strengthened protections for landowners and surface rights holders to ensure they are paid what they are owed, have a fair and independent place to resolve disputes, and they are never left holding the bill when a well reaches the end of life.

Now, once again, the success of the energy industry and the oil and gas industry depends on a strong relationship between industry and landowners, and so we're building upon that. One of the key recommendations of the mature asset strategy was to establish a Surface Rights Advisory Panel. This panel will help identify issues and recommend improvements that we can make as well. This brings together landowners, municipalities, agriculture, and industry. This government has also taken steps to establish the Surface Rights Board to restore a dedicated process to resolve disputes over compensation and access to land in a fair and timely manner.

Now, recently we tabled Bill 42 that, if passed – we're currently discussing it – would establish a resource asset closure assurance and stewardship fund. It's a really long title for what is a closure fund or orphan well cleanup fund, but in this case there won't be any more orphan wells because there's going to be a fund attached to the well. Every single new well that will be drilled has a fund that is attached to that on the day that it is drilled, and under this legislation, every new well drilled in Alberta will be required to have $50,000 set aside for it the first year, and then followed by annual contributions over the next decade. Now, this fund per well will also be able to compound interest, so this will raise the fund over several years. Once again, this is responsible cleanup, and also tying it to the individual well. This is the first of its kind in the world, and no matter how many times that this well changes hands, that fund goes with that well. This will ensure that wells are cleaned up and also paid for by industry.

Interestingly, even the Pembina Institute, the former home of the opposition's own energy critic, called the closure fund an important and positive step. Mr. Speaker, it's time for, really, the NDP to catch up and start bringing forward ideas that aren't just of the past. We've already fixed all of these things and looking forward for them to pay attention to what this government is doing. For that reason and many others I do not support this motion, but looking forward to continuing hearing debate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of Sherwood Park, the hamlet of champions.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to some of the speakers on the other side of the House, through you to them. We just passed emergency services volunteer tax credits. All members just passed a private member's bill, all sides of the House in committee. Passing Motion 515 will compel the Alberta government to take real action on the issues of outstanding tax and lease payments. The only reason this government would not join the Alberta NDP in passing this motion is because they will refuse to be held accountable for anything.

I listened to the member's debate from the other side, but the only thing I heard is that if he's not willing to pass this motion, he's unwilling to be held accountable for what this motion would compel the government to do, which is to take real action on the payments that are outstanding to municipalities and to landowners. You already have 17 recommendations from the Property Tax Accountability Strategy Working Group to implement, so vote for

this motion and tell the world that you are going to implement it. Be held accountable for the working group that wants to take action and give those recommendations for what should be done to make sure that people pay their bills and Albertans do not have to pick up the tab for unpaid property taxes and for unpaid leases.

Maybe enough has been said about property taxes. Maybe I'll jump ahead, Mr. Speaker, to the challenge that is being dealt with by landowners. Now, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers is very clear. Their position on this matter is really clear. All companies should meet their financial obligation to municipalities and landowners. They employ Albertans, support local businesses, and contribute enormously to our economy. In fact, those responsible companies are just as frustrated as municipalities and landowners because when one company refuses to pay its bill, it creates an unfair playing field for the companies that do. Why should a responsible operator have to compete with a company that is effectively receiving an interest-free loan from the municipality and from taxpayers?

5:40

Let's dig into the taxpayer bit a little bit. Why should a company that pays its bills be disadvantaged by a competitor that doesn't? There's simply no justification for that, Mr. Speaker, just as there's no justification for not passing a motion in this House, which is a simple statement to say: we're going to do this; we're going to take care of this.

When we talk about reaching beyond a municipality, it reaches into the fields, farms, and ranches of Alberta. Thousands of Albertans have entered into surface lease agreements with oil and gas companies. They allow companies to occupy their land, install infrastructure, and develop the resources underneath it. In return, they are entitled to compensation. That compensation recognizes the loss of the use of their land and the disruption that industrial development creates, but what happens when the company stops paying? The landowner is left chasing what they are legally entitled to receive. They call the Farmers' Advocate office. It has documented the companies attempting to unilaterally reduce annual surface lease payments.

As the Member for Calgary-Elbow was mentioning, sometimes the companies just say: we're not going to pay as much as we used to, and we think we can get away with that. You know, sometimes they're claiming economic hardship as the beginning of the reason why they're justifying this, but imagine being a farmer who has entered into an agreement with an energy company. You've allowed that company to use your property, you've made accommodations for its operations, and then one day a letter arrives telling you that the company has decided your compensation is going to be reduced, or perhaps cheques simply stop arriving. That's not a partnership, that's not treating rural Albertans with respect, and it's certainly not honouring an agreement.

In November 2025 an investigation reported on landowners who had stopped receiving surface lease payments from companies. They found five landowners that collectively said that they were owed approximately $40,000. One landowner was owed more than $17,000 for wells on her property, and the company's vice-president acknowledged in an e-mail that the company had been unable to pay landowners and other vendors for many months. What was the company suggesting? That landowners should apply to the provincial government to get their money.

Think about that, Mr. Speaker. A private company fails to pay its obligations and directing landowners to the provincial government to get reimbursed with taxpayer money. When asked about that arrangement, the landowner made a statement that I think deserves to be heard in this Assembly. She said: I'm paying myself. That is what happens when we allow private companies to shift their financial responsibility onto the public. The landowner is a taxpayer. The provincial government uses taxpayer money to cover the company's obligations, and the landowner is effectively helping finance the payment of a debt that should never have been theirs to begin with.

There are other troubling parts of this story because it's probably been mentioned that the Alberta Energy Regulator has approved the transfer of 170 wells, 30 facilities, and 47 pipelines licensed to MAGA Energy in September '24 despite that company's documented financial difficulties and inability to pay surface rights payments. The company was subsequently restricted from acquiring additional licences in 2025 because it failed to meet annual liability spending quotas. It raises serious questions about how companies are assessed before they're allowed to take on additional wells and obligations.

We're asking for some accountability, and we're asking for all sides of this House to take that step to say: we're going to be accountable to make sure that landowners are not shorted anymore. The government has recognized that they have their 17 recommendations from the working group with the Rural Municipalities Association. Take the responsibility to implement those.

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