



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 27, 2024

Day 74

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
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Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),
Deputy Premier
Elmeligi, Sarah, Banff-Kananaskis (NDP)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP),
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Official Opposition House Leader
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
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Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
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(UC)
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(UC)
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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
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Deputy Government House Leader
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Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC)
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Lethbridge-West

Party standings:

United Conservative: 49

New Democrat: 37

Vacant: 1

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Wright, J.

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Standing Committee on Private Bills

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Bouchard
Ceci
Deol
Dyck
Hayter
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Sigurdson, L.
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Deputy Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Sabir

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 27, 2024

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: 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 ideas but, laying aside all private interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there introductions today? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce two amazing constituents of mine from Cypress-Medicine Hat, Sarah MacKenzie, board chair of the Medicine Hat College, and Kevin Shufflebotham, president of the Medicine Hat College. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington may have a school group to introduce.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I sure do. I'd love to welcome Simons Valley grade 6s and their teachers: Frank Moeller, Jason Chong, Erin Brophy, Karen Rath. The kids and I decided the bus ride up was the best part of the tour. This might top it. Can you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has an introduction.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you the AUPE Political Action Committee attendees from Edmonton, St. Albert, Calgary, and Grande Prairie: James Gault, vice-president; Nellie Alcaraz; Elaine Cairns; Paulette Gillespie; Bruce Macdonald; and Jennifer Power, and my colleague will introduce the others. Please rise and receive the welcome of the House.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly job creators, friends: Bryce Parsons, Bryan Anderson, Jordan Ramey, Charlie Bredo, and Chelsea Mandrusiak of the Alberta Craft Distillers Association. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka is next.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Steve Christie. Steve is a government relations manager for Alberta and the prairies for Canadian Standards Association, based right here in Edmonton. He's a former mayor of the city of Lacombe as well as former board member for both Alberta Munis and FCM. More importantly, Steve is the husband of my amazing constituency office manager, Cheryl Christie. Please rise, Steve, and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you three constituents – Michael Phair, former city councillor; Guy Milner; and Grant Cameron – here today to witness the tabling of a petition they brought forward encouraging the government to recognize the harm that will be caused by their antitrans legislation. I invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you Nancy Bishay, the director of communications in the Department of Tourism and Sport. Nancy is moving on to other things, but we were lucky to have her for the last 18 months, and I'm lucky to call her a friend. One might ask: what grass is greener than Tourism and Sport? But she's clearly found it, and we wish her all the best in her new endeavours. We ask you to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you. I'd like to introduce Sparrow Rundvall. Sparrow lost her father, Devon, in October. Devon had been the president for Edmonton's Canadian Union of Postal Workers, and he dedicated his life to advocating for the rights and well-being of his fellow workers. We join Sparrow and her family in mourning Devon, her father, and ask her to rise. Please welcome her to the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has an introduction.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce some additional members of the AUPE Political Action Committee who are attending the gallery this afternoon. I'd like to ask, as I say their name, for them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House: Laura Sadler, James Sullivan, Zoey Jones, Tammy Tangedal, Javier Reyes. Please rise.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none.

Members' Statements

Federal Oil and Gas Emissions Cap

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, yesterday our government announced its bold plan to stand up against Ottawa's dangerous oil and gas production cap and stop it from ever being implemented here in Alberta. The proposed cap will result in production cuts of at least 1 million barrels a day in Alberta while devastating our economy. Multiple reports have also exposed this production cap as a job killer, effectively killing over 150,000 jobs. This is the most damaging federal policy since the national energy program. Alberta needs to fight back.

However, it should come as no surprise to anyone in this House that the seatless leader of the Alberta NDP will cave to his bosses in Ottawa rather than fight for Albertans. Nenshi believes Alberta should just compromise to Ottawa's radical agenda of production cuts and reckless energy transitions, all to avoid a fight he will always run away from. Albertans should take notice. The NDP just wants to go along to get along. That's their plan even if it means killing tens of thousands of jobs, hurting families, and leading Alberta into economic and societal decline. This is pathetic, and quite frankly it's shameful. This is why Nenshi will always be known as Trudeau's choice for Alberta.

Justin Trudeau and Steven Guilbeault can always count on the NDP to sit down instead of stand up for Alberta. In 2015 the NDP

rolled out the red carpet for Justin Trudeau when they announced their costly carbon tax on Alberta families and businesses. Like we saw with other NDP leaders, Nenshi just doesn't care about the effects these federal policies have on the people. The Alberta NDP will never stand up to Ottawa's ridiculous agenda to shut down fossil fuels; instead, they will work alongside them no matter the cost to Albertans. The members opposite need to abandon the Liberal playbook of playing politics with people's lives. Enough is enough. We already have one Trudeau to deal with in Ottawa; we don't need another one here in Alberta.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Member Eremenko: Just a few weeks ago the UCP said that the solution to the affordability crisis is a job. Mr. Speaker, this is the kind of ableist, ageist, oversimplified rhetoric that is leaving more and more Albertans behind. Albertans like Tom, who's worked hard all his life, with a high school education, in low-skilled work but who now, due to chronic pain, can't work a full day like he used to. He finally became poor enough to qualify for Alberta Works, a meagre \$959 per month that will now go up only 2 per cent, instead of the rate of inflation, because of the UCP's changes to indexation in Bill 32.

Albertans like Tina, who could not live and provide for her two children without AISH, a monthly base benefit of \$1,863. But when the average price for a two-bedroom rental is just shy of \$1,500, the only option for Tina to feed her family is to queue up at the food bank. Albertans like Theo, a disabled senior citizen who, after he pays for housing and utilities, has little left for transportation, food, and medication. He says: the UCP provided relief through the gas tax, but who needs gas when you can't afford to go anywhere? Does the UCP think Theo should just get a job?

These are real stories from constituents in Calgary-Currie, Mr. Speaker, and I could go on: students trying to get a degree so they have better job prospects, but they're terrified of taking on more debt; parents with jobs not sure about what's going under the Christmas tree this year; workers with not one or two but three jobs just to make ends meet; young people with no potential to save for that elusive down payment. Clearly, the UCP know the price of everything is going up; they just voted in favour of a 14 per cent increase to their living allowance. On this side of the aisle, Mr. Speaker, we are not going to tell hundreds of thousands of seniors and AISH recipients that the only option they have to address the cost-of-living increases is to update their resumés.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has a statement to make.

Automobile Insurance Reform

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A lot has been said on auto insurance lately in this province. Our government has engaged in summits, surveys, meetings to hear thousands of Albertans on this topic. The conversations have been long; a lot of information has entered the public discourse. So let's put to bed some of the misinformation and look at the facts today if we can.

Our government is introducing a privately delivered care-first system in January 2027. What does care first mean? Well, exactly as it sounds, Mr. Speaker. It means that Albertans will get the treatment and rehabilitation they need right away. Care first also provides greatly improved benefits. Under the current system patients could only receive up to 21 preapproved physiotherapy or chiropractic visits. Accident victims may only receive up to \$50,000 in treatment for two years. Under a new care-first system there will be no time

limit or cost for the medical treatment. Albertans will receive payment for as long as they need it. There will be no need to go to court and hand over at least, you know, 30 per cent to a lawyer for a settlement. If someone is catastrophically injured, there will be no time maximum limit for treatment. They'll receive income replacement, a lump-sum payment, and have the ability to sue if their costs exceed those payments.

1:40

Perhaps the greatest piece of misinformation that's being spread around about the care-first system is that bad drivers will continue to pay more in premiums. Well, at-fault drivers will continue to be at fault. They will pay higher insurance costs than good drivers with clean records. Ultimately, the care-first system will provide affordable insurance for the average Albertan, savings of \$400, with faster and better care.

We preserve choice for Albertans, Mr. Speaker, who can pick from dozens of insurance providers for their policy. We're lowering the costs and providing better and faster benefits, and that is putting care first and Albertans first and foremost.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Calgary-Bhullar-McCall Constituency Priorities

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hosted a constituency town hall the day before fall session started. There were many issues that came up.

My constituents talked about cost of living, minimum wage, economic hardships, and lack of support for small businesses. They shared their concerns about the state of health care, wait times, mental health supports, and access to health care. They talked about lack of schools, kids being bused to other quadrants, out-of-reach university tuition, and youth unemployment. They talked about issues facing seniors, their pensions, rent, housing costs, public transportation, and isolation issues. They talked about public safety, rising crime, access to legal services, police response, and police accountability. They talked about issues facing newcomers, lack of progress on foreign credentials files, training opportunities, wait times for LINC classes, and lack of public spaces for community-based programming. They also talked about connectivity issues in the northeast. They talked about the August hailstorm, rising insurance costs, and their insurance policies being discontinued, including based on underwriting eligibility criteria, and the complete absence of government support.

Mr. Speaker, many of these concerns were raised by us in this sitting, and nothing has been addressed by this UCP government. The only solution they were able to come up with is to jack up Albertans' insurance costs by another 15 per cent at a time when they can least afford it. Instead of focusing on Albertans' priorities, the UCP is busy lining their friends' and insiders' pockets, picking needless fights all around, and is completely uninterested and incapable of governing in the public interest. The UCP government is completely out of touch. Albertans deserve a government focused on them and their priorities, not political gains.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has a statement to make.

Government Achievements

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good government requires strong leaders, leaders who inspire trust to act with integrity and have the common sense to lead with purpose. Common sense isn't just a virtue in Alberta; it's a necessity. It's not enough for common sense to simply

have a seat at the table; it needs to lead it. Albertans understood this on election day in May 2023, and at the UCP AGM on November 2, 2024, I was pleased to stand with the 91.5 per cent of voters who reaffirmed this belief. The numbers don't lie. Through our Premier we have a strong leader and with her leadership a strong government. The members opposite should take note. If they truly believed in their leader, surely one of them would have stepped aside to give him a seat or at least have him run in the current by-election in Lethbridge-West, yet here we are still waiting for that moment of clarity. I'm sure they are, too.

What makes our government exceptional is its unwavering ability to stand up for Albertans. We fight against the overreach from the socialist perspectives across the aisle and those coming out of Ottawa and the extension of the NDP friends. The success of this United Conservative government comes down to one thing, staying true to the principles that built this great province – honesty, hard work, resilience, determination, and a spirit of independence – and what makes Alberta a leader in Canada and on the global stage.

This session we've introduced significant legislation that modernizes our approach and protects the rights and freedoms of Albertans. We've prioritized bills that encapsulate a variety of areas and lay a foundation for future generations: medical autonomy for adults, protection for private property owners, fair circumstances for women in sport, and access to information. That's just to name a few common-sense solutions. Our government will not back down. We will continue to fight for what's right and continue to lead with the strength and resolve Albertans deserve.

Infrastructure Planning

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has seen a significant rise in population over the last year and a half. With this increase comes the need for our infrastructure to keep up. This means building schools, hospitals, and housing, all things that our province is severely lacking because of this UCP government.

The government will tell you that they have allocated funding to this school or that hospital but have zero follow-through. A mere plan to build essential infrastructure is not enough. Albertans need more schools, more hospitals, not just the concept of them. Where are the hospitals for south Edmonton and Red Deer? Where are the schools in Alberta communities that have been waiting for more than five years?

When the government does get around to finally building infrastructure, they do it poorly. They opt for P3s that result in hospital roofings caving in, mud ditches around the schools causing kids to fall, and freezing cold classrooms in minus 20 degree weather or boiling hot classrooms with windows that cannot open. These are infrastructure plans that are supposed to cost less but never do and often go over the agreed upon timeline with no accountability.

The UCP called for people to come to Alberta but did nothing to prepare for it, and they did nothing to ensure there would be enough hospital spaces or prevent overcrowded classrooms. They did nothing to secure health care workers or teachers for the more than 200,000 people that came here.

The UCP is bad for infrastructure, and they are definitely bad for Albertans.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to section 63(2) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, section 95(2) of the Health Information Act, and section 44(2) of the Personal Information Protection Act, I'm tabling six copies of the annual report

of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for the period of April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024.

Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table an important article that just came out noting that the Premier's "new policies make all Albertan youth unsafe," referring to her suite of antitrans bills, written by two fantastic scholars, Dr. Florence Ashley and Dr. J.J. Wright. I urge all in this House and all at home watching to read this article.

Thank you.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table today the requisite copies of the evidence brief released last week by the New Zealand Ministry of Health on the impact of puberty blockers in gender-dysphoric adolescents.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table the five requisite copies of a petition put forward by Michael Phair, Guy Milner, and Grant Cameron calling on the Legislative Assembly to recognize the harm that will be caused to Albertans by this government's suite of antitrans legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with the five requisite copies of the utility bill that I referenced in my speech on MR 10.

I also have an article to point to the truth around our opposition leader in Ottawa, who is actually now going to be able to talk about foreign interference because he was given clearance.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to raise the five requisite copies of an article that I referenced yesterday in question period from the *Rocky Mountain Outlook*, which references a statement from the Ministry of Indigenous Relations.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a peer-reviewed article from a top medical journal that reports research showing that wildfire smoke exposure, even in just under three years, increases the odds of dementia by 18 per cent.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has a tabling.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the five requisite copies of the Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey, outlining the experiences of trans youth in Alberta and how if we know better, we can do better.

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling an article entitled, *An Example of How Government Delays Access to Information Requests: Pretending to not Understand Them*, written by Drew Yewchuck.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Members' Accommodation Allowance and Cost of Living

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are paying some of the fastest growing rents in the country and are scraping together every dollar to pay for rent increases, some taking on additional shifts or second jobs. But that's not the case for UCP government MLAs, who voted to give themselves a retroactive accommodations allowance hike that results in a Christmas bonus of a payment of nearly \$2,000. To the Premier: where are the \$2,000 bonuses for everyday Albertans? Does your government plan to do anything about the affordability crisis for Albertans who are not UCP MLAs?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think everyone knows that there's such a thing as reimbursement of expenses, and you have to be able to have a policy to reimburse those, especially in this job where the vast majority of MLAs come from outside of Edmonton.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, that we are very concerned about the level of housing costs, the level of rental availability, which is why the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services has worked well with the Minister of Municipal Affairs to make sure that we are building more houses, building more purpose-built rentals, making sure that we make a rental supplement available to as many people as needed.

Ms Gray: Alberta's inflation under this Premier is at 3 per cent, 50 per cent higher than the national average. Albertans are seeing their already too high auto insurance going to go up another 15.5 per cent under this Premier's latest scheme, hundreds of dollars more every single month that they just don't have. Utilities are skyrocketing. So while costs are soaring for everyday Albertans, the Premier watches, does nothing, and their MLAs give themselves a \$2,000 Christmas bonus. Albertans are appalled. When will this Premier finally worry about their financial situation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We realize that the vast majority of the MLAs opposite are from Edmonton and so do not have to travel to another jurisdiction in order to be able to do their job, but that is not the case for the vast majority of MLAs in this Legislature, who get reimbursed expenses. No one's getting a Christmas bonus; they are just getting their expenses reimbursed.

But on the affordability file we have been acting on every single front. We have reduced electricity costs year over year, now down to about 10 cents a kilowatt hour from a high of 32 cents a kilowatt hour. We're reducing auto insurance premiums, which will ultimately result in \$400 savings per year.

Ms Gray: A \$2,000 retroactive Christmas bonus, a \$270 a month top-up going forward, future increases tied to inflation; these are the things Albertans won't be getting from the Premier this holiday season. Instead, she watched as her UCP MLAs voted through a basket of Christmas goodies for themselves. Mr. Speaker, when folks from Lethbridge to Fort Chip are at their breaking point and could use a hand, why is the Premier so unwilling to do anything serious about the affordability crisis for Albertans? Raising their car insurance just to lower it later is a scheme they can see through.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're making changes to lower auto insurance. We've got the lowest personal income taxes in the country and the lowest overall taxes. We've lowered Albertans' electricity bills with the great changes being made by our electricity

minister. We are making broadband affordable for all rural Albertans. We've helped to reduce commuter costs by assisting with the low-income bus transit pass. We have a seniors' discount of 25 per cent for a whole variety of programs. We've increased and indexed senior supports, AISH, as well as the payments that we're paying to our disabilities workers. We're doing a lot.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for her second set of questions.

Sexual Health Education in Schools

Ms Gray: The current opt-out system for sex ed already ensures that parents are in the driver's seat when it comes to what their children learn. Today's parent-driven opt-out sex ed curriculum promotes healthy and safe interactions. It respects the right of parents and ensures there's choice without administrative burden. Changing to an opt-in system guarantees fewer kids will participate. The Premier's new opt-in system for sex ed creates unnecessary burden, forces busy parents to fill out forms. Why does the Premier want fewer Alberta students to learn about consent and healthy relationships?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the Chamber we believe parents have the right to choose the type of education that they want for their kids. We believe that parents have the right to be able to also include sexual orientation, gender identity as well as human sexuality. And, quite frankly, if there is no difference between opt-in and opt-out, then it shouldn't really make a difference to the members opposite. The teachers are already asking for parents to opt in to field trips. They already have a process. This is going to be a very simple process for them to be able to make sure that the parents' wishes are respected.

Ms Gray: Parents' wishes are already respected, and there is a major difference, which, if the Premier doesn't know that, is dangerous. The new opt-in system seems solely designed to increase the number of kids who are not getting important sexual health education by creating administrative hoops that parents have to jump through. It's bewildering to educators, parents, and everyone who wants healthy outcomes for Alberta's kids why the Premier would make a bureaucratic change. Fewer kids getting this information means more STIs, more teen pregnancies, more sexual violence. Why are you unwilling to listen?

Ms Smith: Well, it sounds to me, Mr. Speaker, like the members opposite don't actually believe that parents should have the right to make the choices for their kids. Nobody knows a child better than their own parents. Nobody knows when a child is going to be prepared with a certain level of maturity to be able to address these issues and be able to process them. This is the kind of thing that we want families to be involved in, in the conversation with their children. They need to know when these topics are being discussed in school, and now they will because every time that this material is dealt with, it will have to have an opt-in from the parents.

Ms Gray: We have an opt-out system where parents are completely in control and informed, and it's remarkable that this Premier thinks that crucial information shouldn't be accessible. Lack of comprehensive sex ed makes school less safe for kids, puts all young people at greater risk for unsafe situations and outcomes. We don't want kids getting this information from dangerous corners of the Internet. The change to an opt-in system will only lead to worse outcomes: more teen pregnancies, more STIs, more kids in unhealthy relationships. Will this Premier do everything to keep kids safe?

Ms Smith: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will do everything we can to make sure age-appropriate material is introduced to those children at a pace that their parents think that they can handle. That is why we are going to have an opt-in, so that every instance where these materials are being presented in class and these topics are being discussed in class, the parent will have an opportunity to do that assessment and make sure that their kids are not being exposed to materials at an age where they don't think that they are ready. This is what parent choice in education looks like. This is what living up to the principles that we have in our Bill of Rights and the school act really looks like.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for question 3.

Private Health Services Delivery

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, speaking of principles, the Premier seems to have no problem with people paying to get ahead of wait-lists that she worsened by not investing in public health care. Yet in the last election the Premier promised no Albertan will, quote, ever have to pay out of pocket for access to their family doctor or to get the medical treatment they need. End quote. Albertans deserve to know. Does the Premier still stand by that promise that no one in Alberta will have to pay for required medical treatment?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know what the Canada Health Act says. It says that hospital services and doctor services have to be covered under the funding arrangement that we have with the federal government. The federal government has said that those are the services that are going to be cost shared with the federal government, and that is a condition of their funding. We signed a 10-year agreement with the federal government to live up to those conditions, and we intend to do that.

Ms Gray: A new for-profit surgical clinic in Fort McMurray promises a for-profit pay-for-your-surgery plan. The private clinic says it will cater to "those willing to pay out of pocket for services like day surgeries (knee, hip, cataract [surgery])." Worse, three government MLAs, including the Premier's own secretary of rural health, have fully endorsed it. So why, in violation of the Canada Health Act, is the Premier going to allow some wealthy Albertans to skip the line, pay out of pocket for their knee, hip, and cataract surgeries?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite should well know, there are doctors able to completely opt out of the current medical system. They do it here. They do it in every other province. They do it, actually, in large numbers in Quebec. We will not be funding any organizations that expect us to pay for a portion of the cost if they're going to be charging. This is a completely private option. They're opted out of the system, and that is allowed under the Canada Health Act.

Ms Gray: The Premier has always wanted Albertans to pay to see their doctor. Two-tier health care: she's written op-eds to that effect. Two local MLAs, including the minister of energy, fully endorsed this for-profit private facility that will be operational by September 2027. The rural health secretary called the project forward-thinking, and the project owners call it a guaranteed return on investment because investors will have the chance to double their cash. They will be selling completely private health care. Will the Premier stop this two-tiered health care project and pass legislation to ban it?

2:00

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, look, if there is any violation of the Canada Health Act, if there is any danger that we are not living up to the commitment that we have made with Ottawa, that hospital services and doctor services that we provide and fund are somehow going to have dollars attached to them, we will intervene and we will not let that happen. But the member opposite should know that there are a lot of different models that are available across the country, and if a doctor has chosen to opt out of the system and is not receiving any money from us or the federal government, that is one of the things that is allowed.

Ms Hoffman: The UCP has a long record of attacking public health care and pushing private, American-style, two-tiered care, and here we go again. They cancelled the south Edmonton hospital, they're chasing doctors out of the province, and they stand by as rural emergency departments are being closed. Now they're pushing private health care. The website for SMG says that it can double your cash investment and offers private luxury accommodations if you can afford it. Most Albertans want a public doctor and an emergency room that's actually open, so why is the UCP pushing more privatization instead of delivering on public health care?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing can be further from the truth. In fact, we are continuing to make sure that we are increasing the number of surgeries that we are doing in Alberta. In fact, we're on track to do over 310,000 surgeries, many more than what was done under the previous NDP government at one point in time. The member opposite cannot speak on behalf of wait times because under her watch wait times continued to go up. We continue to attract doctors to Alberta, and we're going to keep doing it.

Ms Hoffman: A parliamentary secretary, a private member, and a minister walk into a boardroom. It sounds like the set-up to a really bad joke, but it's no laughing matter, Mr. Speaker. They all put their reputations on the line for financial gains with "pay out of pocket... day surgeries" for "knee, hip, cataract," insurance claims, "Indigenous populations, and international residents" with "the potential to double [your]... investment or more." Last week the minister said that she believes in the Canada Health Act, so will she tell her colleagues to stop pushing private, American-style health care, or were her words last week a big joke?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite continues to misinform the public.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: We will continue to make sure that we bring more doctors to this province. In fact, Mr. Speaker, when I started in June of 2023, we had roughly 10,500 doctors. We now have over 12,100 doctors. The members opposite would have you believe that they're coming here and just languishing on our registration list. In fact, they're actually working. The budget for physicians in this province is almost \$7 billion. If it was a ministry, it would be the third-largest ministry in our whole government.

Ms Hoffman: The minister is proud of paying more when 1 in 5 Albertans don't have a family doctor. Instead of focusing on opening closed emergency rooms in Boyle, Drayton, Hinton, and Edson, where the parliamentary secretary for rural health actually represents, surely the secretary knows that Albertans want a family doctor and their emergency room open. The Premier promised that she would sign the contract with family doctors 197 days ago. Then the minister said: wait till summer. Then she said in the fall, and now she's saying

April. So, Minister, why did your parliamentary secretary choose to shill for two-tiered, U.S.-style health care instead of lobbying . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, when the member opposite was the Minister of Health, why didn't she work for Albertans and make things better instead of making it worse, when we had to come and clean up? Under her watch cataract surgeries soared. Wait times went from 10.6 weeks to 16.9 weeks at a time when they drove out hundreds of thousands of people: fewer people, fewer doctors, higher wait times. Let me see. Hip replacements increased from 13.1 weeks to 18.9 weeks. Shame on them. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

A point of order is noted at 2:03 by the Official Opposition House Leader.

Homeless Supports and Services

Mr. Shepherd: Edmonton's downtown is the heart of our city, home to thousands of people, a major driver of tourism, an important centre of our local economy. But after five years under the UCP people who live, work, and visit here feel less safe. My downtown safety tool kit lays out seven concrete steps this government could take today to build safety in our community like ensuring we have enough shelter space for the over 4,000 people with no housing of their own, including fully funded day shelter spaces with actual 24/7 support. To the Premier: will your government listen and step up to support my constituents, businesses, police so that many others in . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we worked a year ago with the city of Edmonton to identify how many shelter spaces would need to be permanently built in the city. They told us the number they needed; we built them. They're here right now as we speak, over 1,800 shelters with the ability to surge if we need to, that we don't usually do, and those shelters remain permanently open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. We already accomplished that, and we're moving on to working to be able to make sure to get people housed and continue to reject the NDP's tent plan.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, given that after five years of this government in power we see the evidence of the failure of their plan on the streets of our downtown every day. This government likes to brag about its navigation centre, which is a first good step but only a first step, and given that talking about connecting people to services like housing and detox, where recovery beds don't mean much when they have massive wait-lists, and given those wait-lists are created by this government's failure to build at the level needed to meet the urgency and need, to the Premier: enough slow walking; when will your government step up and actually address the need and build safety in our community?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, when that member was in government, wait-lists for things like affordable housing went up by 76 per cent. We won't be lectured by the NDP, who built nothing. We inherited a situation where people were living and freezing in tents, being victimized by gangs because of the infrastructure that the NDP did not build. This government has invested unprecedented amounts in helping the unfortunate. We will continue to do it. We're driving forward with strong, concrete solutions, and we are not going to stop.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that when we were in government, we did not have over 4,000 people living without housing on our streets and given that police are key partners in building safety but not social or mental health workers – they don't want to be – but those same officers do want to see more housing and faster access to treatment and given that Edmonton Chief Dale McFee said that we can't arrest our way out of our troubles and given that business owners agree – 83 per cent want the provincial government to act on the root causes of social disorder – and given that this is a crisis that requires collaboration instead of fighting with Ottawa and city council, to the Premier. It's right here; concrete steps we can take today. Will you step up and work with partners to get this done?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, Chief McFee has categorically rejected the NDP's plan and is part of and, in fact, one of the creators of the United Conservative Party plan. That's collaboration, why we're seeing results. I'll tell you what we need: we need actual, true facts, not things made up. Stating things like that there are 4,000 people living on the streets in Edmonton when there are not is really unfortunate. The member is referring to a list that refers to a list that of those 4,000 people, 2,600 of them are housed in government programs. Let's focus on where people really are so that we can invest in the right solutions. That's why the NDP keeps screwing up, because they don't understand where people are. [interjections]

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Federal Oil and Gas Emissions Cap

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is once again protecting Albertans' prosperity and rights from a federal Liberal-NDP coalition against fossil fuels. They seem to be weirdly obsessed with shutting down everything that we do well in this province. The so-called federal emissions cap has been exposed as a thinly veiled production cap that threatens the employment of thousands of Canadians, all in the name of an environmental policy that does nothing to improve the environment. Will the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas explain the actions Alberta is taking to ensure Alberta workers are safe and why they're against this disastrous policy?

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order is noted by the Deputy Opposition House Leader at 2:08.

The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the members opposite and their new leader, we are standing up for Alberta by creating a constitutional shield that will stop Nenshi's Liberal-NDP friends in Ottawa from shutting down and shutting in our energy sector. That's why we'll introduce an Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act motion to stop this unconstitutional, job-killing federal production cap. This motion will set Alberta up to challenge the cap in the courts while preventing its enforcement in our province. On this side of the House we will always stand up to defend our energy industry, affordable energy, and jobs for Albertans across our province.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her answer. Given that natural resource development falls under provincial jurisdiction, outlined clearly in the Constitution, and further given that Alberta is leading the way in responsible resource development without slowing down production, to the same minister:

why is it important that Alberta continues to fight to maintain control of our natural resources?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment and parks.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This cap is absolutely not about emissions. This is shutting down production in our energy industry. This is a radical obsession from the left about shutting down our energy sector even if it costs thousands and thousands of jobs right across our country and hurts both the economies of Alberta and Canada. We must maintain control of our natural resources, and that's why we are going to be putting this motion in place, to ensure the Constitution is respected and not ignored.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister for her hard work on this file. Given that some left-wing politicians in Ottawa may say that the use of the sovereignty act hurts Confederation and further given that this proposed production cap will affect economies across the country, killing tens of thousands of jobs and making Canada poor, can the same minister outline why these actions protect Confederation and benefit people all across Canada?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we in Canada have a federal government who is ignoring the Constitution, putting their ideology ahead of affordable energy, people's livelihoods, and jobs for Albertans and Canadians. It is completely disrespectful of the Constitution of our country. I would like to remind this House of the many so-called experts who said we couldn't challenge the Impact Assessment Act or the ridiculous federal plastics ban. We won in court both times and successfully defended Canadians' rights. We are going to do that again, whether the members opposite support us or not.

Energy Industry Property Tax Payments

Ms Ganley: Salaries at the AER have more than doubled under this government. This in addition to lavish dinners and other perks, all while Albertans struggle to afford groceries. On Monday the minister said this gravy train was just fine because "the gravy train the member is [referring to] is the . . . train paid for by industry." Meanwhile this UCP government accepts that industry can't afford to pay their taxes or clean up their wells. What does the minister have to say to landowners and municipalities who are ultimately paying for the cost of his gravy train?

Mr. Jean: The two are not connected, Mr. Speaker. The first is that I haven't ever seen the NDP stand up for big oil before, but to see them do that right now, to stand up to save big oil expenses: well, I've seen it all.

Speaking of the NDP and seeing it all, I want to congratulate their leader, Mr. Speaker, on his election seven years and one month ago, almost to the day, when the leader of the NDP was elected in British Columbia for the seat in Ontario, where he lives in Ottawa, the best representative of the NDP in Alberta.

Ms Ganley: Given that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has said that it's totally normal for municipalities to go bankrupt but I don't think residents of those municipalities are as excited about the prospect and given that many Albertans are facing higher property taxes and service cuts because of this growing unpaid tax bill and given that the government could prioritize getting those taxes paid rather than the gravy train, would the minister agree that it's a bad look to give his friends at the AER a massive pay hike while municipalities are facing bankruptcy because of their refusal to act?

Mr. McIver: Well, just for a minute, Mr. Speaker, we're going to visit reality. In fact, municipalities are all in a different set of circumstances, and there's nothing to make light of. The hon. member said that nobody is happy about it, but a municipality in Alberta recently voted whether to dissolve or not. One hundred per cent of the people that voted voted to dissolve. So for the folks on the other side to completely disrespect the will of those people – they looked, an honest look, at the financial condition of their municipality. One hundred per cent of them said they did it, but the NDP won't listen to anybody.

Ms Ganley: Given that the definition of gravy train is "a situation [where] someone can make a lot of money for very little effort" and given that the minister on Monday agreed that this is a gravy train, something Conservatives used to be against, and given that the money going into the pockets of the AER board is money that could be used to pay down the dangerous unpaid tax bills, will the minister reverse course, shut down the gravy train, and focus on helping Albertans instead?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all of the oil and gas workers and companies in this province for providing the schools, the bridges, the hospitals. They work hard, and I appreciate what they do every day in the \$183 billion industry regulated by the AER, one of the best on the planet.

I don't know what else to say, Mr. Speaker, except that the NDP have got it wrong again. They continuously get it wrong, and standing up right now for big oil is not helping their case at all with Albertans. We are going to continue to deliver the goods for Albertans, we are going to do the best job we possibly can, and we're going to hold our organizations to account for every dollar.

TransAlta Acquisition of Heartland Generation

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, TransAlta reached a deal with the federal Competition Bureau and acquired Heartland Generation and its power generation business in Alberta. This merger will further consolidate market power from four to three companies in Alberta. This merger will give one company much more control of the energy price. To the Premier: why do Albertans need to depend upon a federal regulator to protect Albertans from the exercise of market power in electricity?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those are the laws of Canada, and Alberta follows the laws of Canada, just like we follow laws here. We have regulators in place. They made a ruling. It is not in the purview of the provincial government to overrule a federal regulator on a Competition Bureau item. That's how the law works. Unfortunately, the NDP doesn't understand the law or, apparently, want to abide by it, but on this side of the aisle we do.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that we now understand this merger is a confirmation that Alberta's market design, even with the UCP's temporary measures taken in the spring, is insufficient to protect the public interest and to stop the price gouging by generators that can exercise market power, has the UCP government sought the advice of the Market Surveillance Administrator, and what will the government do to protect Albertans from the significant loss of competition that will result in further increases in electricity prices in both urban and rural areas?

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, yes, we have sought the advice of the Market Surveillance Administrator, and they work every day with all

of our regulators here in Alberta to make sure that we have good market compliance. That is why we are restructuring the energy market for the day ahead. Not only have we already passed legislation on market power mitigation to stop the act of economic withholding for three years – any time in the next three years we could extend that, should we need to – we are also restructuring the electricity market to a day ahead, where that kind of activity would become incredibly clear to every participant, especially the Market Surveillance Administrator.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that this transaction will allow one company to have more market power than any single entity since deregulation and given the federal commissioner alluded to TransAlta's ability to economically withhold and raise the market price when there is insufficient supply, given TransAlta's monopoly on the AESO strategic reserve, what is the UCP doing to remove barriers to entry to add investments within a sector that depends on competition, and how will market redesign achieve anything other than force Albertans to pay more for electricity?

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, again it seems like the opposition has no idea how the federal regulator is not under the purview of the provincial government. However, we are doing the work to restructure the electricity market. We continue to see many participants added to our competition. We have hundreds of different individual generators providing electricity to the market. The day-ahead market will make that more transparent, more stable, and more affordable for every single Albertan. It's ironic that these questions are coming from the NDP, who ruined the system in the first place, and taxpayers are still paying \$100 million a year for their mistakes.

2:20 School Construction Accelerator Program

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, our government recently announced the school construction accelerator program to deal with the strain that our province's rapid growth has put on our education system. This \$8.6 billion program will create 200,000 new and modernized spaces, with 20,000 new student spaces delivered through modular classrooms in the next four years. To the Minister of Education: how will this program help build spaces for our students to learn, grow, and to reach their full potential?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited to have the opportunity to talk about the school construction accelerator program. For anyone who missed it, it's a remarkable program; we'll be investing \$8.6 billion to build 90 new schools in communities across the province. In addition, we will be modernizing and replacing an additional 24 schools. After all things are said and done, this program will add over 200,000 spaces to communities across the province. Our government is going to make sure that we reduce the holdup and that we get schools building now so that families and students can reap the benefits and rewards of these facilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for the answer. Given that one of the schools being moved into the construction phase is the replacement for Spruce Grove composite high school and further given that many students from my constituency travel to Spruce Grove for their school education, could the same minister tell this House what a school replacement means for the students and families both in Spruce Grove and my constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the MLAs for the region. Of course, this morning we had the opportunity to visit the Spruce Grove composite high school and announce that it is now ready to move forward from the design phase to the full construction phase five months ahead of schedule. This is a direct result of the school construction accelerator program, which allows us to move projects forward in-year so that we can build schools faster. This is proof that our plan is working and that we will get the job done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again through you to the minister. Given that many constituents of Drayton Valley-Devon and Spruce Grove-Stony Plain are anxiously waiting for the construction of the new high school and further given that when completed, this high school will have the capacity to hold and educate more than 1,900 students, to the Minister of Infrastructure: when can we expect the project to break ground, and what is the expected timeline for this project?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure has the call.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's our priority to get students into desks as quickly as possible and to ensure that the halls they walk are well built. With this new accelerator program we've approved funding for this high school and 10 others, speeding up the process by about five months when compared to waiting for the next budget cycle. Design is well under way, and we anticipate having a contractor in place by February. I'm happy to report to the member that construction will begin in the spring, with completion in the summer of 2027, just in time for the September school year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Access to Psychiatric Health Services

Member Eremenko: Mr. Speaker, the OECD recommends an optimal ratio of 60 psychiatric acute-care beds per 100,000, while 30 is the minimum. Nationally we meet that minimum rate, but provincially Alberta falls way, way short. In the latest AHS annual report the ratio of psychiatric acute-care beds to 100,000 population was just 13. Is the minister satisfied with a ratio that the National Institutes of Health refers to as a severe shortage in psychiatric acute care?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to treating youth, whether they are in a mental health crisis or have addiction. The members opposite in government did nothing to expand resources. We are continuing to build more and more spaces. In fact, when it came to the addiction space alone, never mind the continued work we're doing when it comes to mental health and psychiatric spaces, we just announced another 105 new spaces in the northern Alberta youth recovery centre, which is coming right here to Edmonton to treat youth. We're continuing to build not just for mental health but also addiction across the spectrum.

Member Eremenko: Given that that didn't answer the question about psychiatric acute-care beds for both youth and adults and given that Albertans are deeply concerned about eliminating barriers to health care and support for people with complex mental health needs and given that AHS reported in '22 that we need to recruit 40 per cent more psychiatrists before 2032 to meet demand and given that I have heard from families from as far away as the

minister's riding, who have been told to travel to the Stollery for youth mental health services, has the need for highly specialized psychiatric services in all communities large and small registered in any way to this government?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, it has registered that we started off with our first creation of the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction in 2019 under Health. Started with \$50 million; we're now at a \$1.5 billion commitment. We are no longer doing mental health off the side of the desk, like members opposite did when they were in power. We have a total focus on recovery for every single Albertan. Whether it be a mental health challenge or someone in addiction, they deserve an opportunity, which is why we're increasing capacity in all of our centres and doing even more hiring when it comes to psychiatric capacity across this province.

Member Eremenko: Given that \$1.1 billion of that \$1.5 billion is actually not new money, it's from Alberta Health Services, and given that government plans to apprehend and detain people for their mental illness through the UCP's compassionate intervention act and given that the minister's mandate letter contained direction to develop "at least five new 75+ bed mental wellness centres for short and long-term treatment and recovery," can the minister stand up and tell us why his government is zero for five on these centres? Will they only be built and occupied once people are forced to be there?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite do not believe in recovery because they have a philosophy that says that we need to continue facilitating addiction indefinitely. We had members opposite, the Member for Calgary-Acadia saying that there needs to be more, quote, harm reduction tools for children in care. That means drug paraphernalia for children. That means unsafe supply. That means a policy that is created on whether or not we have decriminalized drugs in Alberta. We object to that. We will never go down this path. We believe that every Albertan deserves an opportunity at recovery. We will not take lessons from members opposite.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:27.

Affordable Housing

Mr. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's housing market is thriving, with housing starts rising by 30 per cent this year compared to the January-October period last year. Edmonton and Calgary have seen significant growth, with housing starts up 47 per cent and 24 per cent respectively. Smaller cities like Lethbridge and Red Deer have also experienced impressive increases. Housing starts have surged by 209 per cent and 93 per cent respectively. Can the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services explain how our government is driving this incredible growth and ensuring Albertans have access to diverse and affordable housing options?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like so many things that this government does, we bet on Albertans. The NDP always wants to bet against Alberta; our side of the aisle wants to bet on Albertans. We did that when it came to housing, and we're seeing unprecedented results, like 10,000 new apartment units this year alone in our province, the most in history. Every month: record numbers of builds. And here's the great news. The plan is working, our plan to reject the NDP's plan of dangerous rent control and to

invest in building housing. In Calgary alone this year rent on a two-bedroom apartment is down 7 per cent, while in the rest of the country it continues to skyrocket.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that response. Given Alberta's record-breaking housing achievements, including nearly 10,000 apartment unit starts in the first half of 2024, the highest in any half-year in the province's history, breaking the record set previously in 1977, and given that Alberta has launched initiatives like the Stop Housing Delays online portal to address barriers and accelerate residential construction, can the minister explain how these innovative strategies are helping municipalities and developers address bottlenecks in residential construction and meet the diverse needs of Alberta's growing population?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the record construction numbers speak for the results that we're getting from the work that we're doing. What we did a year ago was that we committed as a cabinet and as a government to work collaboratively across all ministries to find ways to solve the housing crisis together, to remove red tape, to partner with our mayors to make sure municipalities could get the work that they needed to do to go forward, to remove environmental legislation that was holding up housing unnecessarily and make sure that we could go forward with the results that we're seeing. Again, our housing results every month for 12 months straight have been records, we have 10,000 new apartment buildings, and, most importantly, one-third of all new builds are purpose-built rentals.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that last week the minister announced up to \$150 million in funding available through Alberta's affordable housing partnership program to support new affordable housing projects across Alberta and given that this is the largest round of funding to date and further given that together with its partners the government is supporting \$9 billion in investments into 25,000 additional low-income households by 2031, can the same minister outline how these investments in affordable housing are strengthening communities across Alberta and supporting the economic and social well-being of families, businesses, individuals in both urban and rural areas?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, we didn't just focus on market housing, though we've worked hard on that. We also focus on making sure that we increase our affordable housing stock. We're working through our stronger foundations plan, which will make 82,000 more affordable households in our province by the year 2031. We're well on our way to accomplishing that. My most recent announcement is going to move towards another 5,100 units of affordable housing, we just completed another 5,100 units of affordable housing, and each and every month we build more housing in one month than the NDP built the entire time that they were in government.

School Construction in Calgary-North East

Member Brar: Calgary-North East is one of the fastest growing communities in the entire of Calgary, yet it remains critically underserved when it comes to schools. Parents and students not only face overcrowded classrooms; students also travel one hour each way every day to get to schools. While the recent capital funding announcement is a step forward, there has been no clarity on how much will be allocated specifically to Calgary-North East's

pressing needs. Will the minister commit today to funding the new projects and expansions in Calgary-North East that parents and students desperately need so that they can learn closer to home?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, building schools in our fastest growing communities is a priority of this government, and our government will make sure that we get the job done. I'll be very happy to inform the member's constituents that we are moving forward with not one, not two but three schools in the member's riding. We're working on a new high school in Cornerstone and two elementary schools in Redstone as well. I would be very happy to visit the member's riding and give his constituents the good news that three amazing schools are coming very soon. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Member Brar: Given that families in Calgary-North East are still struggling for actual schools and Albertans know the cost of living is high, rents are high, and insurance is going up and health care is in crisis and given that very soon has never arrived, Minister, and given that promises and broad funding announcements are not easing the concerns for parents who watch their children struggle in overcrowded schools daily and given our community's unprecedented growth, will the minister provide a clear timeline for when the projects will be built in Calgary-North East?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, this isn't a broad funding commitment at all, Mr. Speaker. In fact, those three projects are all currently in the design stage. Once the school divisions responsible for the projects have completed the design requirements, we are ready, open, and willing to move those projects forward to full construction, just like we did today with the Spruce Grove composite high school. Once the design work was completed, we moved it forward by about five months to full construction. When the design work is completed, those projects will get the full construction funding they need.

Member Brar: Given that Calgary-North East is facing an urgent crisis with overcrowded classrooms and a severe lack of school infrastructure, vague funding announcements simply aren't enough. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North East has the call.

Member Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And given that families in our community are tired of commuting for hours every day to drop off and pick up kids, impacting their children's learning and well-being, why has the UCP ignored Calgary-North East students and their families for such a long time?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I know that residents in the member's constituency are tired of having to drive long commutes, as he mentioned, to take their kids to school. I would tell them that we will get the job done and our government will make sure that we build those schools so those families and those parents don't have to make those long commutes anymore. I would encourage them to watch carefully the school projects, and I again confirm that our government will be the one that will reduce those long rides and get those schools built in their communities.

Alberta Innovates Corporation Executive Compensation

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, my constituents are struggling to keep up with inflation. The cost of rent is going up; the cost of groceries is going up. Wages are stagnant, and families are falling further and

further behind. You know who isn't falling behind? Government executives. The CEO of Alberta Innovates' salary was increased \$35,000 to a whopping \$431,000 in 2022, when the Finance minister granted her an exemption to the salary cap. To the minister: why did the CEO of Alberta Innovates get a big fat pay raise while my constituents got nothing?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we've had a transition at Alberta Innovates. We have a new CEO there. We have a new board there. These are the board members that I have appointed as Minister of Technology and Innovation. We're proud to be turning the corner and charting a new chapter here. Alberta Innovates does some very important work on helping to build our innovation ecosystem and to ensure that we're attracting investment into building our tech sector. That's why Alberta's tech sector is booming like never before, unlike when the members opposite were in government. We're focused on making sure we have the right supports and programs to have the most innovative jurisdiction in Canada.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, given that in 2024 Alberta Innovates CEO will be paid a base salary of \$441,000, getting a \$10,000 pay raise on top of the \$35,000 pay raise they got in 2022, how can the minister justify raising the salary of the CEO of Alberta Innovates by an amount higher than the median income in Alberta?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, shocker, the members opposite have incorrect information yet again, and they're imposing that incorrect information on Albertans. I can't imagine why. I wouldn't want to say that they're trying to mislead Albertans, but the facts are that we have a new CEO. That CEO's salary and compensation is in alignment with RABCCA, which is the Reform of Agencies Boards and Commissions Compensation Act, and we are committed as a government to ensuring that we follow those rules and we have the right folks doing the right job and being paid in accordance with those rules.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that they follow the rules except when the minister exempts them from the rules, which is exactly what they did with the old CEO and what they continue to do with the current CEO – in 2023 the CEO of Alberta Innovates' compensation was \$737,000. Given that she earned almost \$300,000 in cash benefits – that's way more than the compensation regulation allows – to the minister: how can you justify breaking the salary cap, and what are you going to do to get Albertans' money back?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, it's rich coming from those members, who were the ones that appointed the old board of directors that asked for that salary, benefits exclusion for that CEO at that time. This is their problem. We're the ones cleaning it up. The board of directors that they appointed are not the board of directors anymore under my leadership. We have a new board that's focused on making sure that we're delivering results for Albertans, we're getting good value for our tax dollars, and we are building the strongest technology ecosystem we have ever seen in the history of this province.

The Speaker: I might just take this opportunity to remind all members of the Assembly that on occasion we like to use our hands to help talk. If you're going to be pointing at folks in the Assembly, please be pointing at me. I don't think that it's very helpful for the decorum to be pointing at members opposite. I'm more than happy to see you pointing at me.

Federal Oil and Gas Emissions Cap (continued)

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, Ottawa's proposed emissions cap supported by Trudeau's newest out-of-touch apprentice, NDP leader

Naheed Nenshi, effectively imposes a production cap that infringes on provincial jurisdiction, threatening jobs, families, and Alberta's economy. Section 92A of the Constitution clearly affirms Alberta's authority over the development of its natural resources. To the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: what is Alberta's government doing to protect our economy and uphold our constitutional jurisdiction against another example of federal overreach?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

2:40

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We will be introducing an Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act motion here in this House proposing measures to stop a federal production cap from damaging our province's economy, industry, and prosperity. This will be a constitutional shield to help protect our economy, the jobs and livelihoods of Albertans, and ensure that provincial jurisdiction is not ignored. This production cap will put hard-working men and women out of work and decimate both municipalities, communities, and even First Nations communities who are already invested in this sector. We will absolutely continue to defend them on this front.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for standing up for energy workers and Albertans. Given that the proposed sovereignty motion would launch a constitutional challenge to protect Alberta's jurisdiction over natural resource development and given that the members opposite across the aisle have appointed a new, mysterious regional manager who can't be bothered to show up for work and continue to support these damaging policies, knowing they're detrimental to this province and this country, could the same minister explain why there's an urgent need to invoke a sovereignty motion?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is urgent because we here in Alberta: we've seen this movie before. We saw it in 2015, when the members opposite rolled out the red carpet for Justin Trudeau to shut down and shut in our major industries, killing 180,000 jobs, and they even implemented the carbon tax for them. It took the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona months to get to Ottawa when they rolled out Bill C-69. I think she could have walked there faster than that. We will not take advice from the members opposite on how to best defend Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta is a global leader in providing sustainable and reliable energy using technologies like CCUS and given that forcing production cuts undermines Canada's ability to meet the world's demand for energy and given that this production cap is just another shallow scheme like the carbon tax scam and further given that I'm from a small town in northern Alberta where we don't need a degree from Harvard to know that the carbon tax rebate is just like drinking beer for the empties, to the same minister: how does Alberta's energy industry compare globally in terms of responsible production, and why is it critical to oppose these measures?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we here in Alberta have shown the world that we can do the right thing for the environment and meet global demands for safe, affordable, reliable energy in a way that also

protects energy security. This is why Albertans need a government who will defend them. If the NDP in Alberta cared about Albertans at all, they would have supported our opposition to the carbon tax, they would have supported our opposition to the clean electricity regulations, they would support us next week when we introduce this motion in the House to protect our province against an oil and gas cap, and maybe they could tell their puppet masters in Ottawa to call an election. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Unfortunately, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue with the remainder of the daily Routine.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent of the House to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of this afternoon's sitting, including the first bell in Committee of the Whole.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a request for unanimous consent. We did this yesterday, so I will spare the details.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:03 the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to quote Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) for this one. At the time the Minister of Health, in response to a question from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora said – and I do not have the benefit of the Blues, but I'm pretty sure I've got the quote accurately: "the member opposite continues to misinform the public."

Mr. Speaker, as well as 23(h), (i), and (j), I'm really calling upon the past practices and past rulings of this House. We cannot do indirectly what we cannot do directly. Calling another member a liar, using words like "misinform, mislead, misrepresent," we've had many rulings on this. I know the Minister of Health is often very careful with her language, but in this case I do believe this rises to a point of order because the Member for Edmonton-Glenora would never deliberately misinform the public. What was happening was a matter of debate, an important one, on public health care. I believe this is a point of order.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I think that this would be a matter of debate. Given that I don't have the official records – that would be in your hands at the moment – what I would say is that all members do need to be mindful of the things we say in this Chamber and sometimes things can get a little rowdy. With that said, I don't have the official records. I don't recall exactly what the minister said. If the minister made a direct accusation against another member that that member was trying to mislead the House, I suspect that would be a point of order as that word is specifically noted in the standing orders, but what I would probably do is just save you the hassle and withdraw and apologize.

The Speaker: It's a very reasonable thing to do because that is exactly what happened. The hon. minister is generally careful and has apologized in the past for a similar incident. I appreciate the apology and withdrawal. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:09 the deputy House leader of the Official Opposition rose. I see the House leader has risen.

Point of Order Decorum

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At 2:09 the minister of community and social services was engaged, I believe, in the third question in the set. I rose under 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically because the minister's response was completely over the top in many ways. I will suggest this is a bit of a matter of debate, but in his response he first accused the member of using made-up numbers and then he quoted those same numbers, which was an interesting tactic to take, but he also seriously raised his voice and started talking about the NDP screwing things up and specifically, yeah: the NDP is screwing up.

Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms, sixth edition, section 491 on page 149, Mr. Speaker, reads: "The Speaker has consistently ruled that language used in the House should be temperate and worthy of the place in which it is spoken."

I realize context matters. In this context with the tone of the response I do feel this rises to a point of order. The minister was not contributing to the decorum of this place. Those types of answers and accusations will continue to create disorder in the House. I do seek for you to rule it as a point of order that we might improve the decorum. I believe that it contributed to the heckling and rowdy extent that we saw here in the Legislature as we continued to the point that opposition member questions were interrupted. I think ruling this a point of order would assist the decorum of the Chamber.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a rare instance where I would agree with the Leader of the Opposition in saying that this is a matter of debate. Now, I can understand that someone of the large stature of the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, Sundre's favourite son and the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services, may be a bit intimidating, and his loud voice may have offended the sensibilities of the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, who called this point of order. What I can say is that there is a lot of subjectivity in the points raised by the Leader of the Opposition about having a raised voice and what actually might cause disorder in this Chamber. I don't think anything that member said was a point of order. In fact, I think he's been quite mindful of his tone and mindful of things he said since you've given caution on things like using the words "living in tents" and the policies of the members opposite. I leave this in your hands. I don't believe that this is a point of order but rather a matter of debate.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues. I am prepared to rule. However, if anyone else has anything substantive to add to the point of order, now would be the time to indicate such.

2:50

Seeing none, I don't find this to be a point of order. Often we see inside the Assembly members of both sides of the House raising their voices on occasion. I won't take this opportunity to point any of those individuals out, but it certainly happens on a semiregular case. I don't think this is a point of order. Maybe a caution on the use of the words "screwing things up": it's perhaps not that parliamentary. Certainly, I don't want to give license to the use of that language or the non-use of that language, to be clear, but I think we all need to be mindful of the words that we use. This is certainly not a point of order, a matter of debate. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

The Official Opposition House Leader rose on an additional point of order at 2:27 while the hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction was speaking.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the benefit of the Blues with me, but I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j) as well as the precedents and historical rulings of this Chamber because the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction in responding to a question specifically named the Member for Calgary-Acadia, specifically quoted the Member for Calgary-Acadia, and then absolutely started to imply false and unavowed motives to what that quote should mean and what was happening.

Now, without continuing debate, I will simply say that the office of the Child and Youth Advocate has spoken significantly about harm reduction. There can be different interpretations of harm reduction. The minister very deliberately named a member and then attributed to her some of the worst possible attributions of what her intentions may have been, and he did that purposefully to discourage, perhaps, questions that might call into question what's happening in his ministry and what's happening on the streets of this province with youth.

I believe this is a point of order. He very clearly targeted someone and then proceeded to a litany of a series of things that cannot be attributed to the Member for Calgary-Acadia. I hope that you will rule it a point of order because if that behaviour continues, we will have disorder in this House.

Mr. Schow: While I appreciate the comments from the Leader of the Opposition, I would disagree. The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction at the time noted was quoting the member and saying that the Member for Calgary-Acadia said that we need more harm reduction for children in care, end quote, and then went on to explain what that would mean, having more harm reduction for children in care.

Mr. Speaker, our job in this Chamber is to engage in robust debate about the pros and cons of the policies and the legislation that we put forward, and it is not uncommon for members on this side or that side to quote each other; that is exactly what the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction did. He's simply pointing out that harm reduction is not helpful for members of the general public, particularly for children. So this is not a point of order, and I would suggest that: if we are not allowed to quote each other in this Chamber, why are we even here? It's to go back and forth for what's best for Albertans.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule. However, if any other member would like to provide substantive debate to the point of order . . .

The hon. the Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just add quickly that the Member for Calgary-Acadia certainly used harm reduction in the context of child intervention. I just want to point out that the last couple of years have been years that we noted record deaths in our intervention system, and harm reduction means that harm caused to those individuals and not drugs or anything that was implied in the member's response.

The Speaker: I appreciate the comments. It seems to me that that is adding context to the debate and not a substantive submission to the point of order, but I appreciate your effort to make that.

I do have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction said the following:

We had members opposite, the Member for Calgary-Acadia saying that there needs to be more, quote, harm reduction tools for children in care. That means drug paraphernalia for children. That means unsafe supply. That means a policy that is created on whether or not we have decriminalized drugs in Alberta.

He proceeded to say “We object to that” and concluded his remarks when a point of order was called.

The crux of the challenge here is that nearly every day the Premier is quoted on remarks that they have made in the past or she has made, and other ministers or members of the Official Opposition, on both sides of the Assembly, quote things that members have said that they are held accountable for. I’m reluctant to head down the road of the Speaker intervening in debate on what a minister meant in his words or her words in the debate that takes place here. The only caution that I would provide is that when remarks become individualized about members of the Assembly, decorum inevitably takes a downward turn. I say that with all sincerity, in the broadest caution possible both to the members of the opposition and members of the government and cabinet or otherwise. That is almost always the case. But in the overwhelming majority of cases, that is a matter of debate, as was today. I don’t consider this a point of order. I also consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 24

Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 24, the Alberta Bill of Rights Amendment Act, 2024.

These amendments represent the first significant update to the Alberta Bill of Rights in 50 years, and these updates are, in fact, significant. The amendments will broaden and strengthen Albertans’ rights with protections for personal autonomy, including medical care and treatment, strengthened property rights, and more effective enforcement of all rights. Albertans have been asking this government to improve the protection of their fundamental rights. The proposed amendments respond to what we’ve heard from our constituents and from the Public Health Emergencies Governance Review Panel.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

In fact, the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul recently introduced an amendment to our proposed reasonable limits clause during Committee of the Whole in response to concerns we heard with the original amendment. This government listens, Mr. Speaker. We heard from Albertans that our original amendment was not clear enough, so once again we’ve responded to these concerns and we’ve taken action. The amendments introduced by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul add the words “proportionately” and “based on evidence” to the proposed reasonable limits clause contained in the Bill of Rights. With this amendment, this bill will set a higher bar for justifying a limit on rights than is currently the case under the court decisions interpreting the Alberta Bill of Rights.

A few other amendments to this bill were proposed during Committee of the Whole, Mr. Speaker, and I’d like to briefly address them as well. First, there was an amendment to include the right of an individual not to be restricted or prohibited from installing or using a solar energy panel on their property. With respect, this amendment is simply too prescriptive for a Bill of Rights and could prevent government from fulfilling its responsibility to making sure that land is available for food production, for example.

Other amendments regarding health care rights were also proposed. Health care rights are already encompassed in the act’s existing right to

liberty and security of a person. Government proposed amendments specific to medical autonomy when the bill was introduced on October 28, further demonstrating our commitment to protecting Albertans’ health care rights.

Mr. Speaker, this bill has been thoroughly debated in this House since its introduction on October 28. I’d like to thank all members for their thoughtful contributions and their passion in making sure that this government remains accountable to Albertans and to furthering the debate on protecting fundamental rights. I’m confident that we are bringing forward a far more robust version of the Alberta Bill of Rights, suited to our modern times. I hope that these amendments demonstrate to Albertans that we have listened and we are committed to respecting their freedoms.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I encourage everyone to support this bill. Thank you.

3:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

We are on Bill 24, third reading. Any other speakers? The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to briefly talk about this bill. I think when we look at the government legislative agenda this session – the bills that they have introduced to attack trans and vulnerable kids, the bills, I think, they have introduced to restrict access to information, the bill they have introduced to legalize secrecy in the government, and the bill they have introduced to water down privacy rights in the oversight of the office and Ethics Commissioner – in the grand scheme of things I would say that this bill is not very consequential.

In the claims that the Minister of Justice made about this bill, that it will somehow strengthen rights and all those things, I don’t think that this bill has anything new to offer to Albertans. For instance, the bill says that nobody can be coerced to get a medication that they don’t want. That’s the law. The supreme law of Canada, the Constitution, gives people, like, security of the person; that’s covered there. No forced vaccination: Premier Jason Kenney changed that in 2020 so that there will be no mandatory vaccination, and that was not the case anyways in Alberta.

Then they say that whenever government takes property, there will be compensation. We have the Expropriation Act that actually sets the framework for compensation. Then there was advice with respect to firearms that whenever you acquire them, follow the federal laws. As you will see, Mr. Speaker, that bill doesn’t add anything whatsoever. The minister also said that they have heard from constituents and the public. I think they have heard from just one constituency and that was the UCP member’s base, and this bill was introduced to make sure that the event on November 2 in Red Deer goes smoothly. It doesn’t add anything.

With that, I think I will cede the rest of my time and take my seat. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak on third reading, Bill 24?

Seeing none, the minister to close debate.

Mr. Amery: Close debate.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:03 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Batten	Goehring	Metz
Boparai	Gray	Notley
Brar	Haji	Pancholi
Ceci	Hayter	Renaud
Chapman	Hoffman	Sabir
Dach	Hoyle	Schmidt
Deol	Ip	Shepherd
Eggen	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Ellingson	Kasawski	Tejada
Elmeligi	Loyola	Wright, P.
Eremenko		

Totals: For – 46 Against – 31

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

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

Bill 26

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2)

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

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak against Bill 26, the Health Care Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2). As I do so, I'd like to take a moment to talk about parental rights and the parental rights that are not being recognized with Bill 26. This government talks a lot about parental rights. In fact, earlier in this session we had Motion Other than Government Motion 510, that was passed.

It said:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize

- (b) the rights of parents and guardians to have the primary responsibility for the upbringing, development, education, health care, and well-being of their children.

3:10

This motion makes it very clear the government's intent in recognizing parental rights. My question is: why now are we applying

it to some parents and not other parents? It's pretty clear with Bill 26 that we are not recognizing the rights of parents with trans children who want to work together with their children and medical professionals in their journey in being a trans kid and becoming a trans adult.

These parents, like all parents, want what is best for their children, and what is best for their children is, as this government has said with other parental rights, their right and their decision, their conversations with their kids and medical professionals, not the right of this government to decide what can and cannot happen.

I also want to talk a little bit about how this bill opens the door to interpretations of what may or may not actually be happening or what practices are being engaged. You see, we have in Canada today no bottom surgeries being performed on anyone under the age of 18. In bringing forward a bill that bans this practice for anyone under the age of 18, it creates the belief in society that it is happening. It is not.

This is how through the actions in this House we can create uncertainty, speculation, fear in broader society. It's important that we understand that in bringing forward this legislation, in that act, in bringing forward legislation that bans something that is not happening, it creates that uncertainty and potentially fear.

It's the same with children that today cannot access puberty blockers without the consent of their parents and medical advice and medical professions. Why, again, are we introducing legislation that is creating that uncertainty and fear in the broader population that simply shouldn't be there? Why in bringing forward this legislation are we taking away not only the rights of parents but the rights of medical professionals to do their job? It simply doesn't make any sense. It's not best practice, it doesn't respect the rights of parents, it doesn't respect the rights of doctors, it doesn't respect the rights of kids.

We should not continue this. I plead with everybody in this House to understand the ramifications of what it is that is being brought forward in this House, and in understanding those ramifications and what it may mean for children and parents in our province, they should strike this bill. We should go no further with this bill.

It should also be understood by everyone in this House that members of our trans community are already working with family members, medical professionals, and, in fact, government-appointed psychologists and medical professionals before they can proceed with gender-transforming surgery. That's already in place.

Adults today are already waiting months to see a government-appointed psychologist when they've already been working with their own psychologist for years to come to the decision that they have come to. Why are we disrespecting that? Why are we, in fact, not even recognizing that that practice is already in place? We should recognize that this practice and other practices are already in place, and we should strike this bill. We should recognize the rights of parents who want to work with their kids and medical professionals and make the right decisions for their kids.

You know, I know that we're talking about a relatively small proportion of the population here, but every single person deserves this right. Every kid in this province deserves to be writing their own story, to live a full life and be joyous for who they are. This legislation takes that away from them, and it takes that away from their parents. We must vote against this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am here to speak and to implore all members of this House to vote against the Health Statutes Amendment Act. This amendment act, I find, like many of the government's focuses on policy, seems to completely miss the

mark on the priorities that Albertans have told us they would like us to focus on.

We'll go over a little bit of the details here. On gender-affirming care for minors, I just want to address the idea of restrictions on surgeries. I would call this a solution to a problem that doesn't exist, but it's actually worse than that. It's problematic signalling that puts into the public discourse the idea that bottom surgeries, any of these surgeries are done on minors as a regular occurrence, and they just simply are not. But the manipulation of the work that we do in this House, to feed into mistaken perceptions and to actually flame and inflame the culture wars, is truly egregious.

In my work in constituency offices this was actually a topic that came up quite a bit. Like, I know that right now we're talking about surgery wait times, we're talking about reduced access to health care for folks, people not having family doctors. But specifically around this issue, around trans health care, I would talk to folks who had already done a lot of the work with their doctors, with psychologists, with their children. Let's remember that these are often intimate conversations that are happening between parents; their children; if they are fortunate enough to have some, support networks; and, lastly, their doctors.

The barriers that were already in place, that made it harder for them to get that gender-affirming care, were often a topic of conversation when I was a constituency manager. The focus at that time was just how hard it was to get any gender-affirming care any way, never mind this idea that somehow these treatments are being meted out willy-nilly. This is very, very thoughtful work that's being done on the part of parents.

You know, if we want to talk about parental rights, which I know is a favourite catchphrase over on the other side, we should consider that parental rights should include all parents and that although we can disagree with each other on what some of the decisions may be that we make in our own families, we do not have the call by legislation – this is a completely discriminatory policy – to involve ourselves and insert ourselves and to actually compel people to do things the way we would do them in our families.

3:20

I think that the impetus behind this bill is to serve a small group of people that doesn't actually represent all parents. I know this not just because of my previous work with constituents, but because of the thoughtful, often grief-stricken conversations that I am having with parents in my constituency every day.

Now, I can say that there are some cases in my constituency where I've spoken to parents who have had difficult journeys with their kids, with nonbinary kids, with trans kids, and at the end of this journey was acceptance. What I recognize, though, is that not everyone will face that situation, not everyone has that kind of relationship with their kids or with their parents.

I was very, very honoured to have them share their stories, some of the difficulties that they faced as families as they navigated this situation but, I think, especially being able to see that family come out on the other side, with the celebration of a high school graduation for a child who was able to authentically be themselves, who this parent was worried might not make it. Gender-affirming care is life-saving care, and in the case of this parent it allowed them to go through that moment that we all dream about as parents, to watch our kids walk across the stage, to be able to rejoice in their achievements, to be proud of them, to tell them we love them, and to be able to imagine that future life, that future success, and for them to be the person that they truly are, to be authentic to themselves, and to be able to rejoice in all of the life stages that come after that.

I went off a little bit on some of the other implications, but those are my comments on surgeries.

In terms of puberty blockers, the discussion around puberty blockers is also rife with misinformation. The members opposite love to talk about irreversible decisions. When it comes to gender-affirming health care, I'm just going to quote one of our Minister of Health's greatest hits that I hear in this House often, which is "nothing could be further from the truth." These are not irreversible treatments or irreversible medications. In fact, I've even taken some of these medications to treat other conditions because these are medications and treatments that really are employed in the life cycle of a person's life for many reasons.

In the case of minors they are also employed to address early onset puberty and only done, also in those cases, in close consultation with parents and medical professionals. Like most of us, as parents, and I know that we have several parents on the other side, we care about our kids. We care about their health care, and we listen to the professionals that we trust, in this case medical professionals, to be able to provide the care, to be able to ensure their physical health, their mental health for the span of their lifetimes.

I'm also talking about parental rights in the case of parents who have given consent, have had those intimate conversations and ongoing conversations with their children and with their health professionals. What I'll note is that these are treatments that are given wide application. We know this. These are therapies that have a wide application. But the fact that this legislation is laser focused on restricting it only when used on the life-saving medical care needed for nonbinary and trans children, this almost surgical precision being employed by this slate of bills, this one in particular, makes very clear to members on this side and the many families that have reached out to our offices, that have shared with us their very personal stories, their journeys, the families who have also shared their stories and journeys with the members opposite – they know. They know that they've been reached out to. We get copied on those e-mails.

We know that the desired outcome of this legislation is so focused on discrimination of nonbinary and trans children. What it does is that it sends a message, and we know that, really, that was the goal. One of the goals was to send a message for political gain. I'll say that. The fact that it's discriminating against nonbinary children and their families and their own rights as parents sends a message that their very real fears for the safety and the survival of their children are being disregarded.

With that, I will cede my time to my colleagues, but for that reason, I ask that we all vote against the Health Statutes Amendment Act.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity may speak.

Dr. Metz: Thank you for allowing me to speak to this bill. I want to say very strongly that Bill 26, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2), is something that there's no possible way I can possibly support. This is a bill that really punches down on vulnerable children. It removes the right of a child to grow up in a healthy state and to be who they are.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Dr. Metz: It removes the right . . .

The Deputy Chair: A point of order has been called.
The Government House Leader.

Point of Order **Language Creating Disorder**

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), particularly language that causes disruption in this Chamber. The member opposite clearly just said "punching down." There has been an abundance of caution provided about this specific language and the violent implications that it has. We certainly are not punching

down on anyone. We believe that this legislation is in the best interests of Alberta families, children, et cetera. We will allow debate to continue about that, but in this specific instance, I think “punching down” is certainly unparliamentary, and I would ask you to rule it out of order and ask that member to apologize and withdraw.

The Deputy Chair: The Official Opposition Deputy House Leader.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To read a definition of the term “punching down”: “to attack or criticize someone who is in a worse or less powerful position than you.” For example, “if a comedian punches down, they make fun of people who are less powerful or privileged.”

This is not an expression of violence, Mr. Chair. The member did not suggest any particular member of government was punching down. The member was indicating what we have heard very clearly from many Albertans, from the trans community, parents of trans children, that this legislation is indeed attacking, specifically targeting trans youth, who, by definition, absolutely have less power than this government. Those families have significantly less power than this government. In fact, they have no power to stop this government from its discriminatory legislation.

I recognize that the government members may be uncomfortable with this term or with the concept that they are in fact exercising power that is othering these families and these individuals, but I would say that this is not a point of order because the term is not a term of violence; it is completely accurate.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any others?

I am prepared to rule. The Speaker has spoken to this issue just a couple weeks ago, and we have to recognize that terminology can be defined differently in different occasions. I believe that in this occasion, what I heard is that the member was speaking about the government as opposed to individual members and used the words “punching down.” The Speaker in his ruling essentially encouraged and implored upon people to be careful in how they use that terminology. The terminology can be interpreted to be a violent act as well, so the definitions are fairly broad. I would encourage members to hesitate to use that terminology as it has shown that it has affected decorum within this forum. I am not going to rule this as a point of order at this time, but I just encourage members to choose their words carefully.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity can continue.

3:30

Debate Continued

Dr. Metz: Thank you. This bill is removing the right of parents to support their children in a very distressing time for the child and the whole family by going with the advice, over a very prolonged period of time and after many assessments with professionals, to receive the care that affirms the gender that the child has. There are many systems in place already to assure the safety of all of these measures. We have a health care system that regulates the professionals that can assess these children and make these decisions, and we have a whole process and team in place to support the child and assure that all of the appropriate steps have been taken before any gender-affirming care moves forward.

By implementing this bill, we are preventing the opportunity to delay a decision by that child until they're more mature. Puberty blockers are temporary measures. The effects continue as long as they're taken, but when they are stopped, they're stopped, and the changes of puberty will go forward. It is a temporary measure that allows maturation and further decision-making. This seems to me, and according to the medical recommendations, to be, really, a ridiculous move to try and block something that is medically appropriate.

It is also very unfortunate that the interpretation of the literature around this is being taken up by politicians rather than the medical community in this case. We know that the reviews of this, which are a much higher level of evidence than picking one study. Probably every study has flaws, but by picking studies with flaws that make the conclusions very unreliable and uncertain – by doing analysis of the entire body of knowledge, we know that the medical community in Canada and many places is very supportive of the use of gender-affirming care and that this bill is just interfering in that and going against what is medically recommended. I believe that it's very important that this government start going back to letting the experts interpret the medical literature.

There's another point in here that we haven't much talked about, and that is that some babies are born as intersex. That is a term for a child where you're not sure what sex that child is. You may be used to thinking about a baby coming out and wondering how many fingers and toes the child has, but there are children that are born where it is unclear what sex that child is. It had been very common in the past to make a decision early on for the sake of the child as to what sex they would be even though it is not clear. We need to offer all of the appropriate gender-affirming care to that child through their life and their development.

This bill really fails to recognize that there are many levels of certainty of gender, and one of them is even in the physical characteristics of the child. These individuals are going to have a very rough life, and governments making decisions that signal that they are wrong, that they are abominations, this is not going to be an appropriate way for any government with compassion to deal with our citizens.

This really is a bill that is the thin edge of the start of the state making all kinds of medical decisions. We do not know what will come next. We already have seen restrictions on appropriate medication use for people with addictions, and now we're getting into another group of vulnerable people. Of course, you start with vulnerable people, where a lot of the public might not stand up, but I can tell you that I have had hundreds of e-mails from constituents, and the majority of them are not from anyone that has any association with any person that they know of that is transgender. They're from compassionate people that are simply asking for compassion and not to bring in this very cruel legislation.

I would like this government to withdraw this bill. It is not in the best interests of the population. It signals a very bad direction. Use our current system such as appropriate licensing of medical professionals, health professionals in all areas, and let them enforce them. They will review the appropriate literature, as they are trained to do, and make decisions about what the treatment options are. Then let those decisions, those discussions happen with the patient, their parents, and their doctor, and let's move on from that.

Thank you.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah. It is an honour always to rise in this House. I never forget the privilege that we have to be here. I wish I could be rising on a different matter. I just want to start, as I did the last time I spoke in this Chamber, by speaking to all those folks who are impacted by this and the other bills, the other antitrans legislation proposed.

As I said in the Bill 27 debate, I mean, these bills hit me hard, and I'm a privileged cisgender person. My heart goes out to folks in the transgender community who are watching at home, perhaps watching in the gallery, because I know it's hard right now. Yeah. It's hard. As I talked about in the Bill 27 debate, you know, it's wild to think about how we got here at a time when all of us, not just on

this side of the House, in the entire Chamber, hear from folks every single day who are sharing the very real issues that they're facing, the very real issues that they're struggling with: housing, health care, the list goes on. But instead of proposing any concrete actions on those files, this government is attacking the most vulnerable in our community.

In fact, you know, instead of helping Albertans make ends meet, they're making life more difficult, and we can point to countless examples. Let's take car insurance as a recent one. People are already grappling with such high costs for car insurance. Well, the UCP are upping that even more by a whopping 15 per cent.

3:40

Or take rents. At a time when in our city right here, Edmonton, amiskwaciwâskahikan, rents are rising faster than anywhere else in Canada, the UCP is not doing anything to deal with that. Instead, they're giving a whopping \$270-a-month increase to their own MLAs because they're feeling the pinches of higher rents. You just can't make this stuff up. It is shameful.

Let's get to the specifics of this bill, Bill 26. I'll give them credit. There's a little bit more to this bill than there is on the other antitrans pieces of legislation. I want to talk a little bit, as my colleagues have, to some of the aspects specifically that target trans youth. Of course, the one that we focused on a little bit is prohibiting gender affirmation surgery, which, you know, the government, of course, unkindly, inappropriately calls sex reassignment surgery. Again, I mean, it's just one example of many where they're not actually listening to community members, just a few hand-picked folks who echo their narrative.

As folks already know, you know, bottom surgeries weren't happening for folks under the age of 18. What I think is most troubling to me – and I know my colleagues from Calgary-Klein and from Edmonton-Whitemud and others have talked about this, too – is the fact that this legislation is specifically calling out gender-affirming care. Folks, young people could still get access to some of these surgeries as long as it's not for anything to do with them being trans. I won't repeat the language used for the point of order, but when we use language like that, it's because that's exactly what you're doing. You're attacking. You're singling out the transgender community.

If the members opposite want to disagree with me, perhaps they'll join debate, but as folks watching at home and in the gallery will see, they're not joining debate. If you're so passionate about this piece of legislation, then stand up and defend it.

Mr. Schow: If you want us to stand up, we'll sit here until Christmas.

Member Irwin: Yeah. I absolutely would. The House leader is saying: if you want us to stand up, we could be here for a while. Through the chair, I'd love to hear him defend his bill.

Obviously, many members on this side of the House want to get in debate on this because we're passionate about it and because, like the Member for Calgary-Varsity, who happens to be a medical professional – really important to listen to her. As that member said, you know, she's been inundated with e-mails from folks all over the province. I have as well. As she noted, Mr. Chair, those aren't just from folks who are in the trans community. I've had e-mails from parents, I've had e-mails from trans folks themselves, but I've had a whole lot of e-mails from folks who are just saying: "Why? Why do this? Why dedicate a quarter of your legislation in this session to attacking trans folks?"

This legislation, what does it mean? This is going to make Alberta have some of the most restrictive approaches to gender-affirming care across Canada. You know, what was interesting to me is that we had this discussion not long after I was elected, in

2019, around Bill 8, Bill Hate. Alberta became at that point the first provincial government across Canada to actually roll back 2SLGBTQ-plus rights. Here we are again. Here we are again being leaders for all the wrong reasons.

You know, I've heard from a number of my colleagues who are parents. I'm not a parent, but as my colleagues have said so well, these are very sensitive, vulnerable conversations between parents, children, medical professionals. I'm not a parent, but I know of a lot of parents who are impacted by this legislation who are hurting, parents of transgender kids and youth who just want their kids to lead healthy, safe lives, be their best selves.

I worry deeply about the mental health impacts of legislation such as this. We know the evidence is clear that restricted access to care during development periods, you know, for young people leads to increased rates of depression. We know the data is clear that approximately 45 per cent of trans youth in Alberta seriously considered suicide in the last year. We know from recent studies in the United States that state-level antitransgender laws increase suicide risk among transgender and nonbinary youth by up to 70 per cent. Seventy per cent. Let that sink in. That's heavy. Why would this government – why would you not do everything you can to support the mental health of young people in Alberta? I see some laughter in the back row there, again from MLAs who have been absolutely silent. I'm not shocked.

Who would want their legacy as an elected official to be one where hurting kids' mental health is okay? If any of those members opposite want to dispute that, we've got a whole lot of stats to support the impacts of legislation like this. It's not good.

Anyways, as I said, I know that a number of my colleagues want to get on the record as well because their constituents are asking for them to weigh in and to fight as hard as they can against these egregious pieces of legislation. Gender-affirming care saves lives. End. Stop. Kill this bill.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 26, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2024 (No. 2). I just want to thank my colleagues for their very thoughtful, heartfelt comments thus far. Certainly, you know, the members on this side of the House know what's before us. It is a horrendous bill that will hurt very vulnerable youth in our province, and we of course are not in support of it.

This bill introduces various amendments concerning the delivery of health care in our province, not based on science but, rather, based on backwards ideas. The most egregious aspects of the legislation deny trans and gender-diverse youth access to health care. Gender-affirming care, an approach that affirms a trans person's gender identity instead of trying to change it, is endorsed by all leading health associations in Canada. Examples are the Canadian Paediatric Society, the Canadian psychological society, Alberta Medical Association. All of these learned professionals know that gender-affirming care is important. Canadian health providers generally follow the World Professional Association for Transgender Health standards of care. With consultation with parents and physicians trans youth make decisions in their own best interests. The existing process that we have right now is rigorous. Standards of care include extensive assessments as well as assessments by a psychoneurodevelopment health care professional.

The UCP legislation would create Canada's most restrictive approaches to health care in Canada. That is nothing to be proud of. That is a very sad statement, Mr. Chair. Medical professionals would face misconduct charges of providing treatments that are currently standard care. Impacts of these changes may create mental health challenges for many. Anxiety, depression, and suicide may be negative outcomes for trans youth. I know I've received many

calls, e-mails in my constituency from trans youth and their parents and people who are concerned in our society that this legislation absolutely must be defeated.

We know that a U of A study in 2020 found that 30 per cent of trans Albertans reported unmet health care needs related to their gender identity. This is what the government, the UCP, should be addressing, those unmet needs, not actually further restricting what trans youth have access to, those gaps in health care. We know that access to health care is a human right for all Canadians regardless of their sexual orientation. So this is definitely an affront to their right to have proper health care.

This is a very vulnerable population; 45 per cent of Alberta trans youth have seriously considered suicide. We know that gender-affirming care resulted in lower rates of depression, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts among the community. Legislation like Bill 26 increases suicide risk up to 70 per cent.

3:50

We know that this legislation came before us here without consultation with the community. With the Alberta Medical Association? No, they didn't consult with them. With the Alberta Teachers' Association? No, no consultation with them. With the Canadian Paediatric Society? None with them, with Egale, Stepping Stones. These are organizations that should be able to have contributions to this kind of legislation, but the UCP just ignores all of the experts, people who understand what's going on, and just think that they know what decisions should be made. Of course, they are hurting a very vulnerable population, and I'm deeply concerned, as are my colleagues, about this.

I just want to share. This is an open letter that child and adolescent psychiatry of the Medical Association wrote to the Premier. It's an open letter, and I think their voices are very important. I just want to share that for the record, and I'm happy to table this tomorrow, consequently, so that everyone can have access to that.

The . . . Child and Adolescent Psychiatry of the Alberta Medical Association would like to add our voice to the chorus of concern arising from [the Premier's] recent announcement of new policies banning or significantly curtailing access to gender-affirming care and support in health care and education [as well]. We stand with our colleagues, who have already issued statements, but even more importantly, we stand with our patients.

As specialists in pediatric mental health who have the privilege of working with transgender/gender-diverse youth, we have the opportunity to experience first-hand their strength, courage and resilience. We also bear witness to the suffering and pain that arises from gender dysphoria and from questioning one's identity without access to appropriate support to help them through their journey. We are fortunate to live in an era where there is clear scientific evidence supporting safe and effective treatments for youth that alleviate their suffering and save lives. It is essential that all youth have access to these interventions in a timely, safe and appropriate manner.

We hold our responsibility to the health of Albertans sacred, which includes a duty to bring healing and hope as well as to do no harm. In a safe, secure and trusting environment, psychiatrists work to support youth in their exploration of their gender identity as one component of finding and embracing their authentic selves. This may involve no interventions at all aside from support. It may involve advice on socially transitioning, such as dressing in clothes that support one's gender identity or changing one's pronouns. It may involve being part of a broader team offering puberty-blocking agents to temporarily slow development to give youth time to explore and consider. One's journey may also eventually include hormone therapy, at the appropriate time as determined by the youth, their family and a team of medical professionals. In Alberta, youth under 18 years

of age do not have access to gender-affirming surgeries but they may later choose to pursue these as adults.

Before any decisions are made and along each step of an individual's journey, the child and family/guardian accompanying them are offered extensive discussions with multiple . . . professionals around the potential risks and benefits of interventions. Care is taken to ensure that those making the decision have the capacity to understand and consent to treatment. This process is done carefully and thoughtfully without pressure or persuasion.

So, Mr. Chair, there is already a very respectful process in place that people have access to, and Bill 26 will take that all away and will put our youth at risk, and it will hurt us deeply in our province. It's, as I said, backwards legislation. We need to make sure that all Albertans have access to health care; it is a human right. This bill absolutely should be defeated by all members of this House.

I want to just talk very briefly about another section because this section is so important. This part of the bill is the most egregious aspect, but there's also another section where – it's on page 4, and it amends section 8. It's where the continuing care aspects that used to be housed in the Health ministry are going to be moved over to Seniors, Community and Social Services. This transfer, this administrative change seems to be what the UCP thinks is a panacea. Somehow continuing care will now be miraculously fixed. It won't be. I just want to let everyone know that this administrative change does not mean that anything has changed. We still have huge workforce issues where there's high turnover. We have no minimum daily hours. We have too-low unit costs. There are significant issues in the continuing care system, and the UCP government are ignoring those aspects, and this change in the bill is no support at all for that.

So with those comments on the legislation, I would ask that all members not support this legislation. Thank you.

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

[The voice vote indicated that the remaining clauses of Bill 26 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:56 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

For:

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

4:00

Against:

Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Metz
Batten	Goehring	Notley

Boparai	Gray	Pancholi
Brar	Haji	Renaud
Ceci	Hayter	Sabir
Chapman	Hoffman	Schmidt
Dach	Hoyle	Shepherd
Deol	Ip	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Irwin	Tejada
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.
Elmeligi	Loyola	
Totals:	For – 44	Against – 32

[The remaining clauses of Bill 26 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? Carried.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

Bill 27 Education Amendment Act, 2024

The Chair: I see the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm honoured to rise today and speak to Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024. It was on the first day of this fall sitting that I spoke to one of the most inalienable truths. It was the reason that I felt so called to this office, and that reason was the family. It's the beginning of all we have as people and as a country. But families in our society are under attack. Activism and woke ideology have caused real harm to real people. The institution is suffering from artificial screens and needs to be reinforced through thoughtful policy. We must defend the family from those who would make it a target of neo-Marxist experimentalism or antagonism. We in the United Conservative government and especially myself fundamentally believe that we should stand strong in support of Alberta families. This is especially true in our schools, where kids spend so much of their childhood. That is why I'm proud to support the amendments to the Education Act in Bill 27, which will strengthen parents' involvement in their kids' education.

The family, led by parents, is a form of governance that flows from basic natural order. Policies and regulations did not create it. There was no great founding constitutional convention to craft the family. The family is natural, and the purposes of the family are natural. The family is the mechanism by which people pass on their fundamental beliefs and values to their children. Parents have always held the authority to raise and to educate their children. Any theme that uses wedges to drive parents and children apart, anything that would fracture that crucial relationship is wrong. In earlier times, as education transitioned from informal learning at home to more formal schooling outside of the home, parents had the option to delegate the delivery of their children's education to others. However, it's important to note, Madam Chair, that the extent and nature of that delegation has always been at their discretion. Parents continue to play the primary and the central role in determining how their children are educated.

One of my greatest political inspirations, Ronald Reagan, the 40th President of the United States, said of past administrations:

Government seemed to forget that education begins in the home, where it's a parental right and responsibility. Both our private and our public schools exist to aid your families in the instruction of your children. For too many years, people here in Washington

acted like your families' wishes were only getting in the way. [Well,] we've seen what that "Washington knows best" attitude has wrought.

Well, Madam Chair, I will reiterate that anything that seeks to undermine these fundamental truths is detrimental to families and to society. The United Conservative Party statement of principle says, "... that the family as the building block of society and the means by which citizens pass on their values and beliefs and [we must] ensure that families are protected from intrusion by government." I will add to that. It's not just intrusion by government but any other actor. Parents are the primary leaders and caregivers, not government, not union bosses, not the schools, not the media. The Alberta Bill of Rights currently states that it is "the right of parents to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children."

I had the opportunity to meet with an incredible group of students and parents. In fact, they visited the Legislature just last week. During our earlier discussion they asked me what I thought was a key ingredient necessary to ensure the highest quality of education here in Alberta. My answer today is the same as it was back then: trust parents. Parents are the real experts in their own children and are naturally suited to be making these decisions. The family is at the centre of education. From academic achievement to mental health, children do best when their parents are closely involved. Parents have inherent rights respecting the education of their children. It's not granted by the state, but it's recognized by the state. This isn't about left or right. This is about simple universal truths.

The family is a resilient and unbreakable institution, but families in our society are not immune to forces that seek to break them down and strip their inherent rights from them. The universal declaration of human rights recognizes this as well. Signed in 1948, after a time of global crisis, the leaders of the free world got together to agree on a set of basic truths as they regrouped and rebuilt. These statements were necessary after the horrific violations of inherent rights that had been perpetrated around the world. Article 16 reads, "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State." Article 26 reads, "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." A prior right. That means a natural and inherent right, a right that existed prior to any of us having anything to say about it. These articles were a direct challenge to authoritarianism, experimentalism, and activism. They were a challenge to all those who believed that they had found a new and better way to build society, through breaking down the family and treating humans as individual units to be manipulated and remade to suit the whims of government.

In 2020 the Choice In Education Act amended the Education Act here in Alberta to recognize this truth in the preamble, which already recognizes that parents have the right and responsibility to make informed decisions respecting the education of their children. These are the cornerstones of sound education.

In fact, I've met many people across Alberta, in my constituency, like my dear friend Jen, who moved with her family from B.C. because of this, because we recognize and we respect these rights here in Alberta. Parents have rights as integral parts and leaders of their family.

When I was running for office, I met Mona, a loving mother of eight kids who told me: Chantelle, I just want to be able to raise my kids and love my family. Every day Mona is a powerful reminder to me of why I ran for office and of my duty as a legislator to Albertans. I have a responsibility to parents like Mona and Jen, who are concerned about being crowded out by government, by the media, by schools, by any other influencers or influences that think they can do a better job of raising their kids than parents. We cannot shut parents out of the education of their children.

Madam Chair, for good measure I want to conclude with some more words of wisdom from Reagan. He said, "Parents care about their children's education with an intensity central authorities do not share." He continued to say:

Parents know that they cannot educate their children on their own. We must recognize, in turn, that schools cannot educate students without the personal involvement of parents.

With that, Madam Chair, I'm honoured to support Bill 27, the important amendments to the Education Act, and I ask all members of this House to stand with me in support of families, in support of parents, and in support of a free and prosperous society. Thank you.

4:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 27. As with the member across the way, I also very much strongly support parents and students and teachers and the acknowledgement that we all work together to make sure that we raise kids that are not only safe and secure in who they are but that they are also successful and they have the opportunity to reach their full potential and also to be good citizens of this province, of their city and their community and their country and the world, really. So, you know, we can have an alignment on those statements because I think we certainly all share them, but I don't think we share agreement on the intent and the outcome of this bill.

We believe there's a lot that's wrong with this bill, Madam Chair. We've spoken about it quite passionately in the past. I've had the opportunity to speak to it, and we're going to try to make some attempts, I think, to try to make some small improvements to a piece of legislation that ultimately is focused on making things more challenging for vulnerable young people in school and undermining their ability to succeed.

With that, I would like to introduce an amendment, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, this is known as amendment A1. Please proceed.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment that I've introduced, and I'll read it out for the record, says that I move that Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024, be amended in section 9, in the proposed section 33.2(2), by striking out "the board shall" and substituting "the board shall notify the student of the board's obligations under clauses (a) and (b) and, if the student decides to proceed with the request, shall."

Madam Chair, this is a fairly small amendment, but we believe it's a really important one for children and for students. If the members were to look at the original wording of the bill, in 33.2(2) it currently sets out a process for what happens when a student requests that a new preferred name or pronoun be used. What it says right now is essentially that if a student requests that they'd like to use a different preferred name or pronoun and they want that to be used by teachers, teacher leaders, and other school staff, then that automatically triggers that the board shall have the obligations set out in the rest of the bill. What it says, of course, is that once a student makes that request, then automatically the board has obligations to notify the student's parent and, if they're under the age of 16, then to also seek the consent from the parents before going ahead with using that preferred name or pronoun.

The problem here, Madam Chair, is that while we in this House and certainly some of the more engaged people who are following this – we know and I want to acknowledge that there are many people who have been in the gallery regularly to listen to this debate. We know that there are many people watching who are

deeply concerned. We've tabled in this House a number of e-mails from parents and young people and teachers who are deeply concerned about the legislation that's being brought forward. But while we may be following that, we have to acknowledge that many students are probably not. In fact, you know, they may not obviously care too much about what happens in the Legislature. They may not be following the ins and outs.

What we are trying to address here, Madam Chair, is what we believe should be viewed as an oversight perhaps in the bill, which automatically triggers parental notification as soon as a student requests that they want to use a different name or pronoun.

Let's put ourselves in the place of a 15-year-old student who is clearly, you know, maybe having some challenges identifying with their gender and they're trying to figure this out and they go – and let's acknowledge the courage and bravery it takes for a child to go to a teacher and say: I would like to go by a new name or a new pronoun. That child might be doing that without any knowledge that simply requesting that, simply having a conversation with a teacher or somebody they trust in the school like a guidance counsellor, will automatically mean now that their parents will be notified and not only notified, but their consent will be sought. If you were a young person, that would be terrifying. They don't understand that by simply making a request to somebody that they trust in their school community, all of a sudden they will be outed.

You know, the Premier has actually stood and made public statements about how she doesn't want to force the outing of any kids. Now, I will argue that Bill 27 as it stands in its existing form absolutely does that. But we need to put ourselves in the position of that young person who doesn't realize that simply asking the question is going to trigger an automatic process that outs them.

What we're saying by this amendment is simply that once a student requests a change of pronoun or a change of preferred name, that trusted person that they speak to, that teacher, that school counsellor, has to then notify that student and say: "Look, by telling me this, this is the process that then is followed. I now have to notify your parents, and in some cases I'll have to seek their consent. Are you aware of this?" If the student wishes to proceed with the preferred name change or the pronoun change, then the obligations that are set out in Bill 27 will proceed. It's simply a measure to give the child, the student an opportunity to fully understand the implications of what happens when they request a name or pronoun change.

Now, listen. I'm going to be honest. I still think this bill is incredibly problematic. We're never going to agree, I think, in this House on the intent that is behind this bill, which is going to make vulnerable young people more vulnerable, put them at risk. We have all the stats and evidence to support that. The government knows that. They're proceeding anyway. But if we can at least make sure that there is a small pause, that we give those kids a chance before they inadvertently put themselves in a situation where they will be outed by a trusted teacher or somebody in their school community, that they are aware of the consequences of asking that – I can't even imagine. My kids are younger. They're still in elementary. They're not quite there at that stage, but maybe they'll get to that stage one day. I can't imagine the fear that they would feel to summon up the courage to even just talk, maybe the first time they're talking to an adult in their life, about the fact that they want to go by a different name or pronoun. Then to have that person say, "Well, now that you did that, I have to tell your parents," is such a fundamental break of trust between the student and the teacher, the student and a trusted adult in their life.

I think we should all be able to agree in this House that while we as parents – if you are a parent, of course you want to have that primary role in their lives and be the person that they talk to and

confide in and look to for guidance and advice and all the things that as parents we are obligated to do and want to do for our children. But I'm also really rooting for the fact that there are lots of other people who are also looking out for the safety and security of my children. That includes the people in their school.

This is a common-sense, we believe, amendment meant to rectify something that we believe and we hope was an oversight in the legislation, to just simply make sure that students know what will happen before they go forward. They deserve that. So much of the rest of the bill has been undermining their autonomy, their ability to make choices, their ability to work with and have the support of people in their lives. This bill and the other bills brought forward by the government on these issues are meant to make these kids more vulnerable. Can we do this one thing, Madam Chair, and give these kids a chance to understand the consequences of going forward with the requested name or pronoun change before we do it? To me, that's just simply an act of decency that we can offer to these kids if we're going to proceed with the rest of the act.

I dearly hope that this doesn't have to be a partisan issue. I think in other jurisdictions they do similar things. I really, really, truly hope that this is one that the government can get behind. I've brought this forward, and I think there are members on the government side who have heard the rationale for this and understand it and support it. It doesn't change what they intend to do. If they're looking for an achievement that they want to wave before their base, they will have still achieved that.

If that's their goal, the government can still proceed with being able to say they succeeded in doing what they intended to do with this bill, but this is one small change that would give those kids a chance to preserve the trust in the relationship with the person they've talked to at their school and not be forced to be outed by somebody in their school community, so I strongly urge all of the members on the other side, the government side, to please see this as a way to improve this section for the sake of students and the sake of children.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

4:20

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? My apologies over there. The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this amendment. I'd like to thank my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud for bringing this amendment. I think this is a really common-sense compromise.

As the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said, we're never going to agree across the aisle on this bill. You know, earlier when we were discussing the sex ed opt-in/opt-out portion, I noticed a lot of eye rolling and seeming irritation at the mention of the outcomes that we know are tied to a good sexual health curriculum. I don't understand that. The evidence is very clear, and it's well documented that a good sexual health curriculum results in lower teen pregnancy rates, delayed timing for first sexual encounters. These are outcomes that parents, I as a parent, want to see for my children. And then on a broader scale we know that there are real impacts on domestic partner violence and gender-based violence that can be addressed with a comprehensive sexual health curriculum.

Back to the amendment. I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I just needed to squeeze that in there. On this amendment I think what is important here is that – look. I've got a teenager. I've got a 13-year-old. She follows along a little bit, actually, of what we do in here, and she is absolutely the anomaly in her peer group, okay? No one wants to talk to her about what's happening in the Legislature. You know, the other kids in grade 8 are not following along what we're doing in here, so I understand that

we have a real deep understanding now. We've been debating this bill now for weeks. We know exactly what these changes are going to make to the Education Act and the impact they're going to have. We cannot say the same for our teens.

So this amendment: all it's doing is adding that sober second thought, right? It's adding that opportunity for a teacher to say: "Hey, buddy. I just got to check in with you about this. Do you know what the consequences are of coming to me as your teacher and telling me this information?" To be honest, it's completely ridiculous that we would expect that children will know what the consequences of this bill will be on their lives.

Kids are kids. Teenagers experiment. You know, mine is coming out all of a sudden with makeup. It's very difficult for me, actually. It's very difficult for me. She was a baby, like, not that long ago. I was talking to her last night, and she said to me: "At school today, Mom, we were talking about refined sugar. Mom, did you know that refined sugar actually has, like, quite a negative impact on your sleep quality?" She rattled off the whole whatever is in the nutrition curriculum to me on refined sugar, and she said to me, "What do you think about me trying to cut out refined sugar?" And I said: "Girl, you're 13. Do what you want. Try it out. See if it works for you, right? Give it a go."

Now, I know it's hard for some people and maybe for people who feel very secure in their gender and in their sexuality to extend that experimentation into those realms, but it's not hard for teenagers. It is the natural state of a teenager to test boundaries, to push, to try things out. In fact, when we're talking about things like pronouns, what safer way – what safer way – for a child to try it out? "Does this fit on me?"

Do I want my kids to tell me everything? It's a really complicated question, actually. No, in some ways I don't want my kids to tell me everything. I am not the be-all and end-all for my children. Am I a very important person in their network of support? You bet I am because I am their mom, and that doesn't mean I have rights to my children; it means I have responsibilities for my children. But I am not the only person that can be a safe space for them. That is not a healthy way to grow up. It's not a healthy way to be an adult, and it's not a healthy way to be a child.

I have many colleagues who want to speak to this, and I've already talked for five minutes. Okay. I'm going to sit down, but I really would just like to reiterate that what this amendment does is that it fundamentally does not alter what the government is trying to do in this bill, okay? You're still going to get to do all the things you want to do. You're still going to be able to reduce the number of kids who have access to good sexual health curriculum. You are still going to be able to prevent kids from doing this kind of experimentation with pronouns, with gender identity at school. You can still do all of those things. All we are asking for here is that you give kids the opportunity to understand the consequences when they go to their teachers with this kind of request.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:27 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Metz
Batten	Goehring	Notley
Boparai	Gray	Pancholi
Brar	Haji	Renaud
Ceci	Hayter	Sabir
Chapman	Hoffman	Schmidt
Dach	Hoyle	Shepherd
Deol	Ip	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Irwin	Tejada
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.
Elmeligi	Loyola	

4:30

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 32 Against – 44

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: I am seeking members wishing to join the debate on Bill 27. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have to say that I am disappointed that that amendment: not only was it not accepted by the members opposite, but I would have appreciated hearing on the record some rationale as to why the government cannot support that amendment. I thought it was a very thoughtful one.

I do believe honestly that there are many more changes that could be made to this legislation that are required, but we're going to go forward with one more amendment that I'd like to introduce, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, please note this amendment is two pages. This will be known as amendment A2.

Hon. member, you might proceed.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. Would you like me to read this whole amendment into the record?

The Chair: No.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. I appreciate that. It is quite lengthy. It's only because it is somewhat modifying what's in the bill but also reintroducing some provisions that are in the existing Education Act, which are proposed to be deleted by Bill 27.

Essentially, Madam Chair, if I can summarize what this amendment is about, it is to reflect what we've heard loud and clear from teachers, from school boards, and educators who every day are working with our students to give them the best education possible, which is that it is designed to make the delivery of sexual health education an opt-in – it

leaves it up to the boards to decide whether or not to use an opt-in or an opt-out process for providing sexual health education to students.

As you know, Madam Chair, and we've spoken about it quite a bit in this House already, our existing system is an opt-out system, which means – and I think this is important. We've heard some comments from members on the other side who seem to not understand exactly either what happens or actually what the role is of parents currently when it comes to their children receiving sexual health education. Let us be clear for the record right now. The current system, which is an opt-out system, provides parents complete choice about whether or not their child receives sexual health education at school. Absolutely, one hundred per cent unqualified choice, in the sense parents do not need to give a reason and there's no explanation that's required.

Simply, what happens – and I've just received this as a parent. My kids are in grades 4 and 6, so they just started receiving their sexual health education at school. A notification is sent to parents saying: "This is what's going to be taught. It's part of the curriculum, and you can even find the curriculum here. If you do not want your child to participate in this programming, you simply need to let us know, and we will remove your child from that programming and make sure they get alternate education."

That's the process. It's totally in my hands as a parent. I get to make the choice for my child as to whether or not they receive it; that is the choice that all parents currently have because that is current policy for Alberta Education across the province. That is a process that all school boards follow, and it works very well. That's the key part. It works very well.

We know that a very small percentage of parents do choose to opt their children out of child sexual health, but it's a very clear process. There have literally been no complaints about that process which have triggered this response from the government. In fact, the minister has regularly been asked "What problem is this trying to fix?" and he's been unable to articulate what the problem is that this Bill 27 is meant to address when it comes to sexual health education.

In fact, I know that many of the members across the way, including the Minister of Education, including the Premier, including many members from our caucus, were present at the Alberta School Boards Association just two weeks ago, where all of these public, Catholic, francophone boards were all present and they all voted on a resolution very overwhelmingly, where they said – and I'll read it into the record, Madam Chair. It says:

Whereas board autonomy is one of the core principles of ASBA and whereas all members of a school community have the right to learn and work in an environment free of discrimination, prejudice, and harassment, a right guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Alberta Human Rights Act, and the Education Act, and whereas "opt out" sexual health education is a long standing practice that has helped educate students in Alberta,

Therefore be it resolved that sexual health education remain an "opt out" option for parents in Alberta and that school board autonomy be respected with regards to their own sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression policies.

Essentially, this is saying that the resolution overwhelmingly from Alberta school boards is: let's maintain the opt-out process. Because there may be some boards who would like to choose an opt-in process, this amendment gives the boards, who have the local autonomy – remember, school board trustees are locally elected to represent their community. They're in regular engagement with the parents and the students and the teachers in their community; they know best what would best suit their community. If there are school boards where they believe an opt-in process is more appropriate,

this amendment gives them the right to choose that. Essentially, it is saying, once again: government, stay out of this.

It is absolutely unbelievable to me that a government that claims to be focused on, you know, individual rights and big government staying out of things is so big government when it comes to so many aspects of the legislation they've brought forward. They're trying to get involved. Let the school boards decide, and by the way most of them will say that opt-out is working just fine. If the members across the way are right that there is a big problem with the opt-out process even though there's no evidence to support that, then those boards will choose to do an opt-in process, but leave it up to the school boards to decide.

That is what this amendment is for, and I encourage all members across the way to support this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. Again, I would really like to extend my thanks to my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud for introducing this excellent amendment.

Many of you here will know – but maybe some of you don't, so I'll just get you up to speed – the Alberta School Boards Association did pass a resolution to ask the government to get out of their lane, right? The school boards know that they have the capacity to manage whatever the opt – I've said opt-in, opt-out so many times; it's, like, getting mused in my brain. They have the capacity to manage the opt-out system. So we know that this is something that school boards don't want. Again, this is an amendment that will allow school boards to do the job of school boards. How about we let school boards be in their lane and manage those things and this provincial government does the thing it loves best and stay in its own lane?

I wanted to raise here – because the other day I was scrolling through Instagram and I came across a post. It was an Alberta government post about the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence – we're in those 16 days right now – because from November 25 to December 10 the Alberta government would like us to all work together to prevent violence, support survivors, and address its root causes. Here is a great way for us to address the root causes of gender-based violence, because one of the outcomes of comprehensive sexual health curriculum is a reduction in domestic partner violence, intimate partner violence, and gender-based violence. So if this government is serious about their 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, they can stand up and show us that right here today.

4:40

I know I have many colleagues who also want to get in their thoughts on this very not good bill, so I will take my seat. I encourage everyone in this House to vote in support of this amendment. Let's let school boards manage this process. They know their families. They know their students. Let's let them manage it, and let's just go ahead and let our provincial government stay in its own lane.

The Chair: Any other members to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Yeah, Madam Chair. Apologies. I'll be quick. Some interesting comments from the other side as it relates to this amendment and to the bill itself just generally, but I just wanted to provide some guidance to members and encourage members to not support the amendment.

I think it's contrary to what the government is seeking to achieve, which, of course, fundamentally with this bill, is to help support students by ensuring that parents are included in important conversations related to human sexuality, gender identity, and sexual orientation, because we know, of course, parents, being the

primary caregivers of their children, are in the best possible position to support their children and supplement education that they're receiving at school and supplement that at home. Of course, when we do that, regardless of topic, when parents are the most well informed as possible and able to supplement the learning that's occurring at school at home, you get the best possible outcomes. This doesn't do that.

I did just want to take note, because I thought it was interesting that the NDP wants to give boards the ultimate ability to determine what their final policy is when it comes to opt-in versus opt-out and trying to lecture and tell the government to stay in our own lane. However, when they were in government, they didn't seek to make any changes to the structure of sex education in the province. During their time in government the legislation indicated that parents have the ability to opt their children out of instruction related to human sexuality and religion, and they were fine with being in the lane of school boards during that time, Madam Chair. They were fine with telling the school boards what to do and how to do it. They had no problem because they supported the inclusion of that provision in legislation and made no attempts to change that or to remove that.

So trying to suggest now that, you know, the government is getting out of its lane: well, I disagree as well. I think it is absolutely the lane of government, Madam Chair, to determine the priorities of our education system and to determine how parents are involved in the education of their children and to determine how important topics such as sex education are addressed. That is absolutely within the purview and responsibility of the provincial government. Why else do we have a Ministry of Education if we're not going to address priorities related to the education of our children? This is absolutely a priority.

Of course, the other interesting thing that I've noted not just right now, Madam Chair, but in other debate and other conversation that we've had on this is that I just hear a lot of potentials. I just hear a lot of statements and claims with no information or no details or no evidence or no science to back up any of their claims. They say that STI rates are going to increase as a result of moving to an opt-in. They've not presented any information to base that on. The only thing that they're trying to stretch is to say that if you don't have sex education, you have increases in STI rates, et cetera. Nobody is removing sex education. They're trying to really stretch the conversation here, but they're saying that if we move to an opt-in, it means that we will have all of these things.

Again, all they're doing is just making a claim, and they're not providing any detail or any information or any objective evidence to support the claim. They say that the forms are going to get lost in the backpacks, parents aren't going to return them, and that as a result of parents' delinquency or inability to find these forms, students are going to lose out on important sex education, a claim that they have no basis or information to support. I believe it's important to always follow the signs and always look at the details. [interjections] They laugh. It's really interesting. I would strongly encourage the members opposite to look at jurisdictions that have an opt-in requirement. I was just doing that, Madam Chair.

The state of Nevada in the United States has an opt-in system, and I will ask the Assembly if they know what percentage of parents in the state of Nevada return the forms and do not want their children to participate in sex education. I'll repeat it. In the state of Nevada what percentage of parents under an opt-in system return the forms and say that they want their children out of sex education? Through the chair, of course. [interjections] If any member has an intervention and wants to intervene to provide the answer, I am open to listening. Perhaps interventions are not provided in Committee of the Whole, but we can debate it back and forth.

I'll give you the answer anyway, Madam Chair: 1 per cent. One per cent of parents return the forms and say that they do not want their child to participate. The NDP will make all of these grandiose claims that all of these students are going to miss out on sex education, STI rates are going to go up, we're going to have more teen pregnancies, all of this, which is based on conjecture and is not based on any kind of actual fact. In the state of Nevada, that does have an opt-in system, only 1 per cent of families return the forms and take their children out.

Mr. Getson: So it works.

Mr. Nicolaidis: So it works.

I didn't want to go down too many tangents because I just wanted to stay focused on the amendment here, but I have been hearing these comments through question period, even just as early as today in questions to the Premier saying: why don't you want kids to learn about sex education? You know, totally ridiculous assertions, so far from the truth.

Again, our government is focused on making sure that parents are involved in their kids' education because we know, and I'm confident that the members opposite would agree with the statement, that when parents are heavily involved and supporting their kids' education, you get the best possible outcomes for that child. I don't believe the NDP would disagree with that statement.

We should do everything that we can to strengthen the involvement of parents in their child's education, and this will help us do that. Again, I just encourage my colleagues to reject the current amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis on amendment A2.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thanks so much, Madam Chair, and thank you very much to the minister for sharing those thoughts. Definitely triggered some things I wanted to say in support of this amendment.

You know, essentially, this amendment is about this opt-in/opt-out scenario and trying to create space for more options. If school boards have the right to make that decision – I think we can all acknowledge that school boards work more closely with parents than the Minister of Education does on a daily basis. The school board trustees, that are also elected officials, are responsible for knowing their students, knowing their parents, and knowing their teachers and making decisions in the best perspective of the people who are directly impacted. This amendment really speaks to making sure that school board trustees have the ability to do their jobs to the best of their ability.

When we talk about opt-in and opt-out – and I'm going to get into some of the data to share with the minister in a minute since he suggested that there wasn't but there actually is. Basically, what happens when we create an opt-in system is that we create red tape and bureaucratic hurdles for teachers, schools, and parents. For a government that seems allergic to red tape, they sure like to wrap us up in it all the time.

We would rather have a government that focuses on providing teachers with the right training and resources to adequately teach youth about sexual health and diversity. The Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education recommend a consent-based approach to sexual health, and that is what we have right now, because parents can choose to opt out. We already have a system that is working, and it is not broken, as my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud has said.

4:50

The requirement for opt-in poses an extremely high barrier to formal education on these fundamental topics. That is not me; that

is coming from other education organizations whose names I didn't write down in my notes, sadly, but now I wish I did.

There are studies that indicate parental involvement is effective when schools have the flexibility to adapt to a family's needs. I think that is a critical piece here, that schools and school boards need flexibility to adapt to their constituents and their families. This amendment allows for that flexibility.

I wasn't going to talk about this, but this idea came up to me today while I was speaking with a colleague of mine about some other issues, this idea of the precautionary principle. In science there is broad recognition that we don't know everything and there's not data to support everything because we as humans are kind of flawed. There is a limit to our knowledge. We can't know everything about everything. I think the members opposite like to think that maybe they do know everything about everything, but I tend to disagree.

We have this thing called the precautionary principle in science, which basically says that in instances where we don't know everything, where there are data gaps or there are questions remaining, we should err on the side of caution and make decisions with the best available data but make decisions recognizing that maybe, if we err on the side of caution, we don't foreclose future options that may be available to us.

I was triggered to think about the precautionary principle with the minister's remarks because he's saying that we don't have a lot of data about opt-in and opt-out and how that might lead to increases in STIs or increases in sexual violence and whatnot, and if we don't have that data available, then the precautionary principle is a great way to move forward. In that case we would not change our current system to be opt-in because our current system isn't broken and nobody is complaining about it. What we would do is we would collect more data to truly assess how opt-in and opt-out affect STIs and rates of sexual violence.

We know that STIs in Alberta are on the rise. We know that gonorrhea is up to 1,334 cases in the first quarter of 2024, up from 1,247 in 2022. We know that we're having increased rates of HIV, from 293 in 2022 to 507 in 2023. Chlamydia is up by 19 per cent. Babies born with congenital syphilis are also up. We know that educating people about STIs is a critical component of reducing STI rates. We also know that a lot of that education about STIs, their transmission, and their prevention comes through sexual health education in school. That could be inhibited by mandating an opt-in over an opt-out system, but it is vital information.

The other part of this that I think is really important to consider is that there are 9,000 to 10,000 children in care. Who opts them in? They don't have parents, so who is opting them in in the system? That is, I think, a critical point that is not addressed here.

I'll wrap up my comments momentarily here, but I just want to say that I am a mom, and I like to think that I'm actually a pretty good mom. I think my kids think I'm a pretty good mom, too. [interjections] Thank you. I hope they're watching right now, which they totally aren't, but I'll show them the clip later.

My husband and I believe in fostering open communication in our household, and we have always told all our girls that they can come and talk to us about anything at any time, and we are available for them. Whatever the question is, it's not too hard, it's not too outrageous. We will talk to them about it.

There are things that my kids did not tell me as they were going through their teen years. They're 19 and 22 now, so fortunately we've come out the other end of teenageness, and we've survived. But I want to encourage all members in this House to reflect on: when you were 15, did you want to talk to your parents about sex? Did you? Was that, like, a priority? Because I did not want to have that conversation with my mom. Like, oh, my God.

So the school has to be the place. It needs to be the safe place where the information is presented objectively, where kids feel that they can ask questions about it and it's a safe place for them to have that conversation because, ultimately, I don't know that they want to ask you. It doesn't mean that you're a bad parent. It just means that they need to be able to have those conversations in other safe places, too. Opt-in/opt-out changes their ability to do that.

The Chair: Any other members to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A2 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:56 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Metz
Batten	Goehring	Notley
Boparai	Gray	Pancholi
Brar	Haji	Renaud
Ceci	Hayter	Sabir
Chapman	Hoffman	Schmidt
Dach	Hoyle	Shepherd
Deol	Ip	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Irwin	Tejada
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.
Elmeligi	Loyola	

5:00

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 32 Against – 44

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: I seek speakers to Bill 27, with no amendments.

Do we want to vote? Do we want to speak?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I stand only to oppose this bill and to add my voice to the record.

I will now cede my time to other members.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. I do have an amendment that I'd like to submit.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A3. Please note it's two pages.

The hon. minister may proceed.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to introduce the amendment today. As you mentioned, the amendment is two pages. There are two pieces to the amendment. I'll happily walk the Assembly through the two components of the amendment. The first relates to the approval of certain learning and teaching resources. Of course, it does include a new requirement that the Minister of Education approve all learning and teaching resources that deal primarily with and explicitly with human sexuality, gender identity, or sexual orientation. This requirement would apply to all public, separate, francophone, charter, and independent schools across the province, as I'm sure everyone in the Assembly is familiar with.

Since the introduction of the bill, of course, the government has been listening carefully to partners and stakeholders. We've received some requests for some further clarity over those requirements, in particular as it relates to learning and teaching resources that are used for religious instruction. We have heard some concern from partners and stakeholders that government review of resources related to human sexuality, gender identity, or sexual orientation might impact religious instruction. Obviously, as I believe one can understand, Madam Chair, in many of our faith-based institutions these topics are quite often intertwined with faith and religious teaching and instruction. The intent of the bill, of course, is not to impact learning and teaching resources used for religious education or instruction.

The first part of the amendment clarifies that when learning and teaching resources deal primarily and explicitly with human sexuality, gender identity, or sexual orientation and are used for religious instruction, they would not require approval from the Minister of Education. This would apply to all school types. It would cover separate schools, independent schools, and alternative programs in public schools. There are a variety of alternative programs that exist within the public school system that offer religious instruction as well. So this would apply to all school authorities and all school divisions. This would apply to learning and teaching resources on these topics but not to external presenters, who would still require ministry approval.

The proposed amendment is intended to help strike the right balance between the need for transparency and oversight on resources to ensure that we are providing age-appropriate resources to students on these important topics and ensuring as well the ability of school authorities to select appropriate materials related to their religious instruction and religious faith that aligns with their religious view.

The second component of the amendment relates to notification and consent requirements that arise where a student requests that a teacher and other school staff refer to them by a new gender identity-related name or pronoun. The government again has heard some concerns and feedback from partners that there needs to be some additional clarity around the language here to do with the process and procedures relating to parental consent and notification. Parents will still in all cases be notified. The approach in the amendment clarifies that the intent of this policy will help to ensure transparency so that parents will be made aware of any requests that their children are making, of course.

I'm happy to present this amendment, Madam Chair, with the two components, as I mentioned. Again, I would encourage members of the Assembly to vote in favour.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. Just so I understand this amendment, if I have a child who is in a standard

public school program or a STEM charter school or a science school, their resources on human sexuality would need to be approved by the ministry, but if my child is in a religious school program, then they do not have to have resources approved by the ministry. Am I understanding this amendment correctly? Thank you so much, Minister.

Wow. So now we know what kind of stakeholders this government is listening to, because plenty of stakeholders have spoken out on this bill. I just spoke about the Alberta School Boards Association, that expressed very loud opposition to the changes to sexual health curriculum opt-in/opt-out processes.

I really must say that it's quite rich listening to debate on this topic and to hear someone say: "Well, this is not going to make a difference. It's going to be 1 per cent. Why does it matter one way or the other?" If it doesn't matter one way or the other, why have we been discussing this legislation for weeks? Why would you bring the change in the first place? Obviously, there's a reason. The government simply doesn't want to tell us what the reason is for making this change.

But we do at least now see the kind of stakeholders that the government is listening to, who they're willing to make little carve-outs for, to make more comfortable. It's not my kids. It's not my kids just in a public school system. It's some other separate little niche group of community that this government is making way for.

One final thing. Because this is a bad amendment, I encourage everyone in the House to vote against this amendment.

Mr. Eggen: Okay.

Ms Chapman: Thank you. Thank you. I sense I'll get some support on this side of the House for my suggestion.

But I really just need to speak very briefly to this idea that changing this opt-in/opt-out procedure somehow will have parents becoming more involved in their child's education. That's completely ridiculous. If it's the exact same thing, why would it change how a parent is involved in their child's education? A parent has the option right now to make the choice. There's nothing in this bill, there's nothing in this amendment that the government just submitted that has any kind of clarity for additional information that school boards will have to provide to parents, right? We have timelines for how far in advance they have to do this, but there is nothing in here that compels school boards to have parents be more involved in this decision-making. It's like you flipped a box on the form, okay? You used to opt out; now you opt in. At no point has this government provided any kind of rationale for how this will result in parents being more involved in their child's education. The reason they haven't provided that rationale is because it does not exist.

I encourage all members of the House to vote against this amendment and against this bill when we get to that point. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members on amendment A3?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A3 as moved by the hon. Minister of Education.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:09 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	LaGrange	Schow
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Loewen	Schulz

Boitchenko	Long	Sigurdson, R.J.
Bouchard	Lovely	Sinclair
Cyr	Lunty	Singh
de Jonge	McDougall	Stephan
Dreeshen	McIver	Turton
Dyck	Nally	van Dijken
Ellis	Neudorf	Wiebe
Fir	Nicolaides	Williams
Getson	Nixon	Wilson
Guthrie	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Hunter	Rowswell	Yao
Jean	Sawhney	Yaseen
Johnson		

Against the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Metz
Batten	Goehring	Notley
Boparai	Gray	Pancholi
Brar	Haji	Renaud
Ceci	Hayter	Sabir
Chapman	Hoffman	Schmidt
Dach	Hoyle	Shepherd
Deol	Ip	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Irwin	Tejada
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.
Elmelligi	Loyola	

Totals:	For – 43	Against – 32
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[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

The Chair: I seek speakers to the main bill in Committee of the Whole, Bill 27. Seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Chair. As you can tell, I'm very eager to speak against this bill, and so I rise to speak against Bill 27, Education Amendment Act, 2024.

Recently, I was speaking to a parent and constituent in Edmonton-South West, and she was perplexed by this government. She's worried about affordability, class sizes, a lack of teachers and educational assistants, health care, and not parental consent, and so she was surprised that this bill that targets trans and queer kids is what the government is focusing their efforts on. She remarked to me how this legislation is something you would see from a bygone era. Not only is it a dangerous bill and will put kids at risk, it would fit perfectly if it were introduced in the 1950s or when the Social Credit government were in power.

This legislation, to put it plainly, is predicated on antiquated notions of morality and human sexuality. It's predicated on the idea that talking about sex and sexual education is somehow dirty, should be hidden, and that comprehensive sexual health information available to young people should be minimized. It is also predicated on this notion that children belong to parents as though they were property, but, Madam Chair, if the other side of the House hasn't noticed, Alberta has changed. This government is taking us backwards, is actually undoing the progress that we've seen, and Albertans are paying the price.

I'm going to briefly speak to two aspects of this bill: the requirement for opt-in on sexual education and the consent for pronoun changes. Alberta is a leading jurisdiction in Canada in terms of STI rates, unfortunately. In fact, we saw a 73 per cent increase in HIV cases between 2022 to 2023, and, alarmingly, now congenital syphilis cases have risen from 30.8 per 100,000 live births to 169.1 per 100,000 live births. That has resulted in 50 babies, for example, being stillborn as a result of this disease.

Well-established peer-reviewed studies and the evidence tell us that the most effective way to prevent STIs is through comprehensive sexual health education, testing, and access to care, yet this government is going the opposite direction. Rather than making it easier to access comprehensive sexual health, they are making it harder with a shift to opt-in sex education under this bill. By mandating that parents go through another bureaucratic layer so their children can receive the information that would benefit them, the government is actually doing a disservice to young people.

I should mention that under various versions of the Education Act, opt-out has actually worked well, and it's worked well for decades. The UCP government is trying to convince Albertans that there is a problem when there isn't one. Parents have always had an important and primary role in their child's education and well-being. No one is disputing that. In fact, if members across the aisle – I would invite any member across the aisle to visit a school in Edmonton or any school across the province, and they'll see that parents and guardians are very much involved in the school community. But by increasing the bureaucratic burden on teachers and school administrators when they are already trying to support students in the classroom – teachers are doing everything they can; they are faced with classroom complexity – all of this simply will just take away from kids, and it ends up only hurting kids at the end of the day.

It's part of a broader pattern of this government and their agenda. I have witnessed first-hand the deliberate precipitous dismantling of Alberta's prized publicly funded education system. This government has intentionally starved and underfunded the education system, from cutting program unit funding to dragging their feet on building new schools or the lack of teachers and educational assistants. This government has chosen to prioritize ideology over evidence, restricting access to information that could prevent further infections and save lives. Ultimately, this puts young people's lives at risk.

There is well-established case law, I should mention, Madam Chair, that in this province and in this country children have rights. Children have a right to privacy and children have agency.

Now I want to turn to perhaps the most harmful aspect of this legislation, the requirement for parental notification and consent for name and pronoun changes. First of all, forcing schools to notify parents in all cases assumes that every home is a safe space, and we know that that's not a reality for all children. Unfortunately, some students and some children will need the protection of other adults in their lives. They might come from environments where revealing their gender or sexual orientation could lead to rejection, punishment, or even violence. Mandating, the way that this government is doing so, will absolutely put kids at risk. I want to be clear, Madam Chair. No child should have to choose between being authentic and being safe. No child should be outed before they are ready, and schools should be sanctuaries where students can explore their identities without fear of judgment or reprisal, and this bill tears that sanctuary apart.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

5:20

The Chair: Any other members to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Madam Chair, I rise to continue my advocacy against this antitrans, anti gender-diverse, anti two-spirit, and anti-queer legislation, which this bill goes against entirely. That's right. This legislation goes against the whole of the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community in far-reaching ways. In particular, it is targeting students in our schools, specifically anyone under the age of 15, who requires consent from their parents to use their chosen pronouns or their preferred name.

Anyone who has teenagers in their lives – and this year I just turned into one of those people as my goddaughter and my nephew turned 13 this past September. Let me tell you that asking these two young ones anything is worse than pulling teeth on a good day, and asking any teenagers to do anything in a big group, like many teachers will know, is truly a task and a half, which they do not get paid enough to do, might I add.

I do not see how this piece of legislation will purport to take away the free will of these wonderful little humans in any way because realistically – let's be honest – trans and gender-diverse kids in school will continue to get around these harmful pieces of legislation and will have their own safe spaces with each other despite this government's attempt to quell their existence in schools. They're not going anywhere.

I know this because I was one of those queer kids in high school here in rural Alberta at the Morinville community high school. I want to get personal here because I want you to know what happens when you discriminate against folks and the culture that exists in our communities, that I've witnessed growing up in rural Alberta. I've been called the F-slur, had the words "gay" and "homo" thrown at me in derogatory ways. My brothers have even gotten into fistfights with their hockey buddies when we were growing up simply because I am two-spirit.

It was even worse when it came to the racism at the arenas that I would be dragged to every weekend because my two brothers played hockey their whole lives. I know many of you already know how heated those novice or peewee hockey games can get, what it used to be before parents and coaches had to take anger management training. My little, tiny mother and auntie almost got into many a fist fight with men who called us every derogatory name under the sun.

It doesn't need to be that way because education and social expectations change, albeit briefly. I say briefly because this government wants to go back to this, inviting hatred back into all communities in this province.

Do you know where I felt the most supported and free to be myself? At school. I was allowed to be who I was because of the friends that I made in school and the teachers who supported me. This legislation takes away the safety for many students, and this is sadly on par for UCP governments, who under a previous leader passed legislation to monitor the development of antiracism or gay-straight alliance clubs for students in our schools in Bill 8.

Why are we doing this? Why do we have a government hyperfixated on legislation that goes after such a small population in our province? Why are we legislating discrimination when Albertans are asking for so much more than legislated hate? We could be focusing on funding of schools or teaching reconciliation in our curriculum. We could be focusing on reducing the class sizes of our overloaded schools, or we could, you know, build schools rather than talk about building schools. With us legislating this discrimination, we're putting students in a worse position than we've found them.

Countless organizations such as the Canadian Paediatric Society have raised serious issues with items in this bill related to parental opt-ins for anything related to gender identity, human sexuality, or sexual orientation. The Alberta Teachers' Association have stated that they are concerned that teachers in our province will be impacted in their ability to provide safe and inclusive spaces for all students. The Canadian Psychological Association also issued a position statement titled the Promotion of Gender Diversity and Expression and Prevention of Gender-related Hate and Harm. In that statement there are findings that regulations such as this policy and this suite of legislation that this regressive government has put forward to discriminate against trans, gender-diverse, and the queer community at large – it states:

These regulations . . . exemplify the systemic barriers that expose gender diverse people to higher rates of depression,

suicidal ideation, suicidal behaviour, transphobic violence, and socioeconomic instability.

Respecting trans and non-binary people's chosen name is associated with improvement in mental health issues such as reduction in depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and behaviour.

... suicidal ideation and attempts [are linked with] discrimination, transphobia, family rejection, physical attacks.

Madam Chair, is this the legacy that this government wants? I don't think any one of us want the deaths of Albertans on our hands, but this is what the data is showing us. We know that over 81.7 per cent of trans, gender-diverse, and two-spirit folks seriously consider suicide at some point in their life. I have, my best friends have, Albertans that I've spoken with have, and it's only going to get worse.

Madam Chair, this bill is already harming Albertans before even getting through this House. Hate-motivated attacks are up against the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community, and it's only going to get worse when we start legislating hate. No one in this House thinks that parents should not be involved in the safety and security of their children. I'm so thankful that I had very welcoming and loving parents, who have accepted me for who I am, who supported me and my partner to this day, and, to be quite frank, who probably love my partner more than they love me. I'm just kidding. Mom, if you're watching, I know you love me the most.

Thank you. I'd love to say so much more on this topic, but I just want to share that we love you, everyone out there. You matter, and we will keep fighting.

The Chair: Any other members to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am honoured to rise to speak out against Bill 27 and the many harms that will come from its passing. Again I come to this idea of a solution to a problem that doesn't exist and that, in fact, will create more problems. Through, I think, the life cycle of where we are right now, when we first heard the introductions, and I would say, actually, even back as far as Bill 8, or Bill Hate, as we referred to it earlier, what policies like this, what legislation like this does is actually create a wedge in families; between families and our educators; between parents and children; and the trifecta of parents, children, and educators that didn't exist.

I grew up in the '80s in ultra-conservative Alberta, and throughout the time in the '80s that I lived in, I actually had a classmate who at the time referred to themselves as a tomboy. They had a very feminine name, which they had then asked to be shortened to one letter, which was the beginning of their name. This kid existed among us in the '80s, lived their life. No teacher felt compelled by their own desire and especially not, as what is wrongly being proposed here, compelled by any government or any politician to go to their parents and out them.

Now, from what I've learned of this person, who's now an adult, a nonbinary adult who's fully comfortable in their skin and in their identity, they were very lucky to have parents that accepted them. Those conversations were still hard. As I referred to from a lot of the other constituents that I've spoken to, difficult conversations that are done in a loving manner can still be emotional because that's what it's like in a family. That's what it's like when you're a parent and you have honest discussions with your kids, if you're lucky enough to have parents that are open to having that discussion and you know that there's a chance that they're going to accept you.

On the other end of the spectrum I also had a best friend who at 14 was able to come out to me. They lived in a household where they told me that if they had come out to their family or if their family found out – and when I was told, I was told under the express agreement that I would not share their story. I want to emphasize this point: it was their story to tell. It is not the teacher's story to tell.

What I'd really love to see, if we're so concerned about education and legislating what happens in education and taking responsibility for education as a ministry, is I'd like us to focus on what people are asking us for, which is to reduce class sizes, to properly fund for the operation of schools, including EAs.

5:30

I tell you that it is tough in those classrooms, from everything I'm hearing from teachers, from everything I'm hearing from EAs who are basically sprinting from classroom to classroom, and they're focused on the success of those students, and that is what I would really love to see this government focus on. I'm learning, sadly, through my time here in this House and even, like I said, as far back to Bill 8, that unfortunately the success of students may not be top of mind for this government. Instead, what we're focusing on is outing kids.

I want to just hearken back to a little bit of what I heard from one of the members on the other side about what causes the breakdown in families and citing things like, I think it was activism, woke ideology, but then also talking about how the family is the beginning of all we have. So why don't we talk about that: how the family is the beginning of all we have. And we can also talk about how some of our families may not be as accepting, but they're still all we have. They provide us housing sometimes. They can provide us love if we're lucky.

But if we don't have an accepting family and we're legislating outing kids, this policy is actually the one that is going to create the breakdown in those families, and those divisions can be lifelong. They can go on for generations. I just want everyone to know in this House, if you're voting for this legislation, that is one of the impacts that we're going to see from that.

I just want to quickly go over sexual health education. What I see from this government is also refusing to properly fund for kids in care to make sure that they're safe and that they make it well through this life, and even, you know, the government has actually taken kids into care, they've taken responsibility as parents, that they're going to cut them off two years before they're ready, and they're not going to support those kids. They're not going to support kids that ...

Mr. Shepherd: Stop.

Member Tejada: Okay. Thanks.

With that, I just want to say this legislation will be incredibly harmful to families and cause the division that they say that they don't want, so I encourage everyone to vote against this bill.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm honoured to have a chance to speak but also to make it absolutely clear that I am absolutely, fundamentally opposed to this bill.

We're told that this bill is a bill about protecting children and it's about making sure that their parents have greater knowledge about what those kids are doing in school, but in my mind, Madam Chair, what this bill really shows us is a profound lack of understanding in terms of what school is and what school does and what school means to kids these days. More than that, it's a profound lack of understanding in terms of the trajectory that school can play in a kid's life, providing them with confidence to walk forward into life, into a future.

Not only this, I believe that this is also a bill that's designed to sow division and discord, particularly where trust of teachers and people who work in schools is concerned. More than that, of course, this is a bill that is designed to harm the most vulnerable. It's about

pitting one group of children and their parents and their guardians and the people who love them against another.

The trouble is that these are our kids. These are our colleagues. These are our cousins. These are our relatives, our extended family members, our neighbours. Transgender, diverse, two-spirited folks have always been here. They have always walked alongside us, and, quite frankly, it's time that we walk alongside them. This is one of the most vulnerable groups of our population, and they face so much every day, and as a teacher I have witnessed what they face. They face discrimination, they face bullying, they face harassment, they face hatred on all fronts in all forms each and every day, and the consequences of the passage of this bill, this suite of bills, will be an increased risk. My colleagues have already talked about it: employment and housing, discrimination, depression, illness, continued lack of appropriate health care, risk of suicide and violence.

I've taught these kids, and quite frankly all these kids want to do is be kids. They want to have a chance to play with their friends at recess. They want to have the chance to sit with their very best friend and talk about all the important news of the day. They want to figure out how to take that bus the very first day of school on their own because that's important. They want to remember those field trip forms. They want to have the courage to join that club. They are just kids. They deserve a life like every single other child out there does, and this bill will make it hard for them to do that because it demands that the people that they should be able to trust, they cannot trust any longer.

One of the things that this bill does, Madam Chair, is that it demands that teachers go against the code of ethics. It demands that school boards no longer follow the Education Act, where it talks about the responsibility of teachers to create safe and caring classrooms, where it talks about the responsibility of principals and other teacher leaders and school boards to create safe and caring and inclusive spaces for all kids. Believe it or not trans kids are all kids.

Quite frankly, you know, when I read the part about that if you believe that there will be danger done to these kids, that's okay. All you have to do is make sure that there's a mental health consultant or a counsellor available to that kid. I'm here to tell you that there aren't enough mental health counsellors to go around. There aren't enough social workers to go around. There certainly aren't enough trauma-informed psychologists to go around. Even in emergency they don't exist. It takes time. Ensuring the student is provided with counselling or other assistance: clearly, there's a lack of understanding of how schools actually operate from day to day.

More than anything else it demands that teachers break trust with the kids that they've worked so hard to build that trust up with, and that is perhaps the most egregious thing. I am fairly positive that every single person in this room can think of one teacher that was that person for them. We are now asking that one teacher to no longer be that person, and that is egregious and should simply not be happening.

Quite frankly, and I've heard other people talk about it today, as a mom, as a grandma, and as a teacher I do not want this to be the legacy that this 31st Legislature leaves the kids of Alberta. We should not be leaving them a legacy of hatred. We should be leaving them a legacy of love.

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

Member Brar: Thank you, Madam Chair. Today I rise with urgency and compassion to speak against Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024. While this bill is presented as enhancing parental rights and school transparency, it fundamentally undermines the safety, dignity, and well-being of Alberta's students, particularly gender-diverse youth.

Rather than addressing the real challenges like mental health, building more schools in much-needed communities, overcrowded classrooms, underfunding, this government is choosing to target vulnerable kids with policies that do way more harm than good.

Let me talk about forced disclosure and its impact on gender-diverse youth and kids. Madam Chair, Bill 27 requires schools to inform parents if a student under 17 requests to use a name or pronoun different from those assigned at birth. While transparency in education is important, this provision ignores the harsh reality that many gender-diverse youth face at home. According to the recent study that came out, over 30 per cent of LGBTQ-plus youth report rejection or abuse after coming out to unsupportive families. For many school is the only place where they feel safe and accepted. Bill 27 risks turning those sanctuaries into sites of anxiety and fear by forcing disclosure without the student's consent. I want to ask this government: would you risk endangering a child's safety for the sake of your own political optics?

5:40

Let me talk about mental health, Madam Chair. This is the crisis that we cannot ignore. The mental health challenges facing LGBTQ-plus youth are staggering. The Canadian Mental Health Association reports that these youth are 3 to 4 times more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts than their peers. What makes a difference? Affirming environments make a difference.

The Trevor Project found that using a young person's chosen name and pronoun can reduce suicidal thoughts by nearly 30 per cent. Bill 27 threatens this progress, pushing students away from the support systems that they so desperately need. When we jeopardize mental health, we risk lives. As my colleagues have already mentioned, these are the lives of real people: our own neighbours, our cousins, and the people we love, that we care about.

It undermines teachers. Teachers are the trusted allies of students; they are not the informants. Teachers are often the first line of support for students grappling with identity questions. This bill forces educators to act as informants, undermining the trust that is fundamental and foundational to these relationships. The Alberta Teachers' Association found that 72 per cent of teachers fear that mandatory parental notification would damage their rapport with students, and that is concerning. If students can't trust their teachers, where will they turn for guidance and support, Madam Chair?

Parental rights that this government always talks about: they are already protected. Some proponents, in fact the entire government, claim that this bill enhances parental rights. Madam Chair, let's set the record straight. Alberta already has some of the strongest parental rights provisions in Canada. Under the school act parents are notified about curriculum content related to human sexuality, and they can opt their children out. A 2022 survey by Alberta Education found that over 80 per cent of parents felt that they had sufficient control over their child's education. This bill is not about addressing a genuine gap. This bill is about using children's identities as political tools, and that is shameful for this government to do.

Madam Chair, I had been door-knocking in my riding during this summer, and there were lots of stories that came up. Let me share a story from one of my residents in Calgary-North East. A family told me about their transgender child, who found a safe space at school to come out on their own. With the support of teachers and classmates that young person has thrived academically and socially. Under Bill 27 this story could have ended very differently. These are real lives and the lives of our neighbours and the life of that kid whose parents were talking to me.

Being a shadow minister for Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, I would like to also highlight that this bill will increase

red tape production and will increase administrative burden. Bill 27 imposes unnecessary administrative hurdles, and it requires the Minister of Education to preapprove all materials related to gender identity or human sexuality, adds layers of red tape for teachers already overburdened by overcrowded classrooms and underfunded programs.

I will request this minister to do something else more productive rather than doing this thing. He can go and talk to my residents who are struggling to get new schools in the riding, maybe build those schools, maybe talk to parents who need some help with so many underfunded programs.

There's lots to say, Madam Chair, and I know my other colleagues have more things to say. I want to tell this government that this bill is ridiculous, and this bill should be taken back. I request all my colleagues to vote against this bill. This is the time to not only change the bill, this is the time to change this entire government.

Ms Hayter: Last Friday I had a very important meeting with a very important constituent. Amelia had to complete a challenge at school, and she decided that that challenge was going to be to meet her MLA and have a meeting. I love that I got to assist her in this challenge and getting to have a conversation with the next generation. We sat down, and she opened up her laptop with her prepared questions, and I could feel her dad being so proud in that room and her little brother George's curiosity.

She started easy and asked what it was like to do this job. What was the hardest part? What was it like to be a woman in politics? But then I realized that this well-prepared 12-year-old was just warming up. She then asked me what the stance was for myself and the Alberta NDP on Bill 27 as well as 26 and 29. She asked where we stood on outing kids. I was asked where we stood on opting in on sex ed. She knows that the Alberta NDP and her MLA are standing with her, the teachers, the medical professionals to say: no; we don't want these harmful bills, and changing the process of making sex ed opt-in means students are going to miss important learning.

I then asked her what her thoughts were, as I represent her. She beamed, but then she said: I want you to tell the government to stop pushing through this harmful legislation that's going to hurt friends. I love, as well, that Amelia watches the news every day. She was so well informed. I shared with her that my 12-year-old as well watches the news every day and that she wasn't the only little girl of 12 years watching the news.

And that's the thing right now. The kids in Alberta are watching us. They are watching what is happening to their province. They are aware of the harm-filled bills that put their friends at risk. I have to say, though, that last week, that meeting with Amelia, her advocacy and her vision for our province: that was the bright light during this really dark time. It gave me hope, because there's a generation of youth who will be future leaders here one day that care about Albertans.

But I also stand here today scared of what harm this bill is going to do to that generation of students right now. I'm scared of what the next generation will inherit. I'm scared that Amelia is going to have to stand in this House 20 years from now having to fight for all these rights that have been rolled back, but now I also have a little bit of hope and optimism that in 20 years Amelia is going to be part of an Alberta NDP government, ensuring that we have the world's best curriculum for our students, where Albertans are going to make a living wage and they're housed and they have family doctors.

The Education Amendment Act is going further. The UCP government is going to be restricting the 2SLGBTQIA-plus students. You're taking access of information about sexual health and gender and

sexuality. Medical professionals don't want this. Teachers don't want it. My constituents don't want this. Your constituents don't want this. As we've said, we get all the letters. I have been tabling those letters, and I encourage you to go and read them. They're heartfelt messages. They're not letters of everybody saying the exact same thing. They're their stories, and they are important stories for every single person here to read and understand. The Alberta Teachers' Association are concerned that these changes are going to impact the teachers' ability just to provide a safe and caring and inclusive space for all students.

During the consti break I had an opportunity to attend the ATA's evening with Margaret Atwood. It was an honour to hear her speak and her expertise. It's ingrained in my brain, her words of: if we're going to be doing opt-out of sex ed or opting in, who's going to teach our students that don't actually learn, don't get the curriculum? It's going to be the Internet. Kids don't know it's wrong if they haven't been taught that it is wrong. Are we going to go back to the 1900s, when women don't know that they're pregnant as they didn't know how it happened?

To sit in the Southern Jubilee Auditorium, filled with the energy of these teachers and the support workers and families, it felt so amazing. I loved the conversations I had afterwards with those who approached me to share their concerns and to thank me and my Alberta NDP colleagues for being a voice for them and for these students. I appreciate this care, that work that teachers do every day to support our students, and I wish the government would do the same.

So, Amelia, the Alberta NDP is here, and we are listening. We are standing up and fighting. On behalf of all of my constituents I will not be supporting this harmful bill.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 27?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the remaining clauses of Bill 27 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:50 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

For:

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

Against:

Arcand-Paul	Eremenko	Metz
Batten	Goehring	Notley
Boparai	Gray	Pancholi
Brar	Haji	Renaud

Ceci	Hayter	Sabir
Chapman	Hoffman	Schmidt
Dach	Hoyle	Shepherd
Deol	Ip	Sigurdson, L.
Eggen	Irwin	Tejada
Ellingson	Kasawski	Wright, P.
Elmeligi	Loyola	
Totals:	For – 44	Against – 32

[The remaining clauses of Bill 27 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 25

Early Learning and Child Care Amendment Act, 2024

The Chair: I seek speakers wishing to join our debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah. It is an honour to rise in this House, as I said earlier. Just wait for people to exit since it's incredibly loud in here.

I haven't actually had a chance yet to speak to Bill 25, the Early Learning and Child Care Amendment Act, 2024. I want to start by noting the fantastic work of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Acadia, who I've witnessed first-hand just being an incredible advocate for early learning, for child care, but also I just want to give a particular shout-out for the work that she's done when it comes to children in care. I think these are the types of conversations that we need to be having, and these are the debates that we should be engaging in in this House, not the debates that we have been having around the antitrans legislation this government has put forward.

Member Tejada: Hear, hear.

Member Irwin: Yeah.

Again, you know, as my colleague from Calgary-Acadia and all my colleagues would know, these are some of the issues that we hear about from our constituents. As we've said many times – and I need to get it on the record again – our constituents aren't asking for attacks on our trans community. They're asking for action on the issues that matter.

Now, when it comes to Bill 25, we've seen a track record from this UCP government on very much mismanagement of early childhood development, of child care, of day home issues. They had an opportunity with this piece of legislation to really address some of the truly critical and heartbreaking issues that we've seen in some Calgary daycares and, in particular, the E coli outbreaks that occurred last June.

You know, we hear from Albertans, from our constituents – I know my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is home to many daycare and child care facilities. I always like to give a shout-out to the intercultural family centre in my riding, in the old McCauley school, where they've been offering high-quality child care for a long time now. In fact, that was the site where, under the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, when she was Premier, we first announced \$25-per-day child care. [interjections]. Yeah. I think we have a pretty incredible track record when it comes to child care on this side of the House. And although I was not part of that government, it gets mentioned a lot in my riding. I also need to give a special shout-out to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who was in that portfolio prior. She joined me at, actually, a number of child care facilities in my riding, and we had some really great conversations.

I say all that because I would urge, actually, the members opposite to really take a page from the NDP's handbook when it comes to managing child care facilities and when it comes to doing the best for all kids in this province. In this bill, Bill 25, we don't see the action needed when it comes to addressing E coli outbreaks. For instance, this bill doesn't even set out further guidelines for hygiene policies within daycare facilities to limit future outbreaks. What assurance do parents and families have that there won't be a future outbreak in the centre, a place where they send their kids every single day?

And this is not a slight at all to those child care workers. We know, and any of us who visited a child care centre know how hard those child care centre workers work every single day. They are incredibly committed. You know, kids spend so much time with those workers every single day. They're doing the best they can under often pretty difficult circumstances. So I want to give a shout-out to child care workers as well. [interjections] Yeah. Really respect the work that they do.

I really want to put on the record that the UCP had an opportunity in this bill to go a whole lot further to ensure safety . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the committee stands recessed until 7:30 tonight.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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