



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 13, 2025

Day 111

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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

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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
Cooper, Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC)
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
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Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
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Official Opposition House Leader
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)
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Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)
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(UC)
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Sigurdson, Hon. R.J., ECA, Highwood (UC)
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Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Edmonton-Ellerslie
Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 2

Vacant: 2

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Tanya Fir	Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
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Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Advanced Education
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Rick Wilson	Minister of Indigenous Relations
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Andrew Boitchenko	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Relations
Chantelle de Jonge	Parliamentary Secretary for Affordability and Utilities
Nolan Dyck	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous and Rural Policing
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Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Dyck
Hayter
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Chair: Mr. Sabir

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Dyck
Eggen
Hunter
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 13, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Okay. First we have the hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What a privilege it is for me to rise and acknowledge you as Speaker in this first question period. I hope that doesn't count towards my time.

I'm very happy to introduce students and parents and teachers from the Calgary French & International School in the amazing riding of Calgary-Bow. I ask that they rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services for, I believe, two introductions today.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you two grade 5 classes along with their teachers from Webber Academy, located in Calgary-West. They are here learning about democracy, and I certainly had a pleasure to meet them and talk to them. I invite them to stand up and accept a warm welcome from this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Oh, you have another one?

Mr. Ellis: Not a class.

The Speaker: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're joined by many outstanding, of course, organizations and champions dedicated to vulnerable Albertans. I want to introduce a few of them, introduce to you and through you Ryley Miller from Riseup Society, Colleen Pirie from Be the Voice, and Katherine O'Neill and Christine McCourt-Reid from the YWCA Edmonton. If they could please rise and have the warm welcome of this Assembly as well. Thank you very much for being here.

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. members, it is my pleasure to introduce several extraordinary staff members in the Municipal Affairs office. We have with us today Hillary Cleminson, Emily Briand, Carter Moroz, Kevin Lee, Katelyn Lomak, Shannon Greenfield. I appreciate everything they have done and do. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce Kaniz Fatima and Monir Alam and students from the Centre for Children & Community Development from the great riding of Calgary-Cross. I had the opportunity to sit with them and answer their questions, and I can tell you that the future is bright. Please rise and enjoy the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is nurses week, and there are a number of AUPE members here, some of them LPNs, and all of them love nurses. I ask that they rise when I say

their name: Penelope, Sophia, Hasna, Carolina, Lynette, Timoteo, Nancy, and Sandra. They want you to know that they're all dead set against Bill 55, and I'll be tabling amendments this afternoon to try to make it less bad.

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we announced our government's 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence in Alberta, joined by many important organizations from across Alberta who are here with us today: Lana Wells from Shift; Kim Ruse from FearIsNotLove; Dee Adekugbe from Ruth's House; Katherine Springall from Sagesse; Mariama Gueye from La Coalition des femmes de l'Alberta; Jeanne Lehman from Black Canadian Women in Action; and Corinne Ofstie and Haley Scott from the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a number of individuals from great organizations from across Alberta that are here. We have Sue Tomney from YW Calgary; Jill Young from YW Lethbridge; Roxane Tiessen from the Saffron Centre; Lynne Rosychuk and Marla Poelzer from the Jessica Martel foundation; Ebony Rempel from YW Banff; Catherine Champagne from the ACWS team as well as my constituency staff Lisa Ludwig and Michelle Eastwood. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you members of Diplomat Consulting, a nationally respected firm based right here in Edmonton. Stephanie Bach, Myles Dykes, Patricia Chinayi, Mackenzie Boilard, and Naomi Mison, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jessica Properzi, one of my constituency assistants. Since joining my office in December 2024, Jessica has quickly become a valued and dependable member of my team. She brings a genuine commitment to serving constituents across the riding. I now ask Jessica to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Nami Delagure, who made his way here from Calgary today to catch the session before we end. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly a group of Filipino community leaders from the Edmonton area. The Filipino community is one of the fastest growing communities in Alberta. Their contribution to our province, provincial culture, fabric, economy, and prosperity

cannot be understated. I ask you to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we announced our government's 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence in Alberta. We were joined by many great organizations from across Alberta who are here with us today: Jeannette MacInnis from ANFCA, Glori Sharphead from Enoch Cree Nation, and Jenna Pilot from ACT Alberta. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker, first.

I am happy to rise and introduce Janice Fleming, the newly elected president of the UCP's Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood Constituency Association. Janice has proudly called the constituency home for 18 years, served as president of the Bellevue Community League, and is a passionate community builder and advocate. May I ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. No? A member's statement?

Member Irwin: No. That was . . .

The Speaker: Okay. How about Edmonton-Riverview?

Alberta Separatism and Premier's Leadership

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is playing with fire. It's no secret to anyone that some members of her party and caucus openly support Alberta's separation from Canada, and it's no surprise, too, that the Premier seems to enjoy palling around with extremist types, from chemtrail enthusiasts to American alt-right goons. What is surprising is that in this time of great upheaval and instability, when all Canadians need to stand together in support of our collective interests and the interests of global democracy, this Premier prefers holding press conferences to dog whistle to the most extremist elements within her own coalition.

Why is the Premier inciting separatists? To hold on to power. It's as simple as that. Fearful of the bad press, investigations brought about by her own government's corruption, and threatened by the rancour within her own party, the Premier is trying to have it both ways by inviting others to force this government into accepting the terms of a referendum that the majority of Albertans do not want. It's cowardly, it's dangerous, and it's bad for Alberta.

While the Premier dithers, investors are pulling away from the province, taking with them jobs and prosperity. Albertans lose. The Premier claims to be against separatism and working in support of unity, but as a certain friend of ours likes to say, "The arsonist gives up any right to call the fire department." It's time to stop toying with the future of this province. If the Premier truly believes it's right, then call the referendum now. We know where Albertans' hearts lie: with a strong and united Canada. If not, why not drop this wishy-washy separatism and try on a little competent governance for a change?

The Speaker: Camrose.

Strategy to End Gender-based Violence

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about the scourge of gender-based violence in our province. The word

"scourge" is not often used in this Chamber, but it accurately describes the serious, pervasive, and enduring harm gender-based violence inflicts in our communities. It can take many forms, including physical assault, sexual assault, family violence, human trafficking, stalking, and other harmful acts.

1:40

The statistics on this type of violence are a stark reminder of the pervasiveness of this issue; 2 in 3 females and 1 in 3 males in Alberta experience sexual violence in their lifetime. In 2023 there were more than 18,000 cases of intimate partner violence reported in Alberta. Certain groups like women and girls, Indigenous people, newcomers, and other vulnerable groups are at an increased risk. Gender-based violence happens every day in every community, and it's everyone's responsibility to help end it.

This is why today our government has released building on our strengths, Alberta's 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence. This plan unites the efforts of 17 government ministries to build on the strength of our province both in government and in the community. It will be the most comprehensive of its kind in Canada, including over 100 initiatives to increase awareness, engage men and boys as partners, increase women's financial independence, modernize and increase access to emergency shelters, support care that heals families affected by abuse, invest in prevention and intervention services, and address the root cause of violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Gender-based violence happens every day, but every day hundreds of service providers and community organizations are doing incredible work to stop it and support survivors. The strategy announced today was informed by advocates, organizations, and over 500 survivors, and we build on their strengths to address this issue in every corner of the province. Mr. Speaker, we envision a future where gender-based violence is a rarity, not a norm, and now we have a plan to take us there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Calgary-Mountain View.

UCP Government

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP government wants to make Alberta the 51st state. While most Canadians look at the Trump administration with horror, the UCP seems to have been struck by a serious case of envy. And why not, right? A country that spends almost an additional 5 and a half per cent of its GDP on health care to achieve worse results, shorter lifespans, sicker people, millions drowning in medical debt: personally, I don't think that sounds like anything to emulate, but I guess the UCP just disagrees.

Most Canadians look at Trump's ability to spread misinformation with no consequence and fear that the postfactual era will come here to Canada, but it seems the UCP sees an opportunity. Just imagine the possibilities. The UCP cabinet could go full-throated denial of the safety and efficacy of vaccines instead of being dragged kicking and screaming to do the absolute least they can in a growing crisis.

For years this UCP government has courted separatists, gambling with Albertans' retirement securities by starting their own pension plan, wasting hundreds of millions on their own police force. If that wasn't clear enough, now we have an act to encourage a separatist referendum, never mind that we know exactly what will happen because we saw it in Quebec, never mind the risk to our economic security, to our jobs, to our savings, to our property values. The UCP doesn't care about any of that, not when there's politics to be played. It's so irrational that it's almost surreal. Maybe that's the

point, a cartoonish attempt to be Trump lite by this government, designed to be so absurd that it's unbelievable. But the damage is real.

I still have hope because I know the people of this province. They are pragmatic. They are caring. They are smart. Albertans are proud Canadians. We have no interest in being the 51st state. Albertans know better is possible.

Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's Remarks on Beaverlodge Health Facility

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, today I rise not just in defence of a town but in defence of the truth, integrity, and unshakable spirit of rural Alberta. Last week the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar stood in this Assembly and cast a shadow over the people of Beaverlodge. He cried corruption. He cried mismanagement. He accused the community fighting for basic health care of playing dirty politics.

Well, Beaverlodge did not remain silent. They did what any proud, principled community would do. They wrote to him directly, respectfully. They put their truth on paper and sent it straight to the member's desk, and in that letter they didn't just defend themselves; they exposed the carelessness of his claims. They reminded him that Beaverlodge has one of Alberta's oldest hospitals, so deteriorated that it threatens care itself, and they reminded him that that was his own government, his own NDP government, that pulled the plug on promised funding.

They didn't hold back. I quote, "The comments were untrue, unchecked, and defamatory to our community and warrant a retraction. Your *Hansard* comments . . . are categorically false, misleading, and irresponsible."

The political innuendo in your comments are an unfair and irresponsible stain on all the good people who have worked tirelessly on this project . . . We are profoundly disappointed that a respected and experienced MLA, and former Cabinet Minister such as yourself would make such damning allegations of our Town and community without first checking facts.

This isn't just about Beaverlodge. It's about every rural community that's been dismayed and disrespected by all the members opposite. To Beaverlodge: your courage is the future of rural health care. To those slinging mud across the aisle: next time bring the facts or don't speak at all.

Thank you. [some applause]

The Speaker: Order.

National Police Week

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, today I stand to recognize National Police Week. It was adopted in Canada in 1970 as a way for police to connect with their communities and increase awareness about the services they provide, a way to build trust, a recognition that with great power comes great responsibility to keep our communities safe, to uphold the law, to serve and protect, and that the most effective way to do that is to be connected with and trusted by the communities, the people they serve.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in my time as an MLA I've connected with many who work in law enforcement. I've had the honour of speaking at their graduations and joining them on patrol. Today I thank them for their important work and I recognize the challenges they face. We ask them to do a difficult job, one that tests them every day as they encounter the full breadth of humanity; our family, friends, and neighbours, sometimes at their lowest ebb, in their most broken state, in greatest need. They see humanity at its worst, mired in and perpetuating anger, violence, and hatred, but also at our best: courageous, caring, resilient, and united.

We ask them, despite these challenges, to maintain their humanity, their compassion, to exemplify the best of what it means to wear that uniform, and it's incumbent on us to provide the support they need to do so: the funding and resources required to keep our communities safe; all of the supports needed to maintain their physical and mental health, to heal their hearts, minds, and bodies when it's needed; and robust systems of accountability to ensure they can wield their power responsibly and are able to earn and maintain the trust of those they serve.

Now, this year's theme is Committed to Serve Together, and indeed they do. The members of local police services across our province, their brothers and sisters in the RCMP, our Alberta sheriffs, and the peace officers in our communities as well as the families whose loved ones serve, who make sacrifices of their own: we thank them all. And may we who make the laws they're sworn to uphold hold ourselves to the same standards of integrity, accountability, and responsibility to earn and hold the trust of those we serve.

Happy National Police Week.

Conservatism

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, good government isn't loud. It doesn't chase headlines or stir up chaos to appear active. Instead, it's guided by the foundational principles of conservatism: fiscally responsible, socially reliable, limited government, and a belief in the strength of personal responsibility. A truly conservative government is steady and competent. It doesn't impose itself unnecessarily into the lives of its citizens; it trusts them. It manages taxpayers' dollars with discipline, keeps its promises, and focuses on delivering tangible results, avoiding political theatre.

I believe government should be focused on what matters: safe communities, strong institutions, sound infrastructure, and an economy that rewards hard work and initiative. When government does its job well, it doesn't need to be in your face because people see the results in the reliability of their services, the confidence of investors, and the strength of civil society.

This is about more than just dollars and cents; it's about values. Conservatism means efficient government that avoids waste, reduces debt, and holds itself accountable to the people. It means protecting family, heritage, and culture while creating space for free markets, entrepreneurship, and healthy competition. It means encouraging investment, not burdening it. It means standing for freedom, not just in principle but in practice, protecting the rights of its citizens, not expanding the reach of the state. Above all, it means putting pragmatism over ideology, governing for all, not just the few. This is the conservative vision: responsible, capable, grounded in values that have stood the test of time; a government that serves, not rules.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The first question is with the Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Ms Gray: Congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta in Canada

Ms Gray: The UCP government's flirtations with separatism are dangerous. The Premier fanned the flames, and now some of her own team and party want out of Canada. The Alberta Prosperity Project folks have revealed their proposed referendum question. The Premier told Albertans such a question must uphold and honour treaties 6, 7, and 8. Their proposed referendum question does no such thing. Will

the Premier tell the Alberta Prosperity Project folks that their question doesn't work because it violates the very principle she herself laid out?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very nice to see you in the chair.

We did hear the feedback from First Nations, and we want to make sure that they know that there can be no referendum question that goes forward that violates their section 35 rights, so amendment will be coming forward. We wrote a letter to them with that regard to affirm that no referendum question can abrogate or derogate away from the section 35 and treaty rights that they have enjoyed. I also invited them to join me in Ottawa so that we can press our case to Ottawa together about the need to make sure that more dollars come back to this province and to their nations in particular.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I'm curious if the letter was in response to First Nations or to the Alberta Prosperity Project, folks that she knows very well.

Last week she even invited their leader, Mitch Sylvestre, to share a stage with her at a fundraiser, but when asked to defend Canada at that fundraiser, she couldn't even get the room to support her. There were boos for the Premier and for Canada at the fundraiser of the UCP. This is what happens when you invite separatists into your political tent. While the Premier cozies up to separatists, why should the vast majority of Albertans, who would prefer not to break up Canada, trust this Premier?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we have to have room for all voices in important discussions. That's what citizen-initiated referenda are all about, and we're not going to stoop to the level of the members opposite of demonizing one particular portion of society. We think that this is a constructive debate that can be had if all sides respect each other. I think we have to understand why people are so frustrated with Ottawa. It's because, with the help of their NDP allies, they have continued to pummel this province with bad law after bad law. We have not seen any change, of course, and we certainly hope to. That's what I'm working towards.

Ms Gray: There are members of the Premier's party who want separatism, and she is giving those voices more power and changing the rules to make it easier. Her supporters have a referendum question that would violate our treaties with First Nations, doesn't respect their rights, and which wouldn't even meet the Premier's own conditions for a referendum. It just goes to show how much this Premier has failed to unify our province. She's failed to convince her own party to support Canada. She's failed to protect our economy from Trump's tariffs. She has failed to protect Albertans from the measles. Will the Premier admit she is not up to this job?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, well, I think we certainly helped unify this province against the NDP. They only got 6.5 per cent of the vote in the last election. That is because their failed ideology, which was expressed time and time again in support of their federal masters, came through with policies that damaged our economy. Whether it was net-zero power regs or emissions caps or an inability to build pipeline infrastructure, the ban of tankers off the west coast, it was their bad policies that turned the tide against them. What I see is that Alberta wants a new deal with Ottawa, and that's what I'm going to work on delivering.

The Speaker: Second set of questions. The hon. Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Youth Employment

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, a million Albertans don't have a family doctor. Schools are bursting at the seams. Families are barely getting by, living paycheque to paycheque. So what is this Premier working on? Is it a better health care system? Nope. She's brought in corrupt care, massive amounts of taxpayer money on bloated contracts. Is it better funded schools? Nope. We still have the lowest per-student funding ratio in all of North America. Is it good jobs? Nope. Youth unemployment is skyrocketing. When Albertans need real, competent leadership, why is the Premier only concerned with dividing our country?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you why it is that we needed to have more hands on AHS. We've just done a full analysis of how much it costs to deliver surgeries at every single hospital for every single procedure, and I can tell you with great confidence that the former CEO of AHS was dead wrong when she tried to tell the world that it was \$4,400 to do a knee replacement or a hip replacement. This is the reason why we needed to get in there. We need to have a line of sight on exactly how much is being spent at each hospital on each procedure, and I'm looking forward to sharing that information with the public so that we can ensure that we get the best value for taxpayer dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills will come to order.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier should be laser focused on creating an economy where everyone can thrive. Instead, she is spending all her time talking about separatism, and when it comes to jobs, the Premier has completely failed. Youth unemployment is the highest in the country. Since she's been Premier, she has doubled youth unemployment for men. Young people are struggling to build their careers here. So what is the Premier's focus? Why, separating our country, of course. Why has separatism distracted the Premier from creating good jobs for young people?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's the members opposite who keep talking about separatism. On this side we keep talking about how we want to get a new deal with Ottawa, how we want to make sure that we remove the nine bad pieces of legislation that are impacting investment.

You know what the best way to get a job is? To make sure that we have an investment climate that attracts the wealth creators and the job creators so those young people can get jobs, Mr. Speaker. We're doing incredibly well. Under them all we had were consecutive reductions in jobs being created, people leaving the province. Just last month we had 15,000 new jobs created. That is a sign of success.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, do you know what deters investment climate? Uncertainty and separatism. The gains that this government has seen didn't make up for the losses two . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'd like to hear the question, and then we'd like to hear the answer.

Please continue with the question.

Ms Gray: This UCP government has done nothing but lose jobs. The Premier should be creating good jobs, should be bringing prosperity to the province, but now unemployment for young men

has reached over 20 per cent – 1 in 5 young men cannot find work here in Alberta – and they are making it worse by dancing with separatists, Mr. Speaker. Instead of creating good jobs and fostering an economy that works for everyone, why is the Premier distracted from doing her job?

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Year over year 50,000 jobs have been created. They did not have a job creation record that they could boast of. In fact, I can tell you that they keep on asking for increases in minimum wage, and on this side we have said that minimum wage increases only hurt those who want to get their first job. So it seems to me they're coming into alignment with us. We agree that youth unemployment is a problem. That's why we have invested in apprenticeship programs. We're investing in dual credit. We have more collegiate programs. We want to attach young people to those very first skilled jobs that are in the trades and professions from the very earliest grades, and we look forward to getting the members opposite to support us in that.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, record unemployment for young men in this province because this government is distracted by separatism and corrupt care.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Gray: The Premier says that she sees no problem with her Minister of Justice being a long-time friend and family member of the businessman at the centre of the corrupt care scandal. She didn't know about it until last week, but she says there's no conflict of interest. This is the same Premier who was found to have violated the Conflicts of Interest Act herself. Why is the Premier continuing to pretend she cannot see the obvious and dangerous perception of conflict here?

Ms Smith: We're not sure why the members opposite can't see the obvious difference that took place when we got elected versus when they were elected. When they had quarter after quarter of out-migration in our province, we have had quarter after quarter of in-migration, including 18,000 young people coming to this province because of the opportunity. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we just surpassed 5 million population yesterday. People wouldn't move here if they didn't think there were opportunity and jobs. They left because of them. They're coming back because of our policies.

2:00

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, 1 in 5 young men can't find a job, over 20 per cent unemployment. It's ridiculous.

This government is distracted because of an RCMP investigation, the Auditor General is investigating, and they've had to create a sham inquiry because of their own corruption. The Premier said that she only learned about the deep personal relationship last week and then said that there was nothing wrong with it. How could the Minister of Justice never admit this long-time friendship with Sam Mraiche until he was cornered by media? This is not how an ethical, competent government functions, and this corrupt care scandal will stick around until they call a full public inquiry.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you we are making great progress on health care because we have made the changes that we have at Alberta Health Services. I know that the members opposite's approach was: just trust the experts; give them more money. Failure after failure after failure. They didn't have the

courage to step in and actually solve anything. Our Health minister had the courage to step in, and she has. She has made the decisions that have allowed us to get a nurses contract, a doctors contract. We have more doctors and more nurses working here. We have more nurse practitioners setting up their own practices. We're building out our chartered surgical centres. We are building out our surgical initiative. We are . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, their hand-picked CEO and board got fired because they were worried about criminal corruption, which is now being investigated by the RCMP. The only way that this corrupt care scandal, which involves unusable Turkish Tylenol and \$50 million that Albertans still don't have, inadequate PPE we're still paying to store, strange land deals with hundreds of thousands of dollars of profit, bloated contracts for surgical centres – all of these things need a full public inquiry. It is the only way to get to the bottom of this, and this government deserves to do the right thing.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me tell you all the things that we have because we have a hands-on Health minister. We now have \$15 million to support eight new urgent care centres. That would not have happened without her taking charge and identifying the need in those communities. We now have 350 beds in the Misericordia community hospital and 350 beds at the Grey Nuns hospital being announced because of the work that this minister did identifying that problem. The high-priced bureaucrats . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we heard the question, and I know we're dying to hear the answer, so let's let that happen.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the high-priced bureaucrats at the top of AHS were not doing this work, and I have said before: do the job or we'll find other management. We're finding new management, and this minister is giving them direction.

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

Bill 55

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health introduced Bill 55 as the next step of restructuring Alberta's health care system. While they deny that this is another step toward dismantling public health care, this bill enables the minister to designate approved hospitals. Let's be clear. Private-sector approved hospitals will be operated by for-profit companies. If that is not privatization by stealth, I don't know what is. Will the minister confirm that neither she nor any of her cabinet colleagues will designate a private-sector operator to run a hospital in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you and congratulations, Mr. Speaker. Again, the members opposite continue to put forward misinformation. In fact, Bill 55 is not about privatization. It is, in fact, about making sure that we have the regulations and the legislation that empower us to continue on refocusing. In fact, it's under the Health Facilities Act, which explicitly states, "no person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta," and nothing is changing under the Health Facilities Act other than minor changes in terms of language for . . .

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

Member Eremenko: No person may operate a private hospital, but how about a private person operating an approved hospital? That is precisely what's in Bill 55. It enables private operators to discharge patients when the administrator deems them ready. These are decisions that a patient's medical team should make, no one else. It creates a revolving door that is based on the benefit to the bottom line of that private operator of an approved hospital. This creates a revolving door where many patients will end up returning to emergency departments due to inadequate care, ultimately increasing the cost to the system. Will the minister scrap the plan, protect public health care, and respect the knowledge and authority of health care professionals?

The Speaker: The hon. Health minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier, Bill 55 is not about that. It is, in fact, about enabling legislation so that we can continue with the refocusing, making sure that our hospitals are doing what they need to do, that our acute-care facilities are, in fact, acute-care facilities that provide excellent health care. I've heard over and over again as I've travelled this province that that currently isn't happening, so we have to make sure we can enable that to happen. It's not about privatization. It's, in fact, about making sure we have strong public health care. We are committed to public health care. We will always be committed to public health care.

Member Eremenko: Well, we heard it here, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans want more doctors, more nurses, shorter wait times, yet Bill 55 does the opposite. It fragments the workforce, creating staff shortages and longer wait times. Bill 55 picks up where Bill 11 left off, privatizing Alberta's health care system, but Premier Klein accepted that Albertans said no to a fee-for-service model and no to lower staffing levels and lower quality of care. He ultimately did the right thing and withdrew Bill 11. Restructuring our health care system must meet the needs of Albertans, not the needs of the UCP's corporate friends. Will the minister learn from the PCs of old and withdraw Bill 55 today?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the member opposite meant to say thank you to the UCP government, to our government, because, in fact, the number of primary care providers accepting new patients hit a four-year high; 504 physicians and nurse practitioners now are taking new patients. That's a four-year high. We've gone from 10,600 doctors in the province to over 12,200 doctors in the province, and that number continues to climb. Under the new primary care compensation model we've seen huge increases.

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

Government Policies

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is determined to ignore the wishes of Albertans and to push for things that we just don't want. There's a definite pattern here. For example, we see them wasting time and money advocating for Alberta to leave the Canada pension plan when the vast majority of Albertans don't want the government to be playing politics with their retirement security. Albertans just don't trust their money with this UCP, and they don't trust the Premier with their retirement. Will the Premier drop unwanted and dangerous campaigns to leave the CPP?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we've said before, this government on this side of the House will always pursue and have conversations about things that can make life better for Albertans. When we had the LifeWorks report in our hands, it showed the potential for a \$5 billion annual difference in contributions for Alberta people, Alberta businesses. It would not be responsible of us to not consider that in the public sphere. As I've told the members opposite, we haven't done anything with that. We didn't get a strong mandate from Albertans.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans simply do not want this UCP to be selling off our public hospitals in the province, given this is a blatant grab for more power that has resulted in longer wait times for surgery, chasing away doctors and nurses, Albertans want their public health care to be there when they need it for themselves and for their families. Why does this government seem compelled to pursue what very suspiciously looks like American, two-tier, private health care?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the members opposite, once again, are incorrect. As I said earlier, we've seen a four-year high in the number of family practitioners and nurse practitioners that have come to the province. That means for Calgary a 400 per cent increase in providers that are accepting new patients; in Edmonton, a 180 per cent increase accepting new patients. We're going to continue to make sure that we provide excellent health care for every person in Alberta right across the whole province.

2:10

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that instead of focusing on Albertans' priorities like good jobs, good public health care, making sure we have our Canada pension plan for us when we need it and given this government's shocking decision to pursue a provincial police force, provincial pension plan, American, two-tier, private health care, a referendum on separation, isn't it time that this UCP government came clear about their intentions to encourage Alberta to separate from Canada?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, that question was absolutely ridiculous. They should think about, you know, their political allegiances in this country, the government that they've propped up for the last four years that has brought in punitive policies to Alberta and not put us in a place where we can grow our economy for now and in the future. Now, I'm cautiously optimistic about the new Prime Minister. He's saying the right things. He knows that this isn't about grovelling, about fighting over the pieces of the pie. They're saying they want to grow the pie. That involves Alberta if they're going to grow it for Canada.

Strategy to End Gender-based Violence

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta more than half of all women have experienced physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives. This is a difficult and often uncomfortable topic, but it's one that must be confronted. Alberta's strategy to end gender-based violence is helping bring this painful reality into the open. Awareness and exposure are two powerful tools we can utilize to help change this reality. To the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women:

how is this strategy ensuring Albertans understand what gender-based violence looks like and how to support those impacted?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of status of women and – help me out.

Ms Fir: Arts and culture.

The Speaker: Arts and culture.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. The Alberta-made strategy to end gender-based violence ensures awareness, prevention, early intervention, crisis and long-term supports and resources are targeted and accessible when and where survivors need them most. Our government is taking a community-based approach to raise awareness among all Albertans and foster a culture of accountability and collective responsibility. Targeted actions such as access to education and resources for survivors, bystanders, professionals, and men and boys help change harmful behaviours.

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, given that this strategy highlights forms of gender-based violence that are often overlooked – financial abuse, brutal control, online exploitation, and workplace harassment – and given that these lesser known forms contribute to significant underreporting and misunderstanding of what gender-based violence truly entails, we know that public safety campaigns are amongst the most effective tools for raising awareness. To the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services: what immediate steps will the strategy take to end gender-based violence and to raise awareness to promote safety to all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of public safety.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Of course, public safety does play a very critical role in the approach to preventing and responding to gender-based violence and supporting victims. We all know that the NDP supported Bill C-75, which broke the bail system, resulting in us having to take additional steps in order to protect domestic violence victims and victims of domestic violence through, of course, our ankle bracelet program. We're going to continue to do that in order to support victims of domestic violence.

Mrs. Petrovic: Mr. Speaker, given we know that preventing gender-based violence doesn't begin in moments of crisis – it begins in our classrooms, our communities, and everyday conversations – gender-based violence is rooted in long-standing cultural norms and power imbalances. Real prevention means shifting the culture that allows it to exist at all. To the Minister of Children and Family Services: how is Alberta's 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence promoting education, mentorship, and prevention that help everyone understand their role in this strategy?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations to you in your new role. Thank you to that member for that great question regarding gender-based violence here in the province. Gender-based violence affects not just men and women, but it affects the entire family unit. That's why as part of the Ministry of Children and Family Services we continue to invest in family resource networks. These help provide children and families the resources and the training and the tools so that they can lead healthy and resilient lives. As well, as the Ministry of Children and Family

Services we invest in domestic violence prevention programs to the tune of \$9 million every year.

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

Measles Vaccination Rates

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is facing the fastest growing measles outbreak in the country, with a total of over 365 cases. That is six times more cases than the rest of western Canada. Experts attribute this outbreak to low vaccination rates resulting from misinformation. Having watched the minister's response on the measles outbreak, I have noticed a consistent avoidance of the term "vaccination." Why doesn't the Minister of Health explicitly promote vaccinations as the primary defence against the measles outbreak?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the member opposite has not been listening, nor have they been watching the news or taking part in any of the former media avails that we've had. In fact, we have been consistently saying that immunization, vaccination is the key to protecting one's self and protecting one's children. In fact, because of the great work that's been happening by our medical officers of health and all of the health workforce, since the last week alone in the south zone we're seeing a 150 per cent increase in . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Haji: Given that 90 per cent of the confirmed measles cases involve unvaccinated individuals and considering that two doses of the vaccine provides about 97 per cent of protection, given that in a public health outbreak precise communication is the cornerstone of public health promotion, given that the minister is avoiding the term "vaccination" while launching a vaccination campaign, when will the minister acknowledge that the real problem is to combat vaccine misinformation and call a spade a spade?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we are increasing and ramping up our already robust information strategy for across the province. In fact, our campaign has now been translated into over 14 languages so that we can reach more Albertans, particularly those that are underimmunized or unimmunized. We have added French, Chinese, Punjabi, Spanish, Ukrainian, Urdu Tagalog. We've also got Arabic, Hindi, Korean, Farsi, Somali, Vietnamese, and Low German. We are continuing to make sure that we can reach all Albertans.

Mr. Haji: Given the alarming rise in measles cases, particularly among children under five, and the critical role of clear communication with the principles of public health promotion, given that only 71 per cent of seven-year-olds are up to date with two doses of vaccines – that is far below the 95 per cent threshold needed for population-level protection – will the minister commit to a public awareness campaign that explicitly promotes vaccination, addresses vaccine hesitancy, and ensures Albertans are well informed and well protected?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, we already have. We have from the very beginning. One of the first articles post the first cases coming out was indicating that the Health minister is ensuring that everybody has the information on measles and that it is an

issue. We're continuing to ramp that up. In fact, we are seeing that by the time children reach the age of 13, they have a 90 per cent two-dose vaccination rate. By the time they are 17, that's 93 per cent. We want to get to 100 per cent, but we need to reach people where they're at, and that involves a trusting relationship.

Access to Information Act

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, in November of 2024 the Access to Information Act was introduced in this House. Criticisms included undermining transparency and weakening of public access to information. One such critic was the Information and Privacy Commissioner, who used phrases such as "highly problematic," "significantly degrade . . . openness," and "could have significant implications for holding government to account" to describe her concerns. To the minister of service Alberta: if transparency keeps politicians in check, would you agree that less disclosure erodes public trust?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of service Alberta.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. I'm proud to say that we brought forward some legislation in the fall modernizing the FOIP legislation. As you may recall, the last time we amended the FOIP legislation, we could have done it on Windows 95; that's how old it was. We brought forward some amendments. We modernized it. We also brought in something I'm particularly proud of, and that's proactive disclosure. We know that Albertans will request certain information from public bodies. Why wait till they ask for it? Let's publicly disclose it. There is no light between us and the rest of the provinces when it comes to our FOIP legislation.

2:20

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given that changes in the Access to Information Act greatly expanded exemptions for politicians, made it easier to disregard FOIP requests, altered timelines and allowed for infinite 30-day delays, limited access to electronic data, and removed the commissioner's ability to compel records or hear appeals and given the Trudeau government was accused of abuse of power for similar changes, to the minister. Those that operate behind closed doors often have something to hide. Is this government trying to hide something?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we were updating the FOIP legislation just simply to reflect new technologies. Now, we recognize that Albertans want access to information, and that's what we provide. But let's be clear. FOIP has always been about access to government documents, not political conversations. We will always protect Albertans' rights to access government documents.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given this UCP government was critical of Trudeau, deservedly so, and given the Liberals were accused of corruption, ethics breaches, conflicts of interest violations, and secrecy related to access to information and given that lack of transparency creates conditions for insider deals, cronyism, and entitlement, leading to an undermining of democracy, and given this UCP government is showing its wear, to the Premier: was Bill 34 motivated by a fear of sensitive information harmful to government being publicly revealed?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, our motivation to update FOIP simply came from the fact that it was old. At the time we last amended the FOIP legislation, we could not have anticipated artificial

intelligence, social media, things such as that, so we had to update the legislation. But I will say this. There is no light between that minister and ourselves when it comes to openness and transparency. In fact, that's why we came up with the proactive disclosure process. We know that Albertans will request certain information from their public bodies. Why make them line up and pay \$20 to request the information? We're going to proactively disclose it.

Lobbying Government and Conflicts of Interest

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta there are no rules preventing the spouse of a minister or the Premier from acting as a lobbyist. However, there are legal and ethical considerations to avoid conflict of interest. Someone who is engaging in lobbying activities must register as such, and for a spouse a heightened level of transparency should be maintained. Besides registering as a lobbyist, it is essential to reveal insider relationships. To the Premier: has your husband ever been a registered lobbyist while you were Premier, and if so, for what purpose?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm not sure that's about government policy, but the Premier can answer the question if she chooses to.

Ms Smith: I've been tired of the rumours and innuendo and slander against my family that I have been hearing about for months. My husband owns a restaurant. He has never ever been registered as a lobbyist because he has never ever lobbied any government, including ours, and I would ask for the innuendo and the slander to stop.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given the Premier's husband has not registered as a lobbyist . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, this is about government policy . . .

Mr. Guthrie: Absolutely.

The Speaker: . . . and I would prefer that you stick to that.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier's husband has not registered as a lobbyist but given he has indeed lobbied this government . . .

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

Mr. Guthrie: . . . under the guise of a rail expert, a question arises as to why David Moretta did not proactively disclose. Given the Premier is a staunch supporter of rail, particularly the Calgary to Banff proposal, and given the insider advantage reeks of preferential access and concerns of influence peddling, to the Premier: are decisions in your office being made in the public interest or to benefit the well-connected few?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I'm actually at a bit of a loss of words. I find the nature of that question absolutely repugnant and disgusting, that a former member of the government caucus, a former minister of the Crown would use this time in question period to malign the Premier's husband, a member who does not sit in this Chamber. There is a long-standing principle that we do not attack members who cannot defend themselves. I find this line of questioning out of order and disgusting, and the member should apologize immediately.

The Speaker: I will say, hon. member, that you need to ask questions about government policy, and do be cautious of attacking persons that aren't here.

Mr. Guthrie: No apology forthcoming because as minister . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you will be cautious, or you'll lose your question.

Mr. Guthrie: As Minister of Infrastructure I was invited to attend a meeting with David Moretta about Banff Rail and given I declined the request because I had concerns about the appropriateness of such a meeting and given Mr. Moretta engaged with GOA officials, including the Premier's office and ministers, and given it is rumoured he may have obtained confidential documents during those meetings, to the Premier: with your interest in rail and your husband's efforts, has this crossed the line into undue influence over government policy and spending?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, again, I repeat my previous answer, that I find this line of questioning completely out of line, completely disgusting, attacking a member who does not sit in this Chamber. The Premier has been very clear on the nature of the relationship. I would also challenge that member to take this line of questioning outside of the Chamber and see where it lands that member.

Mr. Sinclair: Point of order.

Mr. Schow: I'll tell you what: this is out of line. It's disgusting, and there is an apology that should be given to the Premier and her family.

The Speaker: A point of order noted.

Child Abuse

Member Batten: Last week Red Deer Polytechnic released their annual child abuse trends report, and it has horrendous results. It found that Alberta consistently shows higher rates of child abuse compared to the national average, with Edmonton and Lethbridge showing the highest rates of child abuse and/or child sexual abuse. To the minister: how many of the recommendations from this report will be implemented to address the horrific statistics of child abuse in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for that question. The safety and well-being of children within child intervention is one of my highest priorities. This is an extremely important matter, and that's why as a ministry we invest in child advocacy centres. We invest in family resource networks to help create healthy environments where children and families can become more resilient. As well, we take the recommendations by the OCYA extremely seriously because we know that all these reports and information will help make the system better. It's going to help protect children here in the province to stay safe, and that continues to be my number one priority.

Member Batten: Given that this UCP government often gloats about how much money they've allocated and given that the report states, "the issue is not necessarily the amount of money, but instead, how effectively it is used," how can this government be proud of the work they have done when they're just throwing money at the problem without providing substantial and effective solutions?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a ministry we look forward to continuing to work with stakeholders in every corner of this province. These are stakeholders that look after vulnerable and complex children, that have decades of experience looking after some of the most vulnerable children here in this province, and we take their feedback extremely seriously because we know collectively the feedback will help improve the system and help look after these incredibly vulnerable and complex children that need some additional help.

Member Batten: Given that some of Alberta's most vulnerable populations are at risk of abuse – 44 per cent of First Nations and 38 per cent of Métis individuals reported experiencing abuse – and given that 40 per cent of people with disabilities reported experiencing abuse and given that 22 per cent of youth reported experiencing physical and sexual abuse, to the minister: how will this government effectively protect Alberta's most vulnerable and bring these horrific numbers down?

2:30

The Speaker: The Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to that member for that question. Ensuring that Indigenous children that are predominantly in care within the Ministry of Children and Family Services are safe continues to be one of my highest priorities. That's why when I meet with Indigenous leaders throughout the entire province, we're always looking for additional ways that we can help support cultural planning and support family connections and then enhance abilities for these amazing kids to have a strong basis of support. That's why we also invest in many Indigenous programs and services throughout the entire province, altogether using a crossministerial approach. This is going to make a positive difference.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to congratulate you also.

Rural Mental Health Services

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Farmers and ranchers have many unique stresses. These folks must also grapple with anxieties over how seeding and harvest will turn out. Their livelihood exists at the will of the weather. It is also very socially isolating. Farm equipment and fuel are often targets for theft. Also, knowing that law enforcement is potentially too far away to help adds to the anxiety of everyday farming. All of these unique stressors can build up and create mental health challenges. To the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: what is our government doing to support the mental health of Alberta farmers and ranchers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for such an important question. Farming and ranching can be very stressful. There are many factors producers cannot control: extreme conditions like drought, volatile markets, disease, and more. However, farmers do not have to face it alone. Our government is here to support them. That's why we provide grants to several organizations that work to provide agricultural-specific mental health resources, including Agknow, Alberta SPCA, and 4-H, so that every farm and ranch family can get the support they need. If there are farmers and ranchers out there suffering, please, I hope they will reach out.

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of Alberta farmers and ranchers to our food supply, communities, and economic prosperity and given that this group also faces mental health challenges, and the stigma surrounding mental health can still prevent people from seeking help and given that in agricultural communities in rural Alberta people are very familiar with each other and news travels fast, so maintaining discretion with mental health challenges is difficult, to the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: what discreet options exist for Albertans looking to access mental health services?

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I answer the discreet options, I think we all need to, across both sides of this House, say thank you to the farmers for providing food on our plates and a roof overhead for their families. This province is built on agriculture. It is the watchword of this province. It will continue to be going forward, which is why we've invested millions of dollars into Counselling Alberta, which is immediate, same-day access to counselling services. You should never be ashamed if you struggle with mental health challenges. Whether it be rain or what happens to the inherence of the farm, farmers and ranchers go through a lot, and we should be there to support them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that stressors on families and parents often also affect children and given that students, particularly those in high school, may already be facing significant mental health challenges and given that these students and youth may also want to access mental health assistance in a discreet way to protect their confidentiality, to the same minister: what options are available for youth in rural communities who are looking to access mental health services, especially in a discreet way?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to youth across our province, especially in rural Alberta, I have a heart for those who are suffering from mental health challenges. I can tell you that we've invested somewhere around \$23 million in Counselling Alberta, where you can get same-day, discreet access that is tailored to youth and young adults; and, of course, \$5 million over three years for the Kids Help Phone, which is also discreet, anonymous, and available to children. Anyone can dial 211 and get access to these services 24/7, any day of the week. It's important that we support those who suffer.

Know that you're not alone. Know that the work that you and your family do in rural Alberta for agriculture is incredibly important to the vitality of your community and this province.

Automobile Insurance Reform

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are being crushed by the cost of living, high grocery prices, record inflation, rising unemployment, and, thanks to Bill 47, even more expensive auto insurance. This government is letting insurance companies hike rates by another 15 per cent, costing hundreds more, while taking away Albertans' right to sue. The Premier had a choice: stand up for families or enrich her friends. Just like the corrupt care scandal, she chose her friends. How can the UCP government justify this?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, honestly, I'm a little disappointed. We've been debating this bill for quite a while, and it appears that the members still don't understand it. We are in our old system right now. You're not wrong; second-highest premiums in the country. You would think that there is a rationale and evidence that maybe something needs to change, like the system that we're in. That's what Bill 47 does. It sets up the framework to move to a care-first system. Albertans deserve that. We also, as you saw in Budget 2025, cut their taxes. You're not seeing that in many places around the country. We're doing what we can. The minister of affordability is still taking on the electricity file.

Member Boparai: Given that home insurance has doubled and auto insurance has quadrupled and this government has the audacity to increase their own allowance at the same time, given that they can look Albertans in the eye and tell them that there is no money for affordability relief but plenty to pad their own pockets – it is disgusting – what does this government say to families watching their bills explode while they lose protections, with disastrous policy like Bill 47?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, once again, I think the members opposite should think about – I know the mother ship crashed here recently, and you've had to have a convention to work out your own divorce from the mother ship. But you've been part of this federal policy the last four years, that has driven investment out of this country and this province, while on this side of the House we've done everything that we can to create jobs in an outsized way in Confederation. I think the minister of jobs has said that for six consecutive months we've had 90 per cent of the private-sector jobs in this country. We're doing what we can.

Member Boparai: Given that to make matters worse, hard-working Albertans like taxi drivers, many of whom are newcomers and racialized workers, can't even get basic protections like coverage for hail, theft, or fire; given these are essential workers trying to build a life, and this new bill pushes them further into hardship; given that driving used to be a path to stability but under this UCP government it's becoming a dead end, how can this government justify ignoring these hard-working Albertans?

Mr. Horner: We're not ignoring them. In fact, the reasons you just mentioned, the reasons you're complaining about, are why we're changing the system. There are not many levers for us. We don't control this; we regulate it. We regulate the profit provisions of the companies that are involved, but the important thing is that of the levers that you have, the one big one is to take most of the litigation out of the system, and that's what we're doing. The delivery mechanism will stay the same. We think that this is what suits Alberta right now as opposed to in B.C., where they went a different way. They put \$4.1 billion in taxpayer dollars into the system.

Strategy to End Gender-based Violence

(continued)

Ms Hayter: While Albertans suffer, the UCP has shown where its true priorities lie. For 18 months they've buried urgent actions on gender-based violence under endless delays. Meanwhile they've had plenty of time for corrupt scandals and finding new ways to waste taxpayer money on pet projects. This isn't just administrative incompetence. It's a deliberate choice to prioritize political allies over Alberta women experiencing violence. How does the minister explain to women seeking safety tonight that her government had time to go on trips to Mar-a-Lago over the last year, and half shuffling of paper to release a plan that will not help women today?

The Speaker: The hon. member of Arts, Culture and Status of Women – hon. minister, my bad.

Ms Fir: No problem, Mr. Speaker.

Wow. That question is such a shame and so embarrassing. Clearly, the member has not read the gender-based violence policy that we released today, that consulted with over 500 survivors, stakeholders, community leaders, people in rural and remote communities, people in the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community, Indigenous peoples; 100 actions in this gender-based violence strategy, immediate actions, short-term, long-term, medium. Maybe she should try reading the policy before she asks her next question.

2:40

Ms Hayter: Given that Albertans continue to be traumatized by a system that fails them daily, given that many organizations across the province report their expertise was minimized during the consultations, with recommendations watered down in this new bold plan, given that the government promises vague long-term actions while people need help now and given that the government's incompetence is evident in the complete lack of urgency, promising action soon while people continue to suffer, how will this help women who can't get to beds tonight because of the UCP cuts?

Ms Fir: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, that member, again, hasn't read the strategy released today. We had dozens of stakeholders at our announcement who came up to me and the other ministers thanking us for what is the most comprehensive strategy released in Canada. This is in addition to the over \$188 million this government spends annually across ministries supporting women and children. Shame on her.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Ms Hayter: Given that the government's cruelty is on full . . .

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:41.

Ms Hayter: Given that this government's cruelty is on full display with this hollow 10-year plan that recycled old initiatives and offers nothing new or substantive to help Albertans right now, given they stood on millions of federal dollars while refusing to commit any of their own funding to this crisis, the message is clear. This government doesn't value those experiencing violence enough to invest their own money to take immediate action. How does the minister justify this heartless approach to Albertans who need concrete support tonight and tomorrow, not empty promises?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I think it's embarrassing that that member hasn't taken the time to read our strategy to end gender-based violence in Alberta before making ridiculous statements that we don't support women in this province. Once again, the most comprehensive strategy in all of Canada, that will identify gaps, identify duplication, support survivors, and continue to provide them with what they need to succeed and thrive in the best province in Canada.

The Speaker: Hon. members, thank you. So ends question period. In whatever way I have fallen short, I'll endeavour to do better.

Anyways, thank you very much.

Members' statements are finished. We will continue in 30 seconds.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In celebration of Asian Heritage Month I would like to table the requisite number of copies of a poster signed by the organizing team of FascinAsian. FascinAsian is the first film festival of its kind in the prairies. It made its debut in Edmonton this past weekend, showcasing the talents of Asian-Canadian filmmakers across North America and telling stories that are not often told.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table copies of a letter from one of my constituents named Derek Clark. He, like so many of my constituents, is incredibly concerned about corruption and about the rhetoric from this UCP government around separatism.

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

Member Batten: Thank you. I have two tablings today. One, an open letter to all members of the Legislature from Erin Norton expressing concerns over the changes to supports for permanency, devastating consequences to her family and their four adopted children.

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

Member Batten: I have two.

The Speaker: Well, I will come back to you. The problem is that when you go into debate instead of tabling, I just assume you're finished. We'll come back to you, though, for your other tabling.

Hon. member.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a letter from a constituent of mine. She's deeply concerned about the state of Alberta's health care system, and she asked me to ask members of the Assembly to read her letter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of an article written by Ximena Gonzalez in The Tyee titled Only Alberta Will Claw Back New Federal Money for Disabled People.

Ms Hayter: I have five tablings, Mr. Speaker. I referenced all these last night during bill debate. One is from Megan just saying: every day I'm scared of what the UCP is doing next. You can have a read of the e-mail to see all of her other ideas.

I've got one here as well from Connie basically saying that Bill 55 – please vote against it. We can't afford any further degradation of our health care system.

One from Tyler here that's basically saying that money in politics and privatized medicine is a step towards corruption.

Lastly, from Abhiraam. Thank you as well. It was a bit longer of a read as well. Abhiraam, I promise you that we will not be supporting Bill 55.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings, one from a constituent, Marie Walker. She's a retired nurse and a tireless volunteer, and she has grave concerns about Bill 55.

The second one is from another constituent, Debby Waldman. She's a well-known writer in our province, and she's standing against separatism.

The Speaker: Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table one of the hundreds of form letters that I've received. It's entitled: demanding government rethink the \$15-a-day flat fee for child care.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table two documents that further illustrate the ongoing decline in government transparency and reflect the growing erosion of public trust. The first document comes from volume 1, section 6, of my March 17 submission to the Auditor General. It includes brief remarks as well as a letter dated November 20, 2024, from the Information and Privacy Commissioner expressing her concerns on Bill 34.

The second document is from volume 1, section 7, of the same document. It contains a calendar screenshot for a meeting with the Premier's husband, David Moretta, concerning the Calgary ...

The Speaker: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Please hand in your tabling. You tabled it; now you need to give it to the page. That's how it works.

Mr. Guthrie: Your first day.

The Speaker: It is, as it turns out, but you're still going to give it to the page if you want it tabled.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings. The first is an article, Clarity from an Innocent Injured ... Auto Accident Victim, which I referenced yesterday in debate, talking about how soft-tissue injuries can be longer term and that needs to be given due consideration.

The second is an article, Former Insurance Industry Insider Exposes the Hypocrisy of Insurance Lobby Demands, making it clear that a private, no-fault system will not ...

The Speaker: No. The idea of a tabling is to tell us what the subject matter is and not to read us a story, so please table that one and go on to your next tabling.

Mr. Ellingson: That's exactly what I was doing.

The third is a letter from a constituent talking about the underfunding for schools and how they're buckling and teachers are really suffering under the pressure.

And the fourth is a letter from a constituent talking about how Bill 54 is undermining democracy and taking Alberta backwards.

2:50

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Amery, Minister of Justice, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act Law Society of Alberta 2024 annual report.

The Speaker: All right. We have come to – this should be fun for me – points of order. The first one is the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Supplementary Questions

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very quick with this first point of order. At the time noted, 2:10, a point of order was

called while the Member for Edmonton-North West was asking questions of the government. It is standard practice in this House that after the fourth question, which 1 through 4 are leaders' row, questions after that should be related to each other. In this instance they were not. The first question was about the Canada pension plan. The second was completely unrelated, about private hospitals, and the third about separation. This certainly deviates from common practice in this place. This is not the member's first day in this place. I would ask the member apologize for that kind of conduct and in the future make sure that subsequent questions are all relevant to the first one.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and welcome to your first day as Speaker with points of order. I don't believe that there is a point of order here. At 2:09 the Member for Edmonton-North West asked a series of questions, but all of them were about this government's separatist agenda in multiple parts. Whether it is attacking the Canada pension plan, whether it is bringing in American-style health care, whether it is fanning the flames of a referendum, it is that separation element which is what connected through all of those things. Now, I understand that it can be difficult to judge the relevance of a remark until you've heard the entire thing. I would note the Government House Leader jumped up with his point of order I believe early in S1, supplemental 1, and may not have understood the full thread between the three questions.

I believe it is a matter of debate, and I look forward to your first ruling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Don't we all just look forward to that? Thank you.

I have the Blues, and I heard the submissions. In the actual part of the question the first one seems to be about the CPP and the second one about health care. Let me just say that the tie together, if I may call it that: I'd call it weak, especially from such an experienced member. I don't think it's a point of order, but I think a member as experienced as the one that did this should just try to do better.

Next point of order. The Government House Leader.

Point of Order Offending the Practices of the Assembly

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. This point of order I believe is particularly egregious. It was raised at 2:27 while the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane was asking questions of the government, and I find the line of questioning particularly repugnant, shameful, and personal and without any justification. I believe it rises to a point of order under 23(h), (i), (j), and (l), (l) being "introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." This is not a point of order that is used commonly, but it is one that I'm citing today, and I'll explain why.

First off, on many occasions in this House points of order have been called where members of the opposition have brought into conversation members of the public, and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* says that

Members are discouraged from referring by name to persons who are not Members of Parliament and who do not enjoy parliamentary immunity, except in extraordinary circumstances when the national interest calls for [the naming of an individual]. The Speaker has ruled that Members have a responsibility to protect the innocent not only from outright slander, but from any slur directly or indirectly applied, and has [stressed] that Members [should] avoid as much as possible mentioning by name people from outside the House who are unable to reply

and defend themselves against the innuendo. Mr. Speaker, just my own memory comes back to a time when I believe the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar referred to David Dorward, a former member of this Assembly, and I remember that member was called to order.

Furthermore, points of order and questions to the government according to *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*:

(10) The subject matter of questions must be within the collective responsibility of the Government or the individual responsibilities of Ministers.

(11) Questions should relate to matters of some urgency.

This is on page 122, Mr. Speaker.

(12) Questions should not be hypothetical.

(13) Questions should not seek a legal opinion . . .

(14) Questions should not anticipate an Order of the Day although this does not apply to the budget . . .

(15) Questions should not offend the *sub judice* principle.

(16) Ministers may be questioned only in relation to current portfolios.

(17) Ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities.

Again, Mr. Speaker, in this question asked by the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane a number of common practices of this Assembly were broken, but I think that just common decency has been breached as well in this instance. We're talking about the Premier of Alberta, and calling into question the relationship that she has with her husband, calling into question the integrity of the Premier's husband and his dealings with the Premier in what he is portraying to be an inappropriate manner is disgusting. I can't state it any louder. It is absolutely disgusting that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane would bring the Premier's husband into debate in this Chamber. It is below any elected official to ever malign a family member in this Chamber.

We were elected – we put our names on a ballot – understanding the consequences of that, to deal with the good times and the tough times, to deal with the correspondence of people who are upset and people who are happy. Mr. Speaker, our relatives, our family, and our children did not take on that responsibility. I suspect that all members of this Chamber at one time or another have been the subject of personal attacks. It is not okay, and I will defend any member of this Chamber, of the opposition or the government side, against such personal attacks.

In this instance the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane is out of line. He is dead wrong, and the Premier and her husband deserve an apology.

The Speaker: Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, the individual in question, the Premier's husband, Mr. Moretta, did act as a lobbyist for a certain period of time. I did table a . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I really want to hear your submission, but what we're talking about is what was said in the House today, not what you believe to be a fact, whether it's true or not, but what was said in the House today.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, okay. Well, let's talk about that. Let's talk about the threat about going outside. That's pretty offensive towards another member, correct?

The Speaker: Hon. member, we're talking about the point of order that was called. If you have another issue you want to address after that, I'll be happy to hear it as long as there was a point of order called during question period. But for now we're dealing with the point of order that was called.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, when somebody, no matter who it is, acts as a lobbyist and they come into this place and they meet with people, it doesn't matter who they're related to. They have to abide by the rules of this place. I have proven that this individual did meet with myself. There are members on the other side, ministers who have met with this individual, yet the government has denied this. They denied this, they called it disgusting, yet . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, this is not a time to continue debate. We're dealing with the point of order called in the question that you asked.

Mr. Guthrie: Right. You're saying that this was not related to policy. It was related to policy; it was related to the discussion of rail through the department of transportation. I was invited to a meeting, and I made that clear in my line of questioning. The fact is that this is true, denials aside.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, hon. members, I have, I guess, the benefit . . .

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, okay. Opposition House Leader. I was looking down instead of up. Please go ahead.

Ms Gray: That's fair, Mr. Speaker. I do know that it's common practice sometimes to ask if others have anything to add to the argument. I simply want to say that I heard the Government House Leader refer to offending the practices of the Assembly and specifically using quotations from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* discouraging the use of names unless within national interest. Respecting conflict of interest laws as well as the government policy around how ethics and conflict of interest are managed, I believe, would bring this within scope.

3:00

I also heard the Government House Leader refer to the *Beauchesne's* quote around what types of questions are within the bounds and practice of this Assembly, and areas of responsibility of the government was one of the things listed. Again, the Conflicts of Interest Act, whether people have registered as lobbyists or not, is in practice.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I heard the Government House Leader get very concerned about the use of names in this Chamber and how horrendous it is for people to do that to make a political point in any way. I would mention that the government has named many individuals, and I will also mention that Premier Rachel Notley's husband was often under discussion in this place because he worked for CUPE. I believe the government protests too much. I remember when they used to throw those stones.

I simply wanted to add these three points to the evidence presented to you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Are there any other submissions?

Okay. Hon. members, what I have here are the Blues. The question that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane asked talks about:

there are no rules preventing the spouse of a minister or the Premier from acting as a lobbyist. However, there are legal and ethical considerations to avoid conflict of interest. Someone who is engaging in lobbying activities must register as such, and for a spouse a heightened level of transparency should be maintained. Besides registering as a lobbyist, it is essential to reveal insider relationships.

I'm troubled by bringing family members of anybody in this House into it. Then the actual question.

To the Premier: has your husband ever... registered [as a] lobbyist while you were Premier, and if so, for what purpose?

I guess where I'm troubled by this – to the hon. member, you probably could have asked the same question in a way that related to government policies. Your question is: has your husband ever registered as a lobbyist? A question relating to government policy might be: what is your government's policy about family members registering? See, that would have been government policy. This seemed to be a direct attack on a person outside of here.

Your first supplementary, "Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier's husband has not registered as a lobbyist but... has indeed lobbied this government," again wasn't about the government policy but, rather, frankly, about the behaviour of a family member.

Members, when you bring family members of each other into the debate here, you go down a dangerous path that I'd like to think none of us want to be on. Speaker Cooper's ruling on...

Mr. Cooper: Oh, names.

The Speaker: The previous Speaker's ruling – and I appreciate the assistance – on November 4, 2020, page 3007 and 3008, notes the grave responsibility of members to use their freedom of speech wisely in light of the reputational damages their comments may cause.

Honestly, hon. member, I think you could have made your point asking about government policy, yet you did not, so I'm going to ask you to apologize and withdraw those comments.

Mr. Guthrie: I will restructure my questions accordingly in the future, and I withdraw.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Sorry. I heard the part – you said you were going to restructure your questions.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah, and I withdraw.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

The matter is dealt with.

Point of order 3. The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not an easy first day for you.

The Speaker: I'm getting paid. It's all right.

Point of Order

Gestures

Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, I rise to call a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j) at, I believe, 2:26 p.m. The hon. House leader is allowed to debate and defend the Premier – it's certainly his job to do that in this House – but I do believe he crossed the line here with aggressive gesturing and threatening the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane. I don't have the Blues in front of me but something along the lines of meeting him outside and even pointing outside.

Now, although I may be inexperienced parliamentarywise, Mr. Speaker, I am experienced a little bit when it comes to what challenging someone to a fight sounds like, and this certainly falls within that language. I definitely believe it rises to a point of order in creating disorder in here. It's important members feel safe to be able to question this government even if it's on topics that make them uncomfortable or frustrated. I find it particularly rich given this member's vast experience. He should definitely know this

behaviour is unacceptable and below him, and I believe he should apologize and withdraw.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak and rise in opposition. This is not a point of order. This is clearly, if anything, a miscommunication and a misunderstanding from members opposite. Mr. Speaker, I believe you will have the benefit of the Blues, which I will not, where the Government House Leader spoke incredibly clearly when there was a question going on with the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, who was making personal accusations that otherwise, outside this Chamber, would be explicitly defamatory, libellous, and deeply inappropriate and not have the protection of privilege outside this Chamber. The minister and Government House Leader said clearly: take this line of questioning outside the Chamber.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite I know is probably experienced in physical altercation. I have none in that. The minister here is not insinuating that. It is abundantly clear. The member opposite misheard. I appreciate that this can happen in our Chamber. If the member opposite wants to continue going down these paths, I suggest he takes the time to understand what was said and the nature of privilege, which is not to be abused. The nature of privilege is so that we can have meaningful debate, as members opposite claim is important. I agree. However, it should not be used as a way to protect an assassination of character of somebody who is not in this Chamber. It is out of the pale of appropriate.

I appreciate there's miscommunication here, Mr. Speaker. This is not a point of order. It is inappropriate for people to abuse the standing orders and attempt to raise a point of order where it's not there, and it's inappropriate for members opposite to try and abuse the purpose of privilege, to protect debate, and instead to assassinate the character of individuals outside this House. The Government House Leader's position was clear. The line of questioning should be taken outside the Chamber so that it could be subject to the laws of this province in terms of attacks on individuals of a nature that is defamatory and libellous.

The Speaker: Are there any other submissions? Please go ahead.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I feel strongly compelled to rise on this because I disagree with the Deputy Government House Leader. My caucus and I watched with interest the question as it was being asked, and I believe the Deputy Government House Leader is mischaracterizing what we saw.

Now, without the benefit of the Blues, here is what I have recorded, Mr. Speaker. The Government House Leader while standing, visibly angry, unbuttoned his jacket, pointed at the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, and said: I would also challenge that member to take this line of questioning outside of the Chamber and see what lands that member. Perhaps fists? That is the impression that I got in this Chamber. This was someone who was visibly angry and making a threat within this place.

Now, I must quote for you, Mr. Speaker, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, chapter 3, privileges and immunities, page 107.

In order to fulfill their parliamentary duties, Members should be able to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed. Assaulting, threatening, or insulting a Member during a proceeding of Parliament, or while the Member is circulating within the Parliamentary Precinct, is a violation of the rights of Parliament. Any form of intimidation of a Member with respect

to the Member's actions during a proceeding in Parliament could amount to contempt.

Now, obviously, a point of privilege and a contempt has not been called here, simply a point of order, which I think is appropriate in this case. I believe the threat to take it outside was absolutely unacceptable and alluded to a threat of violence, particularly when paired with the unbuttoning of a jacket and the pointing at that member. Pointing is also a point of order historically, in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker. There have been many rulings where previous Speakers have invited members to point to them, not at each other, because it can be so threatening and intimidating.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, from my perspective as the Official Opposition House Leader I saw a government getting more and more visibly angry because they didn't like the questions that were being asked. The rules of this place, our standing orders, and the history and tradition that we are based on are to protect members from asking questions that the majority might not like. I think I saw that the Government House Leader was doing whatever he could to shut down the line of questioning, one that, from the previous point of order, I will simply say that I believe was relevant in this place and about government business.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that our *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* – the clear reference to physical violence was inappropriate at this time. If the Government House Leader is unaware of how that kind of physicality can come across to members of this Assembly, I would encourage him to consider that in the future. I believe it's a point of order. I would encourage you to ask the Government House Leader to do better. It could be intimidating and prevent other members of this Chamber from wanting to ask questions on any given topic, and anything that intimidates a member to stop them from doing their job should not be allowed here.

The Speaker: Any other submissions?

Okay. Hon. members, I have the benefit of the Blues and the quote which I think is of issue here. The hon. Government House Leader said, "I would also challenge that member to take this line of questioning outside of the Chamber and see where it lands that member."

Here's my issue as your Speaker. This could be determined two different ways. It's quite normal for people – if somebody says something, our speech is protected in here more than the rest of society. You can say things in here and not be sued for it. That doesn't make it a good idea. It's fairly normal, when somebody says something that's offensive, for someone else to say, "I dare you to say it outside the House," with the threat being that you could get sued and all of that.

I believe that's what the Government House Leader was intending to say, but context matters. While I don't believe – and I heard it right from here to there, so there's no doubt in my mind what happened here. Every part of me thinks he said that, but the way you say it also matters. Sometimes when you have strong physical motions, it can lead to different interpretations of the words.

While no part of me thinks that the hon. Government House Leader was threatening violence against anyone, I'm going to ask him to stand and apologize and withdraw, not so much for what he said or for his intention but because I think this is a case where we need to be careful not just in what we say but how we say it.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because you asked, I will apologize and withdraw. But what I will be very clear on is that in

the future I'll make my language clear that when I say, "Take the language outside," we're referring to . . .

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. House leader, if you want to discuss it later on, we can.

I've made it clear. I believe there is no grounds at all for anyone being physically threatened, but there is sometimes the ability to have things interpreted two ways. I think this is the second ruling today that I've made in the interests of making people's families feel safe and making sure everybody here feels safe. For better or worse, I'm trying to be consistent. I'm trying to allow free speech. Again, I think I've been quite clear. No part of me believes a physical threat was made, but I think there are certain instances and contexts where how it's said also matters. This item is dealt with.

Okay. Point of order 4.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, was that at 2:41?

The Speaker: You know, if I was better at my job and had been doing it longer, I might have a good answer for you on that. But, yes, 2:41.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Ms Gray: Perfect. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I rose, I believe my deputy House leader rose, at this time specifically because as the minister was responding to questions from the MLA for Calgary-Edgemont, the minister, under 23(h),(i), and (j), chose to get too personal throughout that interaction. You will have the benefit of the Blues. I would much prefer if we were debating policy and government action and not throwing insults. The point of order was raised specifically on this language, which I think was clearly beyond the pale and has been ruled out in the past, and the quote was: "Shame on her." We do not speak to one another in those ways, especially when the hon. member is standing up to defend women survivors of domestic violence and to argue about policy and whether this government has gone far enough. The government can have the position that they have done enough. We may disagree, but to yell, "Shame on her" as part of many other personal insults I believe is a point of order. That is why I rose at that time. I look forward to your ruling.

Mr. Williams: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have the benefit of the Blues, and I did not hear any comment, so I can't speak to it. However, a number of times the terms "Shame," "Shame on all of us," "Shame on you, Provincial Treasurer," have all not been ruled out of order on February 15, 1994, by Speaker Schumacher. There's precedent for using the term "shame" in this Chamber referring to actions or statements made by the opposite side. It's a parliamentary term that has a deep history. This is not a point of order. I had not heard the exact language, but I can tell you that the term "shame" is used regularly in debate and is something that is a part of parliamentary process going to before Canada even formed, never mind this province.

The Speaker: Are there any other submissions?

Okay. Well, here's what I have that was said.

Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, that member, again, hasn't read the strategy released today. We had dozens of stakeholders at our announcement who came up to me and the other ministers thanking us for what is the most comprehensive strategy . . . in Canada. This is in addition to the over \$188 million this government spends annually across ministries supporting women and children. Shame on her.

Honestly, shame on her, shame on him, shame on them: seems like a fairly common thing that gets said here. This is certainly in the context where the minister was accusing the member across of not reading the report. It's not helpful, but I don't believe it's a point of order. The item is now dealt with.

Now it is time for Orders of the Day.

Mr. Sabir: Ordres du jour.

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

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

Bill 55 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

The Chair: Are there members that would like to join this debate? Seeing the hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate this opportunity to rise here in the Committee of the Whole and outline the substance of Bill 55, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

3:20

First, before I outline the legislation and what it does, I would like to clear up any misinformation that the NDP and their accomplices the Friends of Medicare have been putting out on Bill 55. Madam Chair, Bill 55 does not privatize hospitals. It does not lead to the privatization of our health care system as Alberta's government remains resolutely committed to a publicly funded health care system. If the members opposite read and understood the bill, Bill 55, they would recognize that it is the Health Facilities Act which, in fact, actually governs what kind of hospitals are permitted here in Alberta.

I'm going to read from the Health Facilities Act and the portion of the act that governs private hospitals to make it absolutely clear for the members opposite. In the Health Facilities Act, section 1 of part 1, named Protection of Publicly Funded Health Care, line 1, named Operation of Private Hospitals Prohibited, it reads, "No person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." Madam Chair, nowhere in Bill 55 does this portion of the Health Facilities Act change, and I don't know if I can be any clearer than that. There is no intention to change it. Bill 55 does not change any part of the Health Facilities Act, that protects our publicly funded health care, nor does it allow private hospitals. It does, however, allow for the appointment of nonprovincial entities like Covenant Health and Lamont Health, both of which are public, nonprofit organizations but not private companies. This is not a new concept.

However, what Bill 55 does signify is an important milestone in our government's ongoing effort to refocus and modernize Alberta's health care system. Every day we move closer to achieving a health care system that works better for all Albertans no matter where they live, what their health care needs may be, or what part of the province they call home. With this bill we are addressing several outstanding policy items necessary to complete the legislative and structural transformations already under way.

Madam Chair, when refocusing was announced in November of 2023, Alberta's government committed to engaging with all

Albertans and ensuring their voices were heard. That's why we held over 130 engagement sessions that covered the whole province twice. From High Level to Cardston, we wanted every Albertan to have the opportunity to contribute and bring forward the concerns unique to their community. These passionate Albertans share our belief in a better health care system for everyone in our province, and their participation has helped make that a reality. The Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, reflects months of collaboration, consultation, and detailed policy development with Albertans. It is designed to support the full and effective transition of all health care system components into the new, refocused model that we have committed to building.

One of the major themes that has emerged from the engagement sessions was determining where public health fits into the refocused system to ensure its important functions continue while improving its consistency and co-ordination. In response to this, through the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, we are proposing amendments to the Public Health Act that will bring clarity to public health's role in our refocused health care system. Public health will be moved out of Alberta Health Services. This will strengthen public health's role in protecting the well-being of all Albertans while allowing AHS to focus on delivering acute-care services.

The proposed legislative amendments will enable front-line public health services to transfer to Primary Care Alberta and other key functions to transfer to Alberta Health, namely the policy pieces. Primary Care Alberta will deliver public health prevention and wellness programs aimed at empowering Albertans to reduce health risks, including front-line public health services like communicable disease control, immunizations, newborn screening, and health promotion. Key functions like policy development and public health inspections and surveillance will transition to Alberta Health, as will the province's medical officers of health.

Madam Chair, Albertans have told us that the way public health currently operates must change. They know it doesn't work for them, and having an acute-care provider, AHS, deliver front-line public health services makes zero sense. That's why we moved public health's front-line services from AHS to Primary Care Alberta. It was not, as the NDP claim, to grab power, control the medical officers of health, and promote misinformation. This is just what the NDP do. We are about making sure that we are enabling a more timely and effective response to public health emergencies, to provide more tools and resources for our public health workers, and ensure Albertans have the information they need when and where they need it.

Additionally, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, or Bill 55, includes proposed amendments to the Provincial Health Agencies Act and would repeal portions of the Hospitals Act. The amendments will modernize hospital governance, support the oversight of health foundations, and continue to align key concepts and terminology across legislation. The Hospitals Act is outdated legislation that does not reflect current acute-care system governance or the introduction of the new refocused governance structures and ministerial roles. That needs to change. Proposed amendments will update and relocate key provisions from the Hospitals Act to the Provincial Health Agencies Act to establish a legislative framework for the operations and governance of approved hospitals. Madam Chair, repositioning the portion of the act that governs hospitals and integrating it into the Provincial Health Agencies Act will ensure governance of the health system is under one statute and that the legislation accurately reflects how hospitals will be managed and operated within the refocused health care system.

Again, Madam Chair, I want to reiterate this once more so that the opposition fully understand. Nothing in these amendments to

the Provincial Health Agencies Act or the Hospitals Act will allow private hospitals to operate in Alberta or lead to more privatization. This act is being done to modernize hospital governance, support the oversight of health foundations, and continue to align key concepts and terminology across legislation.

Further amendments will strengthen health foundations by streamlining governance functions like bylaw approval and the board member appointment process, and it will establish a clear connection between health foundations and the communities they serve. This is certainly something that I heard loud and clear as I went right across the province.

The amendments will also shift oversight of hospital foundations to the new health shared facilities entity. This makes sense, Madam Chair, as the shared services entity will support all four health service sectors and is a natural fit for health foundations as they also work across all the sectors.

Furthermore, amendments are also proposed to the Health Information Act, which will enable the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services to collect, use, and disclose health information. This will support that minister's role as the sector leader for continuing care in Alberta, and it will also fulfill their mandate to ensure high-quality care for Alberta's seniors.

Madam Chair, Alberta's government takes all allegations of abuse in publicly funded health care facilities very seriously, and a proposed amendment to the Protection for Persons in Care Act will in fact provide additional capacity to complete investigations into allegations of abuse. This is part of Alberta Health's commitment to provide timely service and protect vulnerable adult Albertans that are in care.

In November of 2023 we also announced that we would be refocusing the health care system, and that we've already done so much has actually been amazing, that we've been able to accomplish so much in such a short time period. We have stood up Primary Care Alberta, Acute Care Alberta, and Recovery Alberta. Within the year we'll be standing up assisted living Alberta and transferring emergency medical services, organ and tissue donation and transplantation, and cancer services over to Acute Care Alberta. Today, Madam Chair, we are happy to share that we are in the final stages of operationalizing the vision of a refocused health care system.

Through the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, Bill 55, we are demonstrating our commitment to achieving this goal and are honouring the dedication of so many Albertans who have walked alongside us in this process. All Albertans deserve access to health care when and where they need it, and Alberta's government is committed to making sure that this becomes a reality. Madam Chair, that is what Bill 55 is about, and I look forward to the debate in the Committee of the Whole.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It is not lost on me that we just had a ruling from the Speaker about not disparaging others who aren't here to defend themselves and their motives and that the member just spoke disparagingly about the Friends of Medicare. I want to take a moment to make sure that everyone knows who that actual organization is. It's a number of individuals who aren't here to defend themselves, but they have chapters in Calgary, Leduc, Beaumont, Lethbridge, Palliser for the Medicine Hat region as well as in Red Deer, and they are some of the folks who – when I go to their events, it's usually a lot of front-line health care workers, patients, and patient advocates who are there defending public health care through the Friends of Medicare.

I think it would be becoming of all members to not disparage organizations that simply are here to stand up for the benefit of all and for supporting public health care.

3:30

I do also need to respond to a few of the things that were said. I believe this is the first time that the minister has spoken to this bill. Saying that this change was made to define a hospital operator so that organizations like Lamont Health and Covenant Health can operate hospitals is, frankly, not factual. Lamont Health and Covenant Health already operate hospitals, so the legislation is already in existence. Covenant Health operates hospitals, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister. Saying that the legislation needs to be amended so Covenant Health can operate hospitals when Covenant Health already operates hospitals is not true. Yeah. I'm allowed to say "not true."

To give the minister an opportunity to reflect on some of the ways the legislation could be addressed so that people can believe that the things she is saying are accurate – because I do hope that when she says that this isn't about privatization, that's true. The issue I have is that the bill absolutely opens the door to privatization. The bill, for the first time, talks about things as hospital operators rather than – right now if you want to be discharged from hospital, somebody with medical expertise has to be the one who makes that decision. Instead, it's a hospital operator, and it allows the hospital operator definition to expand, too, which could include the definition of a private entity or a corporation.

What I'm going to do is – I have a number of amendments. I think I have five already that have gone through counsel for consideration and for proper wordsmithing to make sure that they're appropriate. Right now I would like to introduce two of them. I will keep one copy that is not the original and give the rest to a page.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Sorry. Just to be clear, you're only moving one amendment?

Ms Hoffman: One right now.

The Chair: Okay. Good. Although two at a time would be most ambitious.

Ms Hoffman: What if they want to pass one but not the second one, Madam Chair? Maybe they'll pass them both.

The Chair: We'll deal with that at that point.

This'll be known as amendment A1.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. I move that Bill 55, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, be amended in section 45(15), which, for people following along with a paper copy, is on page 90, in the proposed section 1.9764. That's why I give you the page number, because clearly this is a whole bunch of – we don't usually get bills that are written with that kind of numbering system, so 1.9764. I refer to clause (a) and clause (b), and I won't read them out, in a matter of expeditious fashion, in order to be able to have everyone read along with a copy, that will be on their desks momentarily.

It is really important to me that we give the minister an opportunity to pass an amendment that is rooted in the words that we've heard around this not being about privatization. Here's one of the ways we could increase people's confidence that privatization isn't something that is moving forward here, by putting in the phrase "established for the health services sector that is funded entirely and directly with monies granted or allocated by

the Government.” If this isn’t about asking people to pay out of pocket, then let’s amend this legislation to clearly state that we are indeed going to continue to be publicly funded. Then later we’ll talk about publicly delivered, but this one is about publicly funded specifically. Let’s make sure that it’s entirely funded with public money, that we’re not talking about collections.

There are other sections in this bill that go into how to collect from somebody who defaults on payment, if they’ve signed admission papers saying that they should be admitted to the hospital and then later default on their bill. If this isn’t about asking people to pay out of pocket and moving to American, privatized, two-tiered health care, let’s just simply add these words to make sure that people in the province of Alberta can have confidence that this bill is for the intention that the minister has outlined and not about making people pay out of pocket.

This clearly talks about publicly funded, that the money directly granted or allocated by the government is what will be going towards funding hospitals.

Happy to answer questions if anybody has them or for us all just to vote yes and get on with the rest of the day’s business. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, just to clarify what the member opposite had said earlier about Lamont and Covenant, yes, Lamont and Covenant can operate. They do operate, but they do not operate under Bill 55. They are going to operate under what still is in existence, which is the Health Facilities Act. That is what governs who is running the hospital.

What we are doing in Bill 55 is making sure that we have the structures in place to continue our refocusing and that we provide for the language of the provincial health agencies, which currently is not in the language that exists within the acts. So we are making sure that the provincial health agencies language is, in fact, there.

I don’t see that this is necessary because, as I was saying, when she’s talking about discharging patients, it is up to the medical professionals, Madam Chair, and nothing in Bill 55 changes that. So for the member opposite to say otherwise is incorrect. I would actually, in fact, vote down this amendment because it’s not necessary. We already have legislation in place to protect who’s governing hospitals.

The Chair: Any other members on amendment A1? Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I will again speak to the relevance of my next amendment, which is being submitted at this moment. This one is much shorter. I’ll wait for you to get it, and then I’ll read it into the record.

The Chair: This will be A2.

You may proceed, hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 55, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, be amended in section 45(15), in the proposed section 1.9764, by striking out clause (c). That again is on page 90, and it flows over to page 91, for those who are following along with a hard copy or digital copy.

I’ll read section (c), which is particularly problematic: “a person other than a . . . health agency or provincial health corporation if the

. . . Minister.” This is around the minister granting approval for the term “approved hospital,” and this legislation is the first time we’re talking about an approved hospital. Of course, that raised a lot of alarms for public health advocates. And it talks about how the “Minister, by order, may designate one of the following as the hospital operator of a health services sector in an approved hospital.”

It talks about “a person other than a provincial health agency or provincial health corporation if the oversight Minister is satisfied that.” Again, they don’t define oversight minister. That will be forthcoming in regulation. “Is satisfied that” then here is the explanation for the section, “the person is capable of delivering hospital services in the health . . . sector in the approved hospital,” and “(B) it is appropriate to designate the person based on any other factors determined by the oversight Minister,” and lastly, “the oversight Minister has considered any recommendation by the provincial health agency established for the health services sector with respect to whether the person should be designated.”

This actually continues to raise significant concerns because it gives the minister – presumably the Minister of Health is the oversight minister. I think that the minister for seniors will be involved in the long-term care branch and the Minister for Mental Health and Addiction will be involved in the Recovery Alberta branch, but they report up to the oversight minister, presumably the Minister of Health. And the Minister of Health therefore has the ability to determine if it is appropriate to designate the person based on any other factors that they have.

So this is absolutely consolidating power and decision-making in the office of the minister when it comes to anyone being allowed to run a hospital in the province of Alberta. Phase 1 had already taken over the ownership of the buildings, the assets that were owned by Alberta Health Services and others, and now they are giving the minister the ability to determine any person to be designated as the operator.

That is deeply concerning to me and to many others, Madam Chair. Also, putting out media releases and speaking publicly about their concerns with this bill are representatives of nurses. Again, it’s Nursing Week here in the province of Alberta and nation-wide, actually. There were paramedics who spoke out, social workers, hospital-based pharmacists, allied health professionals, nursing assistants. The list goes on. Workers on the front lines are concerned about this bill, and this is one area that, if we want to give some assurance to the people working in our hospitals and the people who count on our hospitals that this is not about privatization, taking out the piece where the minister gets to determine anyone as a hospital operator would be beneficial to that.

3:40

We’re leaving in the other two of the three sections through this proposed amendment. Section (a) is around “provincial health agency established for the health . . . sector,” and (b) is “a provincial health corporation whose responsible Minister is the sector Minister for the health services sector.” That would include, potentially, as government is designed today, the Minister for Mental Health and Addiction and the minister for seniors. I think it makes more sense for there to be some criteria other than just the piece that gives all power and ability to make the decision about whether or not an individual is capable of operating a hospital to the minister.

I think that that is a significant delegation of authority to one person on behalf of this entire Assembly, and I think it has the potential – I know it has the potential – to make people concerned that this isn’t about streamlining things. The fact that this bill came in at the end of session, that it amends 54(x) and that in this section, specifically, it talks about the minister having unilateral powers

around determining who's eligible to operate a hospital, leaves many with grave concerns. So accepting this amendment, striking clause (c) of 1.9764 on pages 90 and 91, I think, would go a long way towards giving people more confidence that what the minister is saying is, in fact, the intention of the bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the questions. I know that the member opposite, having read the previous legislations that have come in last fall and previously before that, would be very much aware that the oversight minister and the sector minister are very well defined in those other acts that have been previously brought forward. Also, having been a former Minister of Health, I'm sure she's very aware that you're also bound by the other legislations that still are in place.

I've been very clear in the message that I just read, Madam Chair, that the Health Facilities Act still is in existence, and it will still govern who can actually be a health care provider and run a hospital. I think that was very, very clear there. Again, as the oversight minister or the sector minister they still have to adhere to the Health Facilities Act, and that made it very clear that you cannot have a private operator running a private hospital. You cannot have a public member running a private hospital. You can have a nonprofit, such as Lamont and Covenant; that already exists. So you're governed by previous legislation that already exists as a sector minister or the oversight minister.

In regard to what this bill does, yes, it does amend 57 acts, but it amends 57 acts to say that what used to exist, which will very soon not exist anymore, which is a regional health authority, that that language is changed to "provincial health agency," so that is what's changed in 57 acts. It's really consequential wording that needs to be changed. So, Madam Chair, I don't see the need for this amendment, and I would ask my colleagues to vote it down.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thanks. I do just want to confirm that "oversight Minister" I don't believe is defined in the other legislation. If that is untrue, I'd love to see that tabled in the House. I will leave things at that and turn the remainder of the time over to my colleague.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is fascinating to watch the debate on publicly funded health care delivery and the publicly delivered health care system. It is also fascinating to watch the former Minister of Health and the current Minister of Health on the debate around whether this bill, Bill 55, is enabling a privately delivered health care system, which is not something that the government had campaigned on in the 2023 election. We all remember the Premier announcing a guaranteed public health care delivery, but we have in front of us Bill 55.

I really, really appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Glenora taking the time to go through the bill, which is quite a heavy one, and seeing the number of stickers that she has on the bill, proving that she has taken the time to go through the bill, at the same time come up with a reasonable amendment that will make this bill better, that will ensure that doubts are out of the way and it is not a private or two-tier health care system.

Madam Chair, Albertans want publicly funded and publicly delivered health care that meets the needs of their family and their loved ones. It is very, very, very clear that this side of the House:

we emphasize and underscored the importance of a publicly delivered health care system. However, I don't quite hear that much from the other side when it comes to the public delivery aspect of it.

In speaking to this amendment, the point of conversation where we are having some kind of disagreement is around the area of who is supposed to be defined as an entity that delivers the publicly funded health care system. In the bill it outlines quite a number of delivery entities: the regional health authorities, provincial health agencies, provincial health corporations. The amendment is trying to clear the doubt out of the way and remove section (c), where the definition of the health care delivery entities includes "a person other than a provincial health agency or provincial health corporation."

The problem that comes with, Madam Chair, is the way it is defined. That can be – let's say that you have an operator which is a person that is not the provincial health agency, that has regulations, that has legislation in place. The person is not a provincial health corporation, so what is left with us is that that person could be a private entity. Then what happens is that that private entity gets into agreement with the provincial government.

Let's use here examples. The examples that we could – let's say that the person is Sam, and Sam can set up a hospital in this case. Based on the way this legislation is drafted, the conditions that the minister will look into are: is Sam capable of delivering the hospital services in the health services sector in the provincial hospital? That's condition one. Basically, what that means is that that businessperson – or in this case let me use the name Sam again. The minister could be satisfied with Sam's ability to deliver the services. The other condition is that it's a designated area that the oversight minister is satisfied with.

Then what happens, Madam Chair, is that the oversight minister can enter into agreement with Sam. Once you have that agreement, then the delivery of services in the health services sector in the approved hospital is in accordance with this legislation. Basically, what it means is that a private entity, satisfied by the oversight minister, can get into an agreement, they can be paid tax dollars, and then they can be delivering the hospital services.

That is not what happens now. The only operator that we have now that happens, that's defined, is the chartered surgical facilities, which we know what we went into. We have had the conversation in this House in terms of the questions that it had raised when it comes to the integrity of the system, the questions that it had raised when it comes to the conflict of interest, the questions that it had raised when it comes to how much it is costing us having that.

3:50

Expanding that and including that, our hospitals, is what is in conversation. What this amendment is trying is to strike that out and remove it from Bill 55 so that the delivery of the health care system is not given to private delivery entities.

The bill has quite a number of things, but once you remove that, there are a number of other things that it takes out. For example, the way that this bill is designed is that the private entity – in this case, a private corporation or a person that is running our health care facilities, the hospitals – could actually be the one determining in terms of setting the laws of that, bylaws, could actually be the one who will be determining in terms of when to discharge, and could actually be the one who determines in terms of how much it will charge, deciding when to discharge somebody, if that person is not discharged from the hospital how much penalty they will pay. It provides all those kinds of instruments, which is exactly the same kind of system that exists in the U.S.

[Mr. Rowswell in the chair]

I think, I feel like the Member for Edmonton-Glenora has looked into the bill. It's not an attempt to say: let's completely remove this bill. That would have been actually great. In terms of reasoning and coming up with, "This is the problematic element of this bill," one of them is – it's a major one – creating a two-tier health care system, all of them publicly funded but some of them privately delivered, which will come up with quite a significant number of consequences that will have an impact in our health care system.

Albertans expect a publicly funded health care system. Albertans elected us, all members of this House, because we all campaigned that there will be no private health care system and there will be no two-tier health care system. But Bill 55 brings in that by having two elements of delivery, one being existing regional health authorities, the second being a private operator that could be anyone as long as the oversight minister feels that this is a good person or this is a good corporation that can deliver our hospital services delivery.

So it's quite problematic. I really, really encourage all members, including the government members who campaigned on guaranteed – if you were guaranteeing, I will say that you should support this amendment and strike out the clause that defines what an operator outside of regional health authorities would be.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Are there others that would like to speak to amendment A2?

Okay. With that, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Acting Chair: On the main bill, Bill 55. Member for Sherwood Park, go ahead.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Happy to rise again to speak to Bill 55. You may remember that previously we had a chance to review the sound and the rhyme of Bill 55. Sounds like corruption; rhymes with more bloated contracts for UCP insiders.

Mr. Chair, silly games are sometimes played here, and one of those is bill briefings. I know I've been to bill briefings myself for Bill 50 where the staff of the government decided to take a piece of paper, put the key highlights of the bill in font so small that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and myself could not actually read the bill briefings.

I was happy to see the minister rise here today and respond to debate. What's interesting about that is that it's debate within a time allocated period. I think, I understand, Mr. Chair, that really the largest bill of our session, the last bill of our session, one that's probably the most transformative to our province, to 50 per cent of our budget, has been allocated an hour and 59 minutes of debate. Sixty-six or 67 time allocations have been used now since the UCP formed government, and we're finding silly games being played.

Whenever we bring scrutiny or criticism to the debate, we are accused of fearmongering. Mr. Chair, I want to say to the other members of the Assembly: I'm honoured that the power of my words is considered so great that a criticism or a question or scrutiny is considered to be too powerful, that you need to limit debate on it. I think probably what's more beneficial to all Albertans is to make sure that we have thorough debate, thorough scrutiny, and we can get through looking at these bills.

Too often when we question the words that are written in the laws that we are about to pass, the government says: you're misunderstanding the words. This is what legislative debate is for. So I'm profoundly concerned with the troubling pattern that we're seeing, a pattern that has been described by a former Premier as running roughshod over our democratic process.

The accelerated pace of our debate: it diminishes the quality of the legislation that is released. What we see, Mr. Chair, with other pieces of legislation, like we saw with Bill 50, which we've debated, is that it was a cleanup job on legislation that was brought forward in the fall. So here we are with Bill 55. It's proposing significant changes to our health care system. It deserves thorough examination, and an hour and 59 minutes has been brought forward for debate, again, of a large piece of legislation. It's not making it more efficient to bring legislation forward that is not scrutinized in this Assembly, to know that we're going to have to probably review it again in the next legislative session because there are going to be mistakes that are going to be found when you go to actually implementing or consulting with stakeholders, which is often what happens after the government brings in the legislation. Then they hear from groups like nurses and doctors and allied health professionals who point out all the errors in what the changes are that they are making.

I want to urge this Assembly to recommit to those principles of open and robust debate. Let's ensure that every piece of legislation, especially those with far-reaching implications like Bill 55, is given comprehensive consideration that they deserve because our democracy and, frankly, our whole province depends on it.

Inside the debate of Bill 55 one of the alarming aspects that I picked up on is the restructuring of the chief medical officer of health role. It's going to be integrated into the Ministry of Health, which effectively is going to take an independent medical officer and give them a bureaucratic role that'll be under direct political oversight. Rather than having an independent chief medical officer, they're going to be within the bureaucracy. And what we see with a pattern with this government, Mr. Chair, is that when we have someone like the chief medical officer that does not have independence from the government, they are not able to speak out and give the advice that Albertans need. We're seeing a constant approach from independent officers, like the Chief Electoral Officer, chief ethics officer, who are pointing out quite publicly mistakes that the government is making with legislation. If we're going to have a chief medical officer that moves inside the bureaucracy, I'm afraid we will lose that independence and the health and well-being of Albertans will suffer as a result.

4:00

I want to urge the government to keep the chief medical officer independent and give them the power and the robust authority that they need to keep Albertans safe. What we've seen with a lack of childhood vaccinations in this province is that we have a disease, measles, that was thought to be eradicated now returned and at risk of growing at an exponential rate here in our province. It seems that we are taking a step backwards when we move the chief medical officer into the bureaucracy. Previous chief medical officers and health legal experts are raising their concerns over this.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

My largest concern with Bill 55, this large piece of legislation, is that it seems to be failing to address the pressing issues of our health care system. It's not proposing measures to recruit and retain more doctors or reduce wait times or improve patient care, and it is doing nothing to address the need for more preventative care in our health care system. We need to be looking at prioritizing patient care over political manoeuvring and creating legislation that makes it easier for privatization of our health care system in this province.

I was at a social event on the weekend with someone who worked in health care administration and another person there that works in health care, and the person from health care administration asked: what type of management change do we need to improve health

care systems in Alberta? I'm sure there are improvements that can be made to administration and management of health care, but to me it largely seems that what we need are more workers and giving them the decency, respect they need so that they can provide the health care to Albertans, that we all need as well to have received from them.

The largest concern that has been brought up with Bill 55 is the pressing concern regarding the increasing trend of privatizing hospital operations in Alberta. There are proponents that are saying that this leads to cost savings and improved efficiency, but empirical evidence does not suggest that. It is showing that when you add a level of profit in a system that is like our health care system, a universal service for Albertans, the idea of adding profit is not going to be providing better service or lower cost to the taxpayers. We've seen this in the electricity system where Alberta, with our unique and interesting system – where we have natural monopolies for wires, there is a level of profit that is guaranteed to wire service operators. Just like when you are a private operator of a surgical service, you are going to have guaranteed profit. That guaranteed profit is going to come away from patient care.

There are higher costs associated with privatization. In Quebec a pilot project aimed at comparing the costs of surgeries in public hospitals versus private clinics revealed that the procedures in private settings were significantly more expensive. For instance, standard carpal tunnel surgery averaged \$900 in a private clinic compared to \$500 in the public system. Exploratory colonoscopies cost \$750 in private versus \$300 in a public system. These increased costs were partly due to contracts guaranteeing private clinics a profit margin, thereby incentivizing the higher charges, and that's what we're seeing. We're not providing an incentive for private operators to operate at a lower cost because we are guaranteeing them a fixed price, a guaranteed price for their services.

That's what we've seen with the bloated contracts that are at the centre of the corrupt care scandal. The private operator said: we will provide the surgeries, but we need it for a higher price because we need to make sure we're making a profit and we need to pay off our new building that we've just built.

Another study found that for-profit health care providers tend to have higher administrative costs and require returns for investors, making them more expensive than nonprofit counterparts.

I think the largest problem that we're seeing overall is a diversion of health care professionals. Privatization poses the risk of diverting health care professionals from the public system to private entities. That shift can exasperate staffing shortages in public hospitals, impacting the quality and accessibility of care for the broader population. I have deep concern of the creeping privatization of our health care system, particularly the risk it poses of diverting critically needed health care professionals away from the public system into private entities.

Alberta is already experiencing a shortage of doctors, nurses, and allied professionals. Introducing or expanding private clinics is only going to exasperate this issue. Let's look at B.C., where the Cambie Surgeries Corporation drew doctors away from the public system, leading to longer wait times for publicly funded surgeries, or Ontario, where recent expansion of private surgical centres led to Ontario Nurses' Association warning of the staffing exodus from hospitals, especially in rural and remote areas, Madam Chair. We cannot ignore the warning signs in Alberta.

The crux of the matter is this. We do not have two separate pools of health care workers, one for public and one for private. We have one, finite pool. Every professional who moves to private clinic is one less available for emergency rooms or ICU bed care and our family medicine clinics. The evidence suggests that privatizing hospital operations, as Bill 55 is about to do, will not lead to cost

savings or improved efficiency, Madam Chair. Instead, it'll result in higher expenses for taxpayers, reduce surgical capacity in our public hospitals, and longer wait times and staffing challenges throughout the province.

Madam Chair, I've spoken against this bill. I'm glad this minister was here to respond to it. I would encourage her to extend debate so that we can have thorough scrutiny of this bill and provide better health care for Albertans.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. member, while definitely not intentional, I think saying things like "I'm glad the minister was here" may not be helpful in the future.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Just a short comment, interjection, here in Committee of the Whole. It is surprising that the members opposite are so concerned about a time allocation whilst they do not speak to any relevant question of the legislation at hand. I could have risen on a point of order for all 12 minutes and 38 seconds of the member's speech, 23(b)(i). It was not at all addressing any of the content within the legislation whatsoever. I think it's a bit of a far cry from members opposite to bemoan the idea of time allocation while they waste their time on debate not at all found in the content of the legislation.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. I rise to speak to Bill 55, which amends 57 pieces of legislation. I was part of the 29th Legislature. Madam Chair, you were part of that, too. If there were more than a couple of bills added in one piece of legislation, UCP members, then on this side, and PC members: they would spend the entire day and night just talking about how omnibus these pieces of legislation are. One particular bill that I remember was about labour relations and employment standards. Just two pieces of legislation were amended. I would encourage the Deputy Government House Leader to look at the *Hansard* and watch the debate, how opposition at that time was so much against dropping a last-minute omnibus bill with just two pieces of legislation being amended.

This one is amending 57 pieces of legislation, and government is dropping it at the end of the session. They were waiting for the federal election results, and depending on that they, I guess, were deciding their House strategy. This bill represents a significant shift in how we deliver public health care in this province. Every election the government will sign a cardboard public health guarantee that won't mean anything, and as soon as they become government, they will start tearing apart our public health care system. That started as soon as the UCP became government in 2019. I think the definition of insanity – Einstein said that you continue to do the same thing and expect different results.

4:10

They tried to privatize our lab services, DynaLife. They were taken to the cleaners by a private corporation, and the public is on the hook for tens of millions of dollars, at least 70-plus million dollars if not more. Now they're again putting together a piece of legislation that will help them do the same thing, and this time they're expecting different results. Instead of focusing on making sure that 800,000-plus Albertans who don't have family doctors have access to primary care, access to a family doctor, they think that expanding for-profit surgical facilities somehow is the answer. It doesn't matter how much they deny that that's not what they are doing. It's written in black and white in this legislation. I'm not sure how many have read it. It's allowing private operators to run public

hospitals. That's privatization of our health care. Private operators won't run it out of a good heart. They will run those hospitals to earn a profit, management fees that they will charge at the expense of Albertan health care.

This government doesn't understand what public health care is. That's the basic difference between this side of the House and that side of the House. On this side of the House we believe that if an Albertan gets sick, all of us come together and take care of that person, take care of that neighbour regardless of what their bank account looks like, where they come from, and what kind of illness they have while on that side of the House they think health care could be turned into a business. They're business-minded people. I don't think that Albertans' health is a business. It's a responsibility that government needs to take seriously and deliver on so that Albertans have the health care based on their needs whenever they need it. Again, this bill is allowing government to enter into a financial arrangement with the private operators to expand privatization of health care. That's, again, in their bill.

The second thing that they are doing is that they are centralizing the government's control on our health care. Health decisions are better left to health professionals, not politicians. We saw that when Jason Kenney and the UCP at that time were trying to manage the pandemic to suit their political needs. We saw the consequences. Health decisions are better left for health professionals, not politicians. This bill is giving government power. This bill is transferring significant authority to the provincial government and provincial, I guess, caucus to decide how and what kind of health care people will receive, or at least will influence those decisions.

It's a matter of fact that the government has members in their caucus who have been openly promoting antiscience views against immunizations and have been part of those convoys and group of fringe elements that were against all kinds of health measures during a national emergency. I don't think that government centralizing power is in the interest of Alberta in any way, shape, or manner.

Also, this bill is further supporting the privatization of support services as well. One example that I provided was the lab services. Government already tried. They lost public money, still refusing to account for it. Glad that it's before the Auditor General, and we might see what happened there and how government managed to fail so bad.

At the end of the day, this bill is a bad bill. This bill is not in the interest of Albertans. Albertans deserve a government that believes in publicly funded and publicly delivered health care that just works in their best interests and doesn't extend favours to business corporations to turn health care into a business. With that, I urge every member of this House to think about your constituents and vote against this piece of garbage.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: I appreciate the member opposite's urging; I will likely not follow, and I also ask this House.

I will move to adjourn debate on Bill 55, with the government planning to bring it back again soon.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 54 Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

The Chair: Are there members who would like to join this debate? Seeing the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 54, which is, again, an omnibus bill that the government introduced after the

federal election. Many Albertans, Indigenous communities, academia, and Albertans at large have raised concerns with respect to this bill. There are provisions in this bill that change access to voting, make changes around special ballots: who can ask them, how they can ask them. It contains many U.S.-style vote suppression provisions, and it also changes the threshold for referendum and public citizen initiatives in a way that makes it easier for separatist movements to grow, which certainly the UCP seems to be championing at this point.

More recently we heard from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta as well, who raised significant concerns with a number of these provisions, including vote-anywhere provisions, including the elimination of vouching provisions, and even provided useful examples. One concerning thing that the Chief Electoral Officer raised was that essentially this bill takes away the Chief Electoral Officer's power to investigate any infraction or breach of election laws in any meaningful way. That is deeply concerning. Clearly, the government is rigging the democracy in its favour.

4:20

The best thing would be that government take this bill back, take it to the drawing board, and reflect on it. Listen to First Nations, who are deeply concerned about this bill's impact on their treaty rights – they have called it, rightfully so, garbage – and listen to the Chief Electoral Officer, who also has shown deep concerns about this bill.

With that, I do have a number of amendments. I will try to move the first amendment.

The Chair: All right. This will be amendment A1.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Sabir: The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to move that Bill 54, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, be amended in section 6 by striking out subsections (2)(a)(ix), (9), (19)(a)(ii), (b)(i), and (b)(iii), (21), (23)(a) and (b)(i), (26), (28), (29), (30), and (60).

In short, what this amendment is doing is taking out the provision that eliminates vouching as a form of identification from our election laws. Across Canada those provisions are there, and all I will say – I will read a couple of paragraphs from the Chief Electoral Officer's letter that he sent to the government.

Approximately 0.6% of the total votes cast in the 2023 ... General Election used the vouching process to prove identification.

It goes on to say that

vouching will no longer be available as a form of identification, and it's

critical to the enfranchisement of all voters, but particularly those in rural Alberta, seniors, vulnerable Albertans, and those who may [not have] fixed address[es].

- Limitations on proving eligibility, including further restrictions on identification, will present barriers for some electors to access their right to vote. Changing identification requirements and imposing barrier to voting will engage section 3 of the Charter.

And it provides an example of

Council of Canadians v Canada (Attorney General), 2015 [Ontario supreme court] 4601 ...

That's the case number.

... where the ability to [use] vouching as a form of identification saved legislation that was found to violate section 3.

A couple of things. One, the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta, who is an independent officer of this Legislature, is telling this Legislature that this change is bad; this change will deprive people of their right to access to vote. The second thing is that this change is likely unconstitutional. Section 3 of the Charter is engaged. And,

third, I would say that government should take steps that facilitate people's participation in democracy and not suppress the vote.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

I urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1? The Minister of Justice has risen.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall's proposed amendment. The hon. member speaks about making sure that it is easy to vote, that it is available to all eligible Albertans, and the fact of the matter is that the Bill 54 proposed amendments do exactly that. What they also do is that they protect the integrity of our elections. They ensure that those who are able to vote are the only ones that do so.

We also make sure that that happens easily. That's why, Mr. Chair, we're expanding the use of special ballots and giving a lot more flexibility to the types of proofs of residence that individual Albertans can provide to Elections Alberta officials in order to confirm their eligibility to vote. Every amendment that we've put forward in Bill 54 has been carefully considered, and we know that with the elimination of vouching comes the requirement that we make sure that we facilitate the ability to vote for every single eligible Albertan in every way possible. It's why we're increasing a number of ways for electors to demonstrate their eligibility. It's why we're expanding the use of special ballots significantly. It's why we're making sure of both the balance between the ability for people to vote along with making sure that the integrity and confidence in our elections is always maintained.

Because of that, Mr. Chair, I would simply suggest that all members of this House vote against this amendment and keep the existing bill as it is.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A1?

If not, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 54. I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's really unfortunate because that amendment just followed what the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta recommended to this minister and this Legislature.

The minister said that they are facilitating access to special ballots. As the saying goes, nothing can be further from the truth. Don't take my word for it. The Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta in a letter that was tabled yesterday said that special ballots are important "to increase access for electors" and goes on to say that "the proposed amendments include additional provisions that will create barriers to access and limit the use of special ballots."

That's the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta saying that, and I think I would take the Chief Electoral Officer's words any day over anyone identifying with the UCP because that's the person who is in charge of this legislation. He's writing to the government that they are restricting access to special ballots. That's vote suppression, and that is wrong for the institution of democracy. There are similar provisions that also have no basis in research, evidence, or anything of that sort. Government is just responding to its base, whatever they tell them to do.

With that, I will move another amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Members, this will be referred to as amendment A2.

The member can proceed to read it into the record.

Mr. Sabir: The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to move that Bill 54, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, be amended in section 6 as follows: (a) by striking out subsections (3), (4), and (5); (b) in subsection (31)(a), in the proposed section 111(3.1), as follows: (i) in subsection (3.1) by striking out "subsection (3.2) and"; and (ii) by striking out subsection (3.2); and (c) by striking out subsection (41)(c).

These provisions deal with a conspiracy theory, I guess only accepted and regarded in the UCP universe, that somehow tabulators are fraud, they are not good, and taking tabulators out of the electoral process makes elections efficient and all those kinds of things. The government has not provided any evidence – a shred of evidence – that there were any concerns raised with respect to the use of tabulators in elections anywhere in Canada. It's just the conspiracy theory that they are clinging on to, and to satisfy and please their base, they have put these provisions in which don't belong in this statute.

4:30

Just to kind of add a few things for the benefit of everybody in this House, tabulators are stand-alone devices. They are not networked. They are not connected to Internet, that somebody will somehow hack them and rig the results. The second thing is that even when ballots are counted by tabulators, the hard ballots are still kept as record, and if the results are close, those ballots can still be used for judicial recount in any concerns with respect to irregularities in votes. And the third thing is that the company that makes these tabulators is a Canadian company, Dominion Voting Systems. It has provided tabulators across Canada, especially in Ontario, and again, there is no evidence of any wrongdoing in Canada. There were some concerns raised within the United States, which have been debunked and have led to the defamation lawsuit by the company.

Again, these changes that government included are based on debunked conspiracy theories. They don't belong here. Tabulators are good to make counting more efficient. They are reliable. I urge all members to believe in science and vote in favour of this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, amendment A2. Anyone else wishing to provide comment to amendment A2? I will recognize the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the hon. member once again for the amendment put forward. On May 30, 2023, CBC put out an article suggesting that as of 12:30 a.m. 70,000 advance votes had not been counted. Members of this Assembly had not received their results into the late hours of the night following the day after the election.

We do know that the most reliable way to count votes is to have a paper ballot backstopping that vote. Mr. Chair, it's been the primary way of counting ballots in this province, it is the primary way that the federal election was held, and it is a way for us to strengthen the trust of the public, by being able to have an actual ballot that is consistent with the number of people who came to vote in a particular area. We're creating consistency across municipal, provincial, and federal elections.

The amendment that's being proposed suggests that having paper ballots is the most reliable way, Mr. Chair. Full stop. Because this act that the amendment is put forward to, the democratic process legislation, is intended to not only make things easier for Albertans but also

to strengthen the confidence in our votes, I would recommend all members of this Assembly to vote against this amendment as well.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to provide comment on amendment A2?

I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We move back on to the main bill, Bill 54. I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That was some interesting argument. If I followed that line of reasoning, I wouldn't see any member of the UCP riding a car because walking is the primary way of commuting, so we should stick to that.

Anyway, I will move another amendment, and I have the requisite number of copies.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this amendment will be referred to as A3. I will invite the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to read it into the record and provide comment.

Mr. Sabir: The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to move that Bill 54, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, be amended in section 5 by striking out subsections (5)(d) and (e), (7), (8), (10), and (11).

Mr. Chair, yesterday there was a group called Alberta Prosperity Project that revealed a referendum question as well: should Alberta become a separate state and leave Canada? Prior to this piece of legislation the threshold for any citizen-led initiative was that they need to collect 20 per cent of electors' signatures who participated in the last election, and they need to do it in 90 days. The government, who is still refusing to say that they denounce separatism – they're yet to denounce it, any of them. Rather, there is other information out there that 10, 12 of them even support separatism.

What the government did with this piece of legislation: they are lowering that threshold to 10 per cent of the electors, and they're also giving them another 30 days, another month – now you have 120 days – thus facilitating these separatists' rhetoric and fuelling more, stoking more, I guess, separatist rhetoric, that is in no way, shape, or manner in the interests of Alberta. The government did not get a mandate to facilitate Alberta separating from Canada. That was not their mandate. All this provision is doing is that it's leaving it as is, at 20 per cent and 90 days. That was the provision that existed before the UCP decided to tear Alberta apart from Canada.

I urge all members of this Legislature to talk to your constituents. They do not want to separate from Canada – they do not want to separate from Canada – and this kind of dog whistle, this kind of change in legislation will result in more division in our society. We have seen those referendums, how they impact provinces, their economies. We have examples from Quebec. So there's still time for the government to think about these things seriously. Put the province before your own political interests and vote in favour of this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wishing to provide comment to amendment A3? I will recognize the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the hon. member again for the hard work in putting before this Assembly the amendment that we're looking at here. Albertans are proud Canadians. We want this nation to be strong. We want it to be prosperous and, above all else, as we've said countless times in this House, notwithstanding what the hon. member said, united. That means that a strong Canada exists when there is a strong

Alberta. It means that a strong Alberta exists when there is a strong Canada. We've said that a number of times.

Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall puts forward an amendment seeking to strike a number of sections in Bill 54 relating to citizens' initiatives. The hon. member may or may not know that citizen-led initiatives in this province have been here for a very long time.

4:40

I think that Albertans deserve and value choice and freedom. Those two are fundamental to the fabric that makes Alberta unique. The updates that are being proposed in Bill 54 will help of course make it easier for Albertans to put forward important issues that they're very passionate about, and it allows them to play a more democratic role in the democratic process. Albertans are entitled to bring important questions to the attention of government and to the people of Alberta. Mr. Chair, a referendum on issues that are important to them is something that this government will not stand in the way of.

Now, Bill 54, Mr. Chair, is 144 pages long. I would ask the member who keeps putting forward these theories to find a single mention of the word separation in it; he will not. I would ask him to find a single mention of separatism or separatists or anything of the like; he will not. The reason that he will not find it is because citizen-led initiatives have been around for a long time. They'll continue to be around for a long time. We value and respect the ability for Albertans to put important questions to the people of Alberta and have their opportunity to be heard.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Any other members wishing to provide comment on amendment A3?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Back on the main bill, Bill 54. Any other comments or questions? The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you. Thanks for getting that right.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak in opposition to Bill 54. Why mince words? This bill is an affront to democracy and is being used as a wedge to divide us. It will actively suppress the vote of many sectors of our society while making it easier to stack the deck with dark money, and it seeks to legitimize separatist rhetoric by offering a referendum on separation from Canada. You know, I will refer back to the comments from the Minister of Justice, where you're telling us that separation is nowhere in this bill. But if you're actually setting up the conditions to allow it while flirting with separation, tell me that that's not what the goal is, okay? This is all happening while Trump is poking at us and wants to claim Canada as a 51st state.

I'll be clear. This bill will have long-lasting and harmful impacts on our elections and democracy. It's also about political theatre, stoking divisions, and feeding anger. You know, this isn't a joke. It is also incredibly dangerous. This bill is not about improving or modernizing our elections. It's not about bolstering engagement in democracy. It's not about educating the votership on the processes.

You know, one thing I do remember about the time when we had a Notley government, a New Democrat government, was that great pains were taken to ensure that we had access to democracy, a true modernization of democracy and voting in elections. Really, that should be the aim of any bill that has to do with elections. We need to make them more accessible, ensure their integrity at all stages, and increase transparency.

I just want to talk a little bit about the provisions for eliminating vouching. Vouching helps folks in Indigenous communities on-reserve, seniors in care facilities, disaster displaced Albertans, and postsecondary students to be able to fulfill their civic duty. By removing the vouching provisions – I think I’ve said this before in the House – essentially what’s happening here is that the UCP is choosing its voters. When we’re talking about the impact of removing vouching, we stand to deny access to about 50,000 Albertans when we’re talking about removing the ability to vote through vouching.

They’re also making provisions here about special ballots. It’ll actually be more difficult if you live in a northern and remote community to participate in an election. There’s also the talk of manual balance and not only undermining confidence in our electoral system but making it less efficient and more expensive.

Now, I just want to talk a little bit again about vouching and the reasons that voter ID restrictions have been introduced in this place. It’s to undermine confidence in who is eligible to vote. It’s to deny them the vote, and I just want to talk about the cases of voter fraud that this provision supposedly is trying to address. This is the number. Since 2013 we’ve had a total of five cases of voter fraud. Since 2013. Let’s compare those five cases to 50,000 people unable to vote. We can put processes in place. We can make sure that we have integrity in elections, and that doesn’t actually mean that we have to deny people the right to vote, especially in communities where we know that traditionally their voices haven’t been heard. The policies that are enacted by this government don’t address their needs. These are the folks that need to be able to show up on election day and have that access to the vote.

Now, on top of what we’re seeing in terms of, you know, denying access to elections, they’ve also invited separatists into the room. They have given them air and a platform. It’s dangerous, and it’s part of a larger pattern of this government’s new role as agent of chaos to distract from their own failures instead of govern for Albertans.

We’re all getting the e-mails about affordability. We’re all getting the e-mails about folks who are struggling on AISH. I’m sure you’re all getting the e-mails about the cruel clawback of the \$200 disability benefit that’s coming federally. There’s so much mismanagement in this government. There’s so much that Albertans are begging us to address, and rather than do that and rather than address the issues that plague us, rather than showing up at the table to negotiate and get us a win, the UCP is putting up its dukes and punching in the air at a new Prime Minister and new ministers before they’ve even had lunch. It’s an embarrassment, quite frankly.

It does remind me, if you’ll indulge me, of a quote from one of my favourite television shows, *Mad Men*. I don’t know if anyone remembers that show.

Dr. Elmeligi: Great show.

Member Tejada: Right?

One of my favourite characters on that show, Don Draper, has a great quote. Curiously, this show is also set in the ’60s, around the time of the civil rights movement, when folks in the United States were organizing to get the vote and to not be disenfranchised despite the many movements around them to do it. In this quote Don Draper is referring to how entities can manipulate audiences and groups of people away from what they care about and from what they’re facing in the moment by distracting them, and that quote is: if you don’t like what’s being said, change the conversation. This government is certainly trying very hard to change the channel on what Albertans are asking for.

We need collaboration, not cheap political posturing. We need action on affordability for everything from housing, utilities, and the cost of groceries, disability benefits, our pensions and keeping them. What I see here is a pattern from this government to slowly dismantle everything that makes us part of Canada, dismantling health care, talk of an Alberta provincial pension, talk of a provincial police force, basically setting up all the pieces to legitimize the talk of separation and stoking western alienation and forgetting that when it comes to Alberta as part of Canada, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

4:50

The cost of this fool’s errand to flirt with separation is too high. Our country is too precious, and the needs in our communities have been ignored for too long. We’ve seen this before. Without aging myself, I don’t know if some of the members opposite or some of our other members remember the phrase “Je me souviens.” It means “I remember.” In this case I remember the Quebec referendum in 1995. I know that there were efforts before that to separate as well. All of them failed in their efforts to separate, but what they did succeed in doing was chasing away investment and chasing away confidence in business leaders in any sort of investment in Quebec.

So what I remember is sitting at a table with my roommate, who was also a Quebecer – I happened to be in Toronto at the time as a student – and waiting with bated breath for the result on the Quebec referendum and feeling at the time, as the daughter of immigrants, as a second-generation Canadian, thinking back to my parents and the struggle and the fight and the story that they brought with them to this place and the pride that they felt in being Canadian, in being part of our society and embracing everything that Canada represents. I’ll admit it was a very emotional moment for me, even just remembering it now. I remember not even having been to Quebec at the time and thinking as a very young person that it broke my heart that anyone would want to leave this country and that it would have reverberations on our nation, on our economy, and for no good reason.

And I remember at the time Jacques Parizeau courting minorities in order to get the yes vote on separation and the feeling of relief I felt when they voted no and within minutes the disgust of having Jacques Parizeau also level an accusation at the ethnic vote. He was referring to immigrant communities at the time, but he also had a great deal of disdain for Indigenous communities, that had not been consulted. Of course, we know, and we’ve talked about this before. We are treaty people. We are signatories to treaty. We have a responsibility to treaty. If in any way we are flirting with the idea of separation, that is immediate disrespect of treaty. There’s so much more work to be done when it comes to reconciliation, and respecting treaty is the bare minimum. We haven’t even done that. We haven’t even done that, and here we are flirting with separation. It is shameful. It’s shameful and embarrassing.

I would say, you know, that when we look at how this bill is structured, this is very deliberate. I would credit this government with one thing, and it’s that they leave no stone unturned. They’re looking at every detail in order to benefit themselves, their friends in the far right, to ensure themselves some measure of success if a referendum on separation were to happen. I can say that they’ve looked at things like the Clarity Act. They’ve looked at what they need for majorities. They’ve taken lots of steps like drastically reducing the thresholds in order to make a referendum successful.

When I think about this bill as a whole, I think about voter suppression, the fact that this government is actively trying to deny the vote to thousands of Albertans while enabling the entrance of dark money into the equation and influence and lowering the thresholds for participation in something that would tear our nation apart.

It's unacceptable to me. It should be unacceptable to all of us. That's not what we were sworn in for. We were sworn to serve the constituents in our individual constituencies. We took an oath. We say that prayer every day. I don't think that this bill meets the spirit of that prayer or this oath. I do think it is a betrayal of what we've sworn to do in this House. Until you are meeting the needs of our constituents, until you are ensuring that we have good public education, that we have publicly funded and delivered health care, that we have housing for everyone here, that we are meeting the needs of all of our constituents, introducing a bill that is political theatre and threatens our democracy and creates divisions: that's not what I would like to see prioritized in the actions taken by our government.

I do believe that we can do a lot better. I think one of the things that I keep thinking about is what we have to offer, and that is that we have a better government waiting, and that's with the Alberta New Democrats. Better actually is possible, and this bill is not it. I urge every member of this House to vote against it.

The Deputy Chair: The Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak emphatically against Bill 54 alongside my ancestors and those yet to be born. I stand here opposed to the changes that Bill 54 is putting forward to disenfranchise Indigenous peoples in this province and to make legal threats to the First Peoples of this land.

I've seen the flames that this government has stoked when it comes to separation, and while they couch it in language to put the onus on yet another bogeyman, this time pitting citizens of our province against one another, this government once again creates division amongst Albertans.

I do not want to even touch the tinfoil hat provisions of this bill, including electronic tabulators or electronic voting machines, because I've dealt with this concern when running elections for numerous clients while in private practice. It makes the process easier. There are credibility measures built into those processes. This conversation is just silly spillover from the United States.

I've also heard multiple things from my friends on this side of the House about the bringing in of dark or corporate money into elections, a practice that was put to bed by our NDP government and something we will bring back when we replace this UCP government.

But I want to talk about the concerns this bill creates for Indigenous peoples in Alberta. In a speech to Harvard centre for international affairs in the Kennedy school of government in 1996 the then Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come, who was the grand chief of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee during the Quebec secession crisis, brought some rather poignant and applicable thoughts to this present conversation that we are having in this province because of the changes proposed in Bill 54 to the Citizen Initiative Act.

Now separatist leaders in Quebec insist that they have been wronged; and insist, wrongly, that they have a right to secede on the basis of a right of self-determination. And regardless of any rights in our favour based on legitimacy, democracy or the rule of law, the separatist government in Quebec states it can forcibly include the James Bay Cree people and our territory and resources in a future independent Quebec state.

Mr. Chair, I do not want to defeat the purposes of citizen-led initiatives when they are done democratically. What I am concerned about is exactly what Chief Coon Come has said in his remarks. When this referendum moves forward for separatism – because it's not a matter of if; it's a matter of when. The Premier mentioned in her address to the province that this referendum, if it moves forward with the citizen initiative, will be going ahead in 2026. From the comments I'm hearing from Albertans, Canadians, and folks I can

only assume are from other parts of the world, the split is real, and it endangers the treaties here in Alberta.

5:00

Mr. Chair, I've heard overwhelmingly from people who are thankful to the treaty First Nations who have spoken out against this incredibly concerning amendment to the Citizen Initiative Act. I've also heard from some folks who are less favourable and, let's say, use some colourful language. If I repeated half of what they've said to me, called me, or had some racist or homophobic undertones, I would absolutely be called unparliamentary, but I digress. To quote the eternal and gracious Jinkx Monsoon: "Water off a duck's back."

This, coupled with the fact that Bill 54 also strips the right to vouch for individuals without identification and mandatory need for photo identification, will strip the right to vote from so many Indigenous peoples in this province, is deplorable. Mr. Chair, instead of putting up more barriers to democratic participation, we should be trying to make access to democratic rights of Albertans easier, but this government is taking several steps backward by removing things like vouching and mandatory identification but also voting-anywhere options.

We already struggle with voter apathy and low voter turnout. This will dissuade even more people from attending the polling place to vote. Mr. Chair, in the last election during our get out the vote I remember the apprehension people had to get out and exercise the right to vote. The disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples is on full display in this piece of legislation.

I am so thankful that the chiefs and Métis leadership have voiced their concerns on this bill in entirety, and I heed their calls. This government should abandon this entire thing and go back to the drawing board after they have spoken with the leaders to chart an appropriate course forward. Saying that you respect the inherent and treaty rights of Indigenous peoples while on the other hand supporting the very same mechanisms which will strip them of these rights is doublespeak. It is unbecoming of a government, and it is definitely questionable under the law.

While this bill will make it easier to work with Indigenous leadership to place polling places on their nations, this is just window dressing. This means nothing more if there are people who are unable to actually participate in the electoral processes because of the disenfranchising of Indigenous voters under the removal of the vouching system and mandatory photo identification provisions within these amendments to the Election Act of section 43(2) under amendment 6(9) and also subsequent amendments under 6(26) and (28).

What we have is a perfect storm to remove Indigenous voters, including on both referendums or citizen initiatives. It will create a skewed perspective on what people in Alberta, including Indigenous peoples, have not and will not have provided their voices on because they have been disenfranchised. This is shameful, and any amendment of this bill must include the reinstating of the higher threshold for citizen-led initiatives and referendums. Doing otherwise is an affront to treaty rights in this province. It is an affront to the very real concerns that the chiefs have raised over the past several weeks, including the cease-and-desist letters that have been sent to the UCP.

I think it is also a bit rich that this government is also amending the Recall Act to increase the number of people who need to provide signatures to undertake a recall from 40 per cent up to 60 per cent of the voters for the most recent election. Under amendment 10(6) this government is changing the rules for them to be removed. This government is trying to slide this under this omnibus bill. That is making it harder for them to be removed while also appeasing a minority of Albertans who have justified concerns with the east not listening to Alberta.

This government is not giving Ottawa any reason to work with us by placing bad-faith demands to the Prime Minister within days of the election. Mr. Chair, Albertans deserve better. Albertans deserve to be treated properly. Having bad-faith demands already on the table does nothing to solve this problem.

I also am cognizant of the fact that a repeal of Bill C-69 will also mean a repeal of consultation obligations, and we know where the province sits with consultation. I urge this government to consider how better it could serve Indigenous peoples in this province with consultation. The ACO is not working, and arguing for C-69's repeal will mean that Indigenous voices are further removed from the processes, from the land, from the water, and from the air.

While this threshold to move separatism up on the agenda is on this Bill 54, while this government's members have gone down, it is pretty telling, isn't it, Mr. Chair?

I'd like to close my comments against Bill 54 with another quote from Chief Matthew Coon Come from his Harvard address:

Years ago President Woodrow Wilson said: "... no right anywhere exists to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property." In the same vein, Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote that "[i]t is making fools of people to tell them seriously that one can at one's pleasure transfer people from master to master, like herds of cattle, without consulting their interests or their wishes."

The Crees have given notice. We will not be handed from one country to another like property or cattle in a field. Those times are past.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Those are my remarks against Bill 54. [Remarks in Cree]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the lively debate on Bill 54. I know it will continue as the government plans to bring it back up again. But at this moment I move that the committee rise and report progress on bills 54 and 55.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 55 and Bill 54. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I move for unanimous consent of the Assembly to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of this afternoon's sitting.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 46

Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Technology and Innovation has the floor.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to move third reading of Bill 46.

Mr. Speaker, I don't intend to speak long on this because we've had much debate over the last number of days. Much of the debate is centred around the same key themes, and I think in my remarks during Committee of the Whole I have been able to address those key issues. Members opposite may not agree with our statements, but the fact is that we have provided a very clear explanation of why we are bringing forward this legislation and why we believe it's the right thing to do.

I'm looking forward to the remainder of the debate this afternoon. I strongly urge all members to support Bill 46.

With that, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:10

Government Motions

Time Allocation on Bill 46

69. **Mr. Williams** moved on behalf of Mr. Schow:
Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 46, Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's quite unfortunate that government will resort to these time allocation motions as a standard operating procedure. It's the 66th time that, in six years, the government has used time allocation motions. If they were in opposition, they would be calling this the death of democracy, and I guess rightfully so because we are all elected to be able to participate in debate, be able to weigh in on pieces of legislation that impact our constituents, that impact Albertans.

This time they are moving this time allocation motion on a bill that will have significant impacts on Albertans' right to privacy, Albertans' right to access information. It was just a couple of days ago that an independent officer of the Legislature, the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner concluded its 18-month-long investigation on how the government is handling information requests. It's shameful that instead of opening this up a little bit more for debate, instead of taking into account what the Information and Privacy Commissioner has said, they are rushing to close debate on this bill.

The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner noted that government departments have been offside the provisions of the act. Prior to that, when they introduced bills 34 and 33, the government refused to consult with anyone, refused to listen to the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and then the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner provided public commentary. None of those concerns have been addressed by this government. Not in those two bills; not in this bill.

This bill also includes Henry VIII clauses, which gives this government authority to amend any piece of legislation that is filed

under the Alberta regulation statutes in any manner they see fit. I do understand that the minister in charge tried to explain that away, but no; our concerns remain. Government should not be seeking that kind of carte blanche, that kind of power to amend any law as they see fit. If these were housekeeping amendments, they should have brought a miscellaneous statute amendment act.

These motions are curtailing the debate in this Legislature. They are curtailing the democratic accountability that government should face in this Legislature. These are heavy-handed, undemocratic, and these are pushing this province more towards authoritarianism than democracy. I urge all members to vote in favour of democracy. Vote against this motion. Don't let the government get away with using these motions as their standard operating procedure. These are undemocratic motions. They don't belong in this Legislature. I urge all members to vote against this motion.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 69 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:16 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Arcand-Paul	Elmeligi	Miyashiro
Brar	Goehring	Pancholi
Chapman	Haji	Sabir
Dach	Ip	Tejada
Ellingson	Kasawski	

Totals: For – 42 Against – 14

[Government Motion 69 carried]

5:20 Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 46

Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

(continued)

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 69, agreed to earlier this afternoon, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of Bill 46, Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, in third reading.

The hon. Minister of Technology and Innovation has some time left.

I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's refusal to accept even the most basic transparency measures in previous amendments I've introduced in this House cannot be separated from its broader record. We've just seen this very government also limit debate, time limit debate, and I think that sends a very clear message that this government sees debate as a nuisance and something that should not be honoured. It's a shame.

Albertans have watched this government build a pattern, a deliberate effort to concentrate decision-making in the hands of a few and weaken the role of this Legislature. We've seen this throughout. Whether it's the Henry VIII clauses in this bill, Bill 46, or the way that this government has treated this debate process so far, it's very clear that this government cannot be trusted with ensuring transparency and accountability. On this side of the House we have demonstrated through previous amendments that this kind of broad, sweeping power is absolutely unnecessary.

But it goes beyond Bill 46. It's a much broader pattern of behaviour from this government in which they are nudging our democratic system towards authoritarianism and towards the lack of accountability. We saw it with Bill 18, which would give the Premier and cabinet the power to unilaterally order provincial agencies not to co-operate with federal programs. We saw it with the sovereignty act, where cabinet gave itself the authority to unilaterally amend Alberta statutes by regulation, again attempting to bypass elected representatives. And even in the early days of the UCP government, during the pandemic, we saw it with Bill 10, when the UCP attempted to give individual ministers the power to rewrite laws on their own authority.

Now, back in 2025 we've been sounding the alarm, Mr. Speaker, over and over and over again about what this could mean for democracy but also that this government's track record cannot be trusted. In fact, the Centre for Constitutional Studies warned that such powers erode the rule of law. They wrote that the use of subordinate legislation, particularly in this example I'm going to use, the example of the pandemic, bypassed democratic debate and undermined the principles of transparency, clarity, and justification.

Even at that time with Bill 10, which, I want to remind this House, many members on the other side spoke out against, even the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, a conservative legal advocacy group, launched a constitutional challenge and argued that delegating legislative power to individual ministers undermines the democratic process and violates the separation of powers.

What this government hasn't done is answer the question: what has changed? It's very clear that if their intention is simply to harmonize bills 33 and 34 and to take care of housekeeping issues, broad, sweeping powers such as Henry VIII clauses are not necessary. In fact, I had the opportunity to introduce a series of amendments, including one that would have narrowed the scope of the regulatory powers to technical changes only and that would have been sufficient, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that this government can proceed in harmonizing the two bills, but it was rejected by this government.

Let me also speak to why this matters in the broad context of the actions of this government. This government, let me remind this House, is facing deepening questions about political interference and insider access in our health care system. Albertans have come to know this as the corrupt care scandal. These are serious concerns, that government contracts are being awarded to politically connected insiders, that decision-making has been shielded from oversight, and that the public, the very people paying for the system, has been kept in the dark.

When faced with calls for an independent public inquiry, what does the government do? They dismissed the concerns; they refused to call a judicial public inquiry, not a sham investigation with limited powers and scope; and they ask us again and again

to just trust them. With this bill, again they're asking: just trust us. But, Mr. Speaker, Albertans don't trust them, and they're right not to.

I also have to say that the record of corrupt care is but one part. We see that potentially throughout the entire procurement system, particularly in Health. In long-term care during the COVID-19 pandemic, hundreds of residents unfortunately died in facilities that were understaffed, underequipped, and often unregulated or underregulated. FOIP requests were ignored or redacted, and oversight was insufficient.

In addition treatment, for example, this government handed public dollars to ideologically aligned recovery centres, many of which operate without trauma-informed standards or independent evaluation. Again, there is very little public accountability for outcomes, and FOIP requests were also routinely denied.

In children's services Indigenous leaders and community advocates have long raised concerns about systemic neglect and the fact that children have died in care, reports are buried, records are inaccessible. Mr. Speaker, what this does, all of these examples, all of these cases, is paint a dire and very serious picture of not only incompetence but potential wilful obfuscation of wrongdoing and an undermining, an active undermining of our democracy.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Let me remind this House again, as I did yesterday, about the damning report from the Privacy Commissioner, in which the Privacy Commissioner addressed the systemic failures by this government to comply with their own access laws. Think about this. Here this government is saying: "Trust us. Give us the power to rewrite laws however we see fit, but we can't actually follow our own laws. We have a track record of either circumventing or contravening our own laws." These are serious, serious allegations, Mr. Speaker, and they have not been appropriately addressed by this government.

5:30

Within the report from the Privacy Commissioner we've heard that requests were delayed for months, in some cases over a year. Applicants were forced to resubmit requests or receive heavily redacted responses. The Ministry of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction failed to meet its basic obligations under the FOIP Act.

Instead of addressing these failures, which they could have done in Bill 46, they've once again given themselves the sweeping ability to make changes and rejected, frankly, Mr. Speaker, very simple, straightforward amendments to ensure that there is some measure of accountability. Need I remind this House that we, in fact, put forward five different amendments, four to five different amendments, all of which were rejected by this government?

The public's right to access government information is nonoptional. It's the bedrock of a free society. The previous freedom of information and protection act is how journalists can expose wrongdoing, can hold governments accountable. It's how families get answers. It's how citizens hold their own elected representatives responsible and accountable. It's important that we protect this tradition.

The challenge with Bill 46 in its current form is that it potentially could allow cabinet to all of a sudden reclassify records as inaccessible. It could shield derived data from access. It could withhold publication of regulatory changes until year-end summaries, if at all. It gives government carte blanche to do whatever they want without accountability.

I cannot stress enough how incredibly important it is that we do not undermine democracy, Mr. Speaker. I urge all members again to vote against this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations on becoming our Speaker of the House.

I stand this afternoon to speak to Bill 46, the Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. First, I would like to express sincere gratitude to the Member for Edmonton-South West for the light that he is shining on this legislation that is going to impact so many in the province.

When it comes to privacy, it's essential to protect Albertans' privacy. That is something that I believe is very important. When I worked with children's services, we were always doing training and making sure that we were very aware of the different pieces of legislation that impacted privacy because it's essential to ensure that Albertans have their information protected.

This piece of legislation, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, doesn't really do that. It doesn't seem to have the best interests of Albertans in mind. We put forward, like the previous speaker had mentioned, numerous amendments that simply would create a space for transparency. It would create, you know, things like letting the public know when regulation was changed. That was denied. Putting forward things like descriptions of the changes of regulation. That was denied. Then something that we like to do on this side of the House, which is show your work, so having the reasons for making the regulation. That was denied.

Here we are speaking about this piece of legislation at a time when the government is under scrutiny for corruption and allegations regarding procurement of health care facilities to political insiders. We see legislation that makes it easier for government to hide things. That's concerning, Mr. Speaker. We believe that Albertans deserve transparency. We believe that Albertans should have access to information when they make a request.

It's not just the NDP that believes that, Mr. Speaker. There's been a new report that came out from the Information and Privacy Commissioner that says: Alberta's government has implemented internal procedures and policy that allow government employees to wrongfully deny freedom of information requests. That's very, very concerning. They're saying that it was a two-year investigation, and they indicate that all 27 government departments were found to be at fault. This isn't just one or two ministries. This isn't just a one-off. This is a significant concern, when you have a report coming out saying that they're violating the rules that are set out in the legislation. Here we are debating this legislation, but there's nothing in here that talks about how they're going to make sure that those interpretations and rules aren't being broken when it comes to those applications and requests for information.

This piece of legislation gives the Lieutenant Governor in Council powers to amend any legislation that references the former Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. That's putting power in the people that are denying requests arbitrarily, it seems, or perhaps to cover information. The report does not to my knowledge say why. Government certainly hasn't answered why they've been denying those requests. But I think, based on the news, Albertans can speculate and perhaps guess. There are investigations from the RCMP going on. There's been outcry for a public inquiry to get to the bottom of this. Yet instead of addressing that and becoming more transparent, the government introduced Bill 46 to amend the information and privacy statutes.

I'm really concerned. I think that we're in a place right now where Albertans do not trust this government. This government has shown over and over and over that they are not transparent, that they should not be trusted. Now they're taking a piece of legislation that protects Albertans' privacy and right to access information and saying: just trust us. That to me, Mr. Speaker, is very, very concerning. Despite

the government rejecting the amendments, I would hope that this report and this feedback that we're hearing from Albertans creates some space where they reconsider this piece of legislation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and gladly listen to the debate. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for—he's looking carefully—Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you so much for taking such care. I don't think I've had an opportunity yet to say congratulations on your new role.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in opposition to this Bill 46, Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Having listened to the many informed responses by my colleagues here, I'm really struck again by just the repetitive patterns that I see from this government when introducing legislation, obfuscating and failing, really, to take accountability and setting up . . . [interjection] Thank you for reminding me of the time; I'm terrible at timing myself. Really, just setting up a situation where they concentrate control, concentrate decision-making, and shy away from any type of process. I think that when we're talking about a topic as sensitive as privacy, this is truly alarming.

5:40

We are seeing also a pattern of introducing legislation without doing proper consultation, doing consultations after the bills have been introduced and passed, and then bringing back more bills to clean up the initial bills. I think, unfortunately, what this also does is that it provides some cover to tighten the government's grip on legislation and make it less transparent.

As my colleague from Edmonton-South West pointed out, they've given themselves the power to change legislation outside of appropriate processes. I know in having listened to the debate in previous sittings that one of the things that struck me was really not just removing the ability from the opposition caucus to be able to debate, which is, you know, I think kind of a sacred thing about this place, but also removing the ability of Albertans to be able to participate along with that process, to be able to witness the debate, to have everything in the light of day, to see the debate happen even if we know the vote might not go our way, and we've given them lots of opportunities to provide transparency. We've given them many opportunities to accept some very reasonable amendments, and all of that has fallen on deaf ears.

Just as a little bit of history, this is the housekeeping bill that cleans up some of the language in the Protection of Privacy Act and Access to Information Act, which are set to come into force this spring. These were, I believe, bills 33 and 34. If passed, this bill would give cabinet the ability to amend legislation, any legislation, that references the former Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This act was split when the two new acts were introduced. It also makes changes to clarify that disclosures of nonpersonal data and data derived from personal data must comply with the Personal Information Protection Act and clarifies a few things from what came before.

We know that protection of Albertans' privacy is important. We know that appropriate privacy legislation is a safeguard for the dignity of every Albertan and that it needed to be updated. But we also need the checks and balances to this legislation. We know that Albertans should know when their personal information is compromised, and this legislation isn't addressing that. So while we support modernization, I have to think about, you know, just how many times I have seen the word "modernization" giving cover to what I would consider manipulation and a pattern of

undermining transparency and accountability. That is the case with this legislation as well.

When I think of the questions that I would like to see answered, I would love just to see what the rationale is for granting cabinet such broad powers to amend any legislation referencing this act rather than bringing those amendments in so that they are seeing the light of day so that Albertans can participate in that process. I'd like to see what safeguards there are to apply to the Office of Statistics and Information given its exemptions from key protections of the privacy act, and I'd like to know what further consultation they plan to do and whether we will have any reporting on that and if they could give us examples of the feedback that they've received from public bodies that have led to those amendments. I think it's a pretty fair expectation to have of our government to have transparency. I think this is, unfortunately, taking away transparency from Albertans to see what their government is doing in their name, and for that reason I would urge all members of this House to vote against this bill.

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

Member Miyashiro: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and once again congratulations on your big win today.

Hey, Mr. Speaker, the original FOIP legislation was introduced in 1995. I was actually working in the children's services system at that time, and part of the new legislation was viewed as a way to facilitate information exchange between professionals that were acting in the best interests of a client, so it wasn't set up to be a barrier to the exchange of information. It was set up to protect information but in a way that if people that were in the same business were talking about a client, it was okay if they're acting in their best interest.

The government held workshops across the province. They explained how this new legislation was supposed to work, explained how organizations and individuals were supposed to apply it to their work, and allowed questions about the legislation, which led to a greater understanding for everybody involved and all the stakeholders to understand how to apply this legislation. However, it was definitely not intended to be a shield for the government. Of course, Bill 46 seems to be only to protect this government from people seeking information.

Mr. Speaker, in a report released just this past Friday Alberta's Information and Privacy Commissioner found that the government relied on policies that broke access-to-information laws and were used to improperly refuse to process some requests for the public. In this report the Information and Privacy Commissioner outlined 27 public bodies that relied on policies that do not align with the purposes of the act and noted that

accountability is the cornerstone of the exercise of good governance . . . there is only one choice that these public bodies have, and that is to administer these provisions in accordance with the Act and in such a manner that ensures Albertans are able to effectively exercise these rights.

This investigation centred around how government departments interpreted three sections of FOIP related to the wording of requests, the creation of records in response to requests, and the department's duty to assist the public in accessing records. McLeod found multiple breaches of the act around how the government required requests to be structured, including limiting requests to one topic, restricting time frames, splitting requests, et cetera.

The commission recommended overhauling all these policies to better align with the act and improve responses to information requests, and in the meantime Postmedia remains involved in the ongoing mediation process with the Privacy Commissioner's office and the Department of Treasury Board and Finance regarding the latter's redacted responses to multiple requests seeking results of the

government's 2023 survey on a potential provincial pension plan. So are we to trust this government to come up with legislation? The citizens in Alberta are supposed to trust the UCP government to be transparent and allow full access to the public record? I think not, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP, our NDP opposition, put in three amendments to this legislation that would have made it way more transparent, that would have required the public to see what was going on, that wouldn't allow the government to hide behind what regulations were being changed, because, as we've already heard, the government would be able to change any regulations they want or legislation as long as it had a piece of the privacy part in it.

Mr. Speaker, we can't trust a government that's embroiled in scandal and corruption to have such overarching power without proper oversight. This government is essentially asking for a blank cheque to rewrite legislation as they see fit, with minimal accountability as our elected representatives. This government should not be granted sweeping authority to make changes to our laws without clear boundaries, and our job as legislators is to set clear boundaries on executive power, not to hand over broad authority to a government that has poor judgment. This is about basic government accountability. If you're going to change the law, you should be willing to tell the people what you're doing and why.

5:50

Mr. Speaker, the protection of Alberta's privacy is an important matter. While we support modernizing Alberta's privacy legislation, the UCP's pattern of undermining transparency and accountability continues in this proposed legislation. Albertans deserve legislation that puts their privacy rights first, not legislation that prioritizes government convenience.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Member Brar: Mr. Speaker, there's an old saying: privacy is the guardian of dignity. Yet here we are today debating a bill that, rather than guarding that dignity, invites the fox into the henhouse, blindfolds the farmer, and tells Albertans not to worry. This government wants to call Bill 46 a housekeeping bill. But let me tell you: this isn't sweeping the floors; it's sweeping powers. This isn't light dusting; it is deeply disturbing. The UCP says that it's administrative. I say that it is authoritarian. Imagine if you gave your house key to a stranger just because they promise they will just tidy up your kitchen. That's what this government is asking Albertans to do, hand over their rights under the guise of grammar fixes and cleaning up language, but what they are really doing is rewriting the rules of trust. Trust, once broken, doesn't come back soon.

First, let's talk about the elephant in the cabinet room, or should I say the cabinet elephant in every room? This bill gives the Lieutenant Governor in Council, basically, the cabinet, the power to amend any legislation that once referred to the FOIP Act, any legislation, Mr. Speaker, with no debate, no discussion, no committee review, no vote, just the stroke of the executive pen of the cabinet ministers. Now, we are told that it's just administrative. But when you give cabinet this much discretion, it's not cleaning up; it's clearing out legislative oversight. So I ask the minister: why is this government so afraid of bringing these changes through the Legislature? Is transparency too tedious? Is democracy too slow for the UCP?

The second thing, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about the Office of Statistics and Information, which under this bill becomes less of a watchdog and more of a wild card. Section 17(4) exempts the office from restrictions on data matching. Section 18(3) exempts the office from restrictions on retention and use of derived data. Section

19(3) allows public bodies to disclose derived data to the office. Section 21(3.1) exempts the office from the restrictions on creating the nonpersonal data. All of these four changes are extremely dangerous for our democratic process. What's worse: we have received no public explanation of what safeguards exist to protect Albertans in light of these exemptions.

Mr. Speaker, I ask this House to choose courage, not convenience; clarity, not confusion; transparency, not tyranny, and I request all members of this Assembly to vote against this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be quick because we don't have much time left tonight, and I'm ready to eat some dinner, just selfishly.

I have two main problems with this Bill 46. The first is something that my colleagues have brought up tonight about this bit around Bill 46 giving the cabinet the ability to amend any legislation that references the former Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. I respect that the minister last night went on for quite some time telling us how it was really just to bring other acts in alignment with this new FOIP and public privacy legislation that we've created and debated over this last year, and I appreciate that intention, Mr. Speaker.

However, if that is the case, I wonder why that is not more specifically referenced in the legislation. The legislation does not say to change the name of the legislation referred to in those acts to bring them in line. It doesn't say: "Don't worry about it, Alberta. It's going to be fine. Just trust us." It just says that the Lieutenant Governor "may, by regulation, amend any Act or any regulation filed under the Regulations Act." Again, the government is asking us to trust them: just trust us; it's going to be fine.

The other thing the minister said last night was that he is willing to repeal these clauses once all of these other pieces of legislation have been brought into alignment and everything is, you know, matching. To that I say: right on. I will hold you to it, and if I don't see these clauses repealed in the fall session when we're back in this House, I will expect the minister to stand up and apologize to all Albertans for not being truthful in this House at that time. I look forward to that.

Mr. Glubish: If I do do it, then will you apologize for . . .

Dr. Elmeligi: Sure. If you do repeal the clauses, I will stand up and say that I was wrong because I actually have no problem standing in this House and admitting when I am wrong, and I will more than happily do that if I am. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, while I can feel the love, let's let the hon. member with the floor speak, please.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you. Okay. I'm starting to run out of time.

The other piece I really wanted to speak to is this investigation by commissioner McLeod that really identified Alberta as the only province to refuse to respond to routine information through the FOIP Act, and I do find this really problematic, Mr. Speaker, because we have seen it in this House. We have talked about it in this House, in particular with the people who are opposed to coal mining on the eastern slopes and their process in filing a FOIP request with the Alberta government to understand how those decisions came to pass and the government's continual dithering and stalling and complete refusal to provide that information. These are people who are ranchers. They are community leaders. They are local businesses. They are municipal leaders. They deserve to know

how these decisions are made, and if they file a FOIP request to find out that information, they deserve to get that information. That's the whole reason why this process exists.

I'm sorry. I don't trust this government, Mr. Speaker, and I don't trust that they're willing to be transparent. I think they throw around the word "transparency" as this blanket statement, but they don't live it. They don't demonstrate it, and they don't prove it to Albertans every day. This act is another failure of this government to actually be transparent and accountable to the people of Alberta, and I'm tired of it, and I believe my constituents are, too.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is my duty to inform you that it's 6 o'clock. Do I need to quote a standing order?

Mr. Sabir: The House stands adjourned until 7:30.

The Speaker: I know that. Do I need to quote a standing order? No. And the House stands adjourned without a standing order being quoted, because it doesn't have to be, until 7:30 tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Introduction of Guests	3387
Members' Statements	
Alberta Separatism and Premier's Leadership.....	3388
Strategy to End Gender-based Violence	3388
UCP Government	3388
Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's Remarks on Beaverlodge Health Facility	3389
National Police Week.....	3389
Conservatism.....	3389
Oral Question Period	
Alberta in Canada	3389
Youth Employment	3390
Investigation of Health Services Procurement.....	3391
Bill 55	3391
Government Policies	3392
Strategy to End Gender-based Violence	3392, 3396
Measles Vaccination Rates.....	3393
Access to Information Act.....	3394
Lobbying Government and Conflicts of Interest	3394
Child Abuse.....	3395
Rural Mental Health Services.....	3395
Automobile Insurance Reform	3396
Tabling Returns and Reports	3397
Tablings to the Clerk	3398
Orders of the Day	3402
Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 55 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.....	3402
Bill 54 Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.....	3408
Third Reading	
Bill 46 Information and Privacy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025	3413, 3414
Government Motions	
Time Allocation on Bill 46.....	3413
Division	3414

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