



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 14, 2025

Day 112

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
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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)
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Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
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Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
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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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Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
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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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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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Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

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Kayande
Stephan
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely

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Eremenko
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Standing Committee on Private Bills

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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk

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Sinclair
Stephan

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Sabir

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowswell

Armstrong-Homeniuk
de Jonge
Ellingson
Johnson
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McDougall
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Rowswell

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Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Boitchenko
Calahoo Stonehouse
Dyck
Eggen
Hunter
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 14, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to welcome members from the municipal council of Drayton Valley, who are here as guests of the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Rowsell: I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all in the Assembly two schools. One, the Irma school, grade 6. It's a really full school, and I welcome them here. They had their tour today. Also, from Edmonton-Ellerslie, the grade 6 class from Pollard Meadows school, with roughly 85 members here.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to introduce to you students who go to school in the community of Mill Woods but live in the provincial riding of Edmonton-Ellerslie. They are waiting for their new MLA when the by-election gets called. They are visiting the Legislature. I would invite all the students and guests from Pollard Meadows to stand. Receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it gives me great pleasure to introduce two very important people seated in my gallery today. Kathy Holdaway, the office manager at the constituency of Calgary-Hays, and Tabitha Burkitt, the constituency manager at Calgary-Peigan. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly Kurt Feigel, who is the CEO of Universe Machine Corporation. They are celebrating their 60th anniversary as a business here in Edmonton later this year.

Also, along with him, my father, Brian Glubish, who I am so grateful for. He's been a great father, a great mentor, and also a great friend. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Oh, yeah. I didn't have the note here. I apologize, Mr. Speaker. Today we met a ton of great folks from the Pakistani community, and they have their organization here today. I'd like to

ask all of the members that I met earlier today to stand up and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today proudly wearing my vyshyvanka to mark international Vyshyvanka Day. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Assembly Christina Hollingworth. Christina is a summer student in my office this year. She's a singer and a songwriter as well as a proud member of the Enoch Cree Nation who has recently sung O Canada in her Cree language at many prominent venues, including this Chamber. Christina has just completed her first year toward a bachelor of arts degree at the University of Alberta. She's a valued member of the executive board of the University of Alberta NDP. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two men from my community, Ken Duggan and Doug Fleck. These two gentlemen are community leaders in the Camrose constituency and are heavily involved in bringing curling and hockey events to the province. Doug and Ken, would you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Chamber.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you Joanne Pitkin from GreenShield Canada, who is here sharing information about their new essential medicines program.

Also, Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta provincial chapter president, Orysia Boychuk, and other members Alyssa Stoddard and Nataliia – I don't know your last name. They are here today for Vyshyvanka Day, which is actually tomorrow, the 15th. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's nurses week, and I'm excited to introduce you to a number of registered nurses here today: the president of the United Nurses of Alberta, Heather Smith, along with Danielle Larivee, Karen Kuprys, Christina Doktor, Sandi Johnson. Nurses need more than a Band-aid; they deserve our respect and fair working conditions. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know you already introduced them, but I too would like to have the privilege to rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my Calgary-Peigan constituency manager, Tabitha Burkitt, and Kathy Holdaway, who has the enormous responsibility of keeping the Member for Calgary-Hays in line. As MLAs we know the extraordinary work that our constituency staff do. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce Garrett Koehler, my press secretary. I can say unequivocally that he is the best press secretary that I currently have, so I really want to thank him. He's done an exceptional job of taking my foot out of my mouth on several occasions, cleaning up messes that I've made, correcting statements that I've made. I want to thank him for doing

that, and I want to thank him for following me around the Legislature as well. I ask him to rise and be recognized.

The Speaker: Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Denise L'Heureux, a fierce health advocate and resident of Edmonton-South. Due to challenges in our health care system Denise's cancer diagnosis was missed and is now terminal. I want to thank her for her immense bravery in being here today. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, I would like to rise and introduce again to you and through you an incredible team from Drayton Valley, Mayor Nancy Dodds and her team council. I want to thank them for the great work they do, and I would like to ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Vyshyvanka Day

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize Vyshyvanka Day, which will be celebrated tomorrow on May 15. Every year Ukrainians and people with Ukrainian descent around the world dress up in a vyshyvanka, a garment packed with symbolism. The stitching patterns and colours on a vyshyvanka vary by region of origin and are often passed down from generation to generation. This means each one has its own beauty, but they all share a common trait. They are a proud statement of community, unity, and heritage.

In 1891 the first Ukrainian settlers arrived in Alberta, introducing a wave of immigration to Alberta that continues to this day. Today Canada has the largest Ukrainian diaspora in the world. In Alberta there are over 400,000 Ukrainians and Albertans with Ukrainian heritage. At Vyshyvanka Day celebrations the variety of colours and patterns is truly a wonderful sight. Whether your family has been here for generations like mine or you arrived more recently, your vyshyvanka is unique and a distinct reflection of your heritage and identity. Mr. Speaker, it's a beautiful sight to see. This celebration is far more than a reason to dress up. It is a celebration of culture, heritage, and identity.

Since February 2, 2022, the vyshyvanka has also served as a symbol of solidarity with those suffering from the war in Ukraine. This humble article of clothing serves as a powerful reminder of Ukrainian identity in a time when Ukrainian heritage is under threat by Putin's invasion.

1:40

We had an unfortunate reminder of how important cultural preservation is last month when a grass fire destroyed parts of the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village. Those buildings contain irreplaceable artifacts that told the stories of generations of Ukrainian Canadians, but with us, the descendants, those stories remain. As long as we gather to remember our heritage through celebrations like Vyshyvanka Day, our heritage cannot be destroyed, not by wildfire, not by war. Slava Ukraini.

Bill 54

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, the right to vote is not just privilege; it is the heart of our democracy. It is how people claim their power, how people

shape their future, and how people hold governments accountable. Bill 54 removes those rights quietly and systematically.

Bill 54 eliminates vouching, cutting off Indigenous Albertans on-reserve, seniors in care, and those displaced by disasters from the ballot box. Bill 54 curtails special ballots that remote and northern communities rely on for their democratic participation. Bill 54 takes away vote-anywhere provisions that made it easier for many Albertans to participate in their democracy. These are not just procedural changes; these are barriers.

We have seen where this leads. In the United States Black Americans fought for generations just to cast a ballot, but even today they continue to face strict ID laws, reduced voting hours, and continue to face closed polling stations, measures that have nothing to do with fraud and everything to do with control. History should not be ignored. It should be a warning.

Elections Alberta has been clear. Voting is not a source of fraud, so why take it away? Why make it harder for the very people who are already struggling to participate in our democracy?

Bill 54 will leave too many Albertans behind, and when entire communities are left out of our democratic process, we don't just lose votes. We lose trust, we lose representation, and ultimately we lose legitimacy. Our democracy is the strongest when everyone can participate. Bill 54 weakens it, and that should be a concern for every single member in this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ponoka Rising Sun Clubhouse Society

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Ponoka Rising Sun Clubhouse Society is a remarkable organization in my constituency, one that plays a vital role in supporting central Albertans living with mental illness. Since opening its doors in 1994 the clubhouse has provided a safe, welcoming, and empowering space, where individuals can find purpose, dignity, and belonging.

This is a member-operated organization, meaning individuals with lived experience, past and present mental health youth service users, are at the heart of everything the clubhouse does. Members participate in a variety of meaningful activities, from preparing healthy meals and maintaining the facility to operating recycling services for local businesses.

Their mission is clear and powerful: to help individuals live independently, build confidence, and feel connected to their community. The clubhouse is built on the belief that every person has potential. It builds essential life skills and offers opportunities for social, recreational, and work-related engagement. With more than 150 active members, including individuals living with mental illness, physical or learning disabilities, and those recovering from addiction, the clubhouse is a beacon of hope and support.

One shining example is the blue box and cardboard recycling program, which today employs seven members and serves the town of Ponoka and surrounding areas. Another is the community lunch program, where members prepare and serve free lunches, fostering community spirit and giving back to others. In partnership with the province and the Canadian Clubhouse Coalition the clubhouse also supports transitional housing through its halfway house program, helping residents safely reintegrate into the community. The clubhouse also cofacilitates weekly wellness groups for its members.

Mr. Speaker, the Rising Sun Clubhouse Society is more than just a mental health organization; it's a pillar of compassion, resilience, and community strength. Its continued operation ensures many more central Albertans will benefit.

To everyone involved at the clubhouse: thank you.

Alberta in Canada

Mr. Kasawski: The UCP are facing multiple investigations into their corruption. Wildfire season has started earlier, and it's drier than usual. Evidence is showing that smoke from wildfires is degrading our health. Measles, a disease thought to have been eradicated, is spreading. It's showing signs of exponential growth because we don't have herd immunity. And the mad king is still musing about us being the 51st state.

Alberta needs an ethical, competent government now more than ever, so the UCP caucus, the entire cabinet, all the members, the Premier have decided their top priority will be lowering the bar to initiate a separation referendum. The fact that the bar needs to be lowered indicates the UCP are pandering to a small group of their fringe supporters. Most Albertans are puzzled; some think it's a joke. But inspired separatists are already going door to door across the province trying to collect signatures, and the Premier has advised them on the wording of their referendum question.

Being frustrated with decision-makers in central Canada is a part of our westerner culture, but I do not support separating from my country or even threatening to separate as a bargaining chip to negotiate better deals for Alberta. We are all a part of the Canadian family. Families can disagree on things, and we do, but the moment one member starts threatening to leave, everything breaks down. Alberta has been a Canadian province since 1905. Before that our people were signatories of treaties. We are all treaty people, and our modern life has been built upon treaty.

Alberta was able to support the completion of the TMX expansion with a campaign to keep Canada working. I doubt that threatening to separate from other Canadian provinces will gain us pathways through their territory to diversify the markets for our products.

We are Canadians and always will be. The surest way to wreck our provincial economy is to encourage separation. Let's get to work building Canada, starting at home here in Alberta. Lead Canada; don't leave it.

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

Conservatism in Alberta

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier has done me a great service by removing me from a UCP party I no longer recognize. This new hostile version of the UCP is not the party of Lougheed or even Ralph Klein, not even close. It's become a party of absolutes – either you blindly support this Premier, or you aren't conservative – with a leader that says she believes in freedom, but only if it's the freedom she believes in, a leader that demands obedience and silence instead of welcoming critical thinking and transparency.

Mr. Speaker, I respect democracy and that Americans voted for President Trump, but the second he mentioned Canada becoming the 51st state, he crossed the line for me. Albertans have been waiting too long for a Conservative in this province to say it, so I will. I'm conservative, and I love being Canadian. I'm conservative, but I respect treaty rights. I'm conservative, but I'll never join the United States.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of issues that are hurting our province are self-inflicted and separate from Ottawa's failures. The UCP government must take care of their own sandbox before we continue to blame everything on Ottawa. It should be fair to say as a conservative that I don't like Justin Trudeau, but I also don't like Donald Trump. Both things can be true, just like we can be angry with the federal government but still love this country. We

need to re-establish a political climate where we can disagree with someone and not hate them.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure lots of Albertans feel like there isn't a party that speaks to them anymore, but we can do better. Folks want a steady hand, a government that promotes unity, not division, one that will reduce spending and balance budgets, a boring government with leadership that's focused on common-sense governance, not on becoming a celebrity or a podcaster. I'm ready for a change. I don't know what it looks like, but there has to be a better option than this.

Mr. Speaker, I'm an underdog from northern Alberta, I'm still conservative, and I will always be a man in the arena.

Health Services in Rural Alberta

Dr. Elmeligi: Mr. Speaker, this government talks a big game when it comes to supporting rural Alberta, but do they? If they did, surely they'd do more to address rural health care issues. I'm talking about everyday health care: seeing a family doctor for a prescription, treating your child's cough, getting blood tests. Albertans should have access to these services regardless of their postal code.

When the UCP suggests that rural Albertans should just drive to the city for these basic services, I just have to wonder: have they ever had to find child care at 6 a.m. just to get a prescription refilled? Arrange for someone to take over the farm chores or run a small business for the day? Spend hundreds of dollars of fuel on a round trip? Take an entire day off work without pay just to see a doctor about ongoing pain or get a blood test?

The clinic in Lake Louise was told that they can no longer do blood work due to funding cuts. Patients now have to drive to Banff. This essential service costs AHS about \$47,000 a year. The Canmore CT scanner only operates Monday to Friday 8 to 4 because there aren't enough staff to operate it on weekends and evenings, precisely when most mountain injuries happen. While the UCP wasted hundreds of millions of dollars on private surgical clinics and corrupt care, they expect the people of Lake Louise to take a day off to see if their cholesterol is high and that skiers and mountain bikers only get injured during business hours. It's appalling.

1:50

Severance packages to fired AHS staff and board members amounted to almost \$6 million last year. Imagine if every dollar wasted on corrupt care and severance packages was spent on rural health care, keeping hospital emergency rooms open, hiring ob-gyns and paying them what they're worth, recruiting and retaining more doctors, staff to operate equipment, and, yes, blood clinics. What a great Alberta that would be.

Rural Albertans deserve better than this government's indifference. They deserve an NDP government that understands rural communities need accessible, everyday health care close to home, not just directions to the nearest city.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The first question goes to the Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are not being led by an ethical, competent government. On April 15 the Premier said that she directed the Justice minister to oversee what files the Auditor General received for his investigation into corrupt care. Later we learned the Justice minister is a personal friend and relative of Sam Mraiche, the owner of the company at the heart of the scandal. A

friend and relative of the guy at the centre of the scandal should not be the one overseeing and deciding which documents go to investigators. Why did the Premier fail to protect the integrity of these important investigations?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, let me correct the record because the member opposite is wrong. What had happened was that the Deputy Minister of Health made a decision to choose outside counsel to assist her in providing documents and interviews to the Auditor General. The Auditor General expressed concern about that, so the Department of Justice stepped in to see if the DM had done anything wrong. It is still the DM of Health that is co-ordinating both the documents as well as the interviews, and it is the DM of jobs and economy who is co-ordinating with the Auditor General as well as with Judge Wyant.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier was quoted telling reporters that she had asked her Justice minister to look into it. And, by the way, the DM of Justice reports to the minister. The Premier's Justice minister quietly sat in a clear conflict of interest. The Justice minister's friend and relative made money on Turkish Tylenol. The minister's friend and relative made money on faulty PPE. The Justice minister's friend and relative stands to make tons of money from bloated surgical centre contracts. Will the Premier do the right thing today and fire the Justice minister?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No.

What I've seen consistently with the members opposite is that they've used the privilege of this Chamber to slander not only the people who sit in this Chamber but also friends and family members. I think it should stop, Mr. Speaker.

As I mentioned before, we've been very clear that anyone who was named in the former CEO's statement of claim has nothing to do with co-ordinating files, has nothing to do with co-ordinating interviews. This has been delegated to counsel at AHS, delegated to the Deputy Minister of Health, delegated to the deputy minister of jobs and economy. If there's a process issue, that's when the Deputy Minister of Justice steps in and only then, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Gray: I will repeat where I started. Albertans deserve an ethical, competent government, and it is unethical for the Minister of Justice to have any role in oversight for this scandal, and it's scandalous of the Premier to have tasked him to do that. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been wasted here; \$50 million sits in a bank account in Turkey while Albertans can't get it back because of this cabinet's incompetence. The Premier has repeatedly said that these allegations are serious. Since she won't call a public inquiry, will she at least hold her minister responsible? He is the one who withheld information. Will she fire the Justice minister today?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, no one is withholding information from anyone. The Deputy Minister of Health is facilitating information. Last we heard, it was 13,000 records that had been transferred, facilitating interviews. The deputy minister of jobs and economy is facilitating the same, and if there is any need for the Deputy Minister of Justice to make sure that processes are followed and the rules that govern the Auditor General's inquiries are followed, then that is the role of the Deputy Minister of Justice. We are in full co-operation with both of those investigations. We look forward to seeing the results very soon.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order is noted at 1:55.

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

Health Minister

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, today a million Albertans can't find a family doctor. Today we're in the midst of the worst measles outbreak the province has seen in modern times, six times worse than in other provinces. So what did the worst Health minister in Alberta's history do? She put a gag order on the chief medical officer of health, she delayed rolling out his advice to ramp up vaccination programs by a year, back when prevention would have made a difference, and she did it all while firing the AHS CEO, firing the AHS Board, dismantling public health care. Will the Premier fire the health minister today?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, no. We've actually seen an increase in the number of people who have been attached to family doctors and nurse practitioners, and that's because of the great work of the Health minister in refocusing our health care system. We have Recovery Alberta, that's been fully operational since last year. Primary Care became fully operational in February. Acute Care is now up and running since April. We've established assisted living Alberta, and we expect it to be fully operational in the fall. We announced activity-based funding for health care, which will support greater efficiency, and we've announced \$330 million in funding for rural health facilities. This minister is doing a great job.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are stuck waiting in pain for the surgeries and diagnostics they need under this Premier's watch. More Albertans are left waiting for surgery than when she became Premier. Last summer only 70 per cent of the surgeries were on target; this summer, 56 per cent. That is a decrease. Nearly half of all surgeries are not on schedule, leaving patients waiting in agony. While handing bloated surgical contracts to UCP friends, wait times for surgeries have gotten worse. Will the Premier recognize how incompetent her Health minister is? Do the right thing. Fire her today.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, no. Maybe the members opposite will fire their incompetent research assistants because those are the ones giving them false information. We are on track to do 316,000 surgeries this year, and it's because of the work that we've done in expanding the chartered surgical facilities that that is where the success is. We have seen more surgeries increase because of the chartered surgical facilities, ones that they want to shut down. If we had followed their advice, there would be 2,000 fewer surgeries being done at ASG, and we're not going to do that. We're not going to leave people in pain.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, in urban and rural communities families can't rely on getting timely care in Alberta emergency rooms. Last year ER rooms were shuttered for more than 34,000 hours. What's the minister doing instead of opening ERs? She's opening warehouses. She's storing endless pallets of Turkish Tylenol, even more expired PPE and charging Albertans for the service. She can't even figure out how to donate the medicine to Ukraine. The minister can't run surgeries, can't open ERs, can't promote vaccines. Why won't the Premier fire the Minister of Health?

Ms Smith: I can tell you that what the minister discovered is that there hadn't been any investment in rural hospitals in 12 years. Oh, guess who could have fixed that when they were in government and chose not to and watched it go into disrepair. Listen to what this Health minister has done: High River general hospital renovations for

pharmacy; Didsbury hospital redevelopment. We've got Claresholm, Wetaskiwin, Olds, WestView, St. Paul, Peace River, Slave Lake, Lloydminster, Crowsnest, Raymond, Strathmore, Vulcan, Canmore, Oilfields hospital, Okotoks, Worsley, Barrhead, Valleyview, High Level, George McDougall, Bonnyville, Redwater, Hinton, and I almost ran out of time.

The Speaker: Third set of questions. The hon. Leader of the Loyal Opposition.

Government Policies

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, young men in this province want opportunities to build a life, but 1 in 5 cannot find a job. When this Premier took office, the rate was 11 per cent. It's doubled under her watch, and she can't blame a higher minimum wage because they kept it frozen. Overall, unemployment has increased by 25 per cent since she won her leadership. Instead of creating jobs, she's been dining at Mar-a-Lago, fund raising for Ben Shapiro, calling Trump's job-killing tariffs a big win. Will the Premier apologize for unemployment skyrocketing under her watch?

2:00

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I still haven't heard the members opposite apologize for 13 quarters of out-migration that happened under their leadership, when there were no opportunities and people were leaving and their energy minister was telling people to go and get a job in British Columbia.

We just surpassed 5 million people in our province, and the reason for that is people are coming here for opportunity. They're coming here because of jobs. We have the highest income as well as the lowest taxes of any jurisdiction. We're going to continue to create jobs, continue to create opportunity and not listen to the job-killing policies of the members across the aisle.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it's this government that's the job killer, not a job creator. The Dow net-zero petrochemical project is paused. Billions of renewable investment are gone. Our investment reputation is at risk because this Premier's priority this year: breaking up the . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's let the member give the answer, and let's listen to it.

Ms Gray: This Premier's priority is breaking up the country. She's so dedicated to this, she had draft legislation sitting in a desk, ready to introduce the second her preferred candidate lost the federal election. Why, when we should be bringing down trade barriers, is this Premier dancing with separatism?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:01.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only clear loser in the last federal election was the party of the members opposite. I overstated it yesterday. They didn't get 6.5 per cent of the vote; they got 6.3 per cent of the vote. We can see why they're a little bit worried, because people know what this party would have to deliver if they ever had the misfortune of forming government again.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we are proud of our job-creation record. In the past 12 months we have increased jobs, and we were also responsible for 90 per cent of the private-sector job creation that took place in the entire country. That's the record of this government.

Ms Gray: Skyrocketing youth unemployment under this government, failure to create jobs, failure to protect Albertans, failure to do her job. It's so bad that her own team is losing confidence in her. She lost a trusted cabinet minister. He called out the corruption, denounced separatism. She lost a caucus member after a budget of cuts, chaos, and corruption. Thousands of public servants have just had a historic strike mandate. The government may be shut down because of them. To top it off, she's opened the gates to separatism. Will she admit she's not cut out for office? I'm really looking forward to Naheed Nenshi. Call the by-election. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it hilarious that no one in the aisles opposite would step down for their leader in Calgary, where apparently he must be so unpopular that they had to run him in the safest seat in the province in order to get him into the Chamber, and that will be happening soon.

I can tell you that we are so proud of the fact that we passed a \$75 billion budget. We passed legislation as well for our emerging biogas industry. We've got a care-first auto insurance policy. Our compassionate interventions model is going to be the envy of the country. We've got the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act and so much more. I can't even list all of the areas that we have success.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement (continued)

Ms Pancholi: There are at least four ways the Minister of Justice might have a conflict of interest between his personal relationship with Sam Mraiche and his responsibilities with the corrupt care scandal, and there's one way that we know about for sure. On Monday the Government House Leader confirmed that when it comes to the unprecedented decision to hire an outside law firm to handle inquiries from the Auditor General, well, "Alberta Justice routinely handles all relationships with external counsel." This means that the Minister of Justice is responsible for the decision to put a law firm between government employees and the Auditor General looking into contracts with the minister's good friend and relative. That's a conflict. Will the Premier fire the Minister of Justice today?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm happy to answer this question on behalf of the government, as I have done many times up to this point, to reaffirm to members opposite, members on the government side, and the general public that there are three independent investigations happening concurrently: with the Auditor General, a judicial inquiry, as well as with the RCMP. I have full confidence in all three of these bodies, in their independence as well as their ability to carry out a fulsome investigation. I am curious why the members opposite don't feel the same.

Ms Pancholi: It's not a surprise that the Premier is incapable of recognizing a conflict of interest. After all, she has the distinction of being the only sitting Premier in Alberta's history to have been found to violate the Conflicts of Interest Act, and for what? Well, she inappropriately pressured her then Minister of Justice to interfere in prosecutions. It seems she didn't learn her lesson because when it comes to the corrupt care scandal, the Premier told media she directed her current Minister of Justice to check in with the AG to see if the government can solve any errors, the same minister who has his own conflict of interest because the AG is

investigating his best friend. I mean, the unethical conduct is mind boggling. Enough already. Will the Premier fire the Minister of Justice now?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do find it a bit rich to hear the word “competence” coming from the members opposite. This is the same government that drove Albertans out of their own province. They told them to take a job in British Columbia, outside of Alberta. This is the same government that had six consecutive credit downgrades. Six. I repeat: six. I know math is hard sometimes. What I can tell you is that counting to six isn’t that difficult, but getting there is some kind of a record. What I can also say is that this is the same government from 2015 to ’19 that attacked family farms.

Ms Pancholi: Speaking of rich, check out the Rolex on the minister’s wrist.

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

Ms Pancholi: Political pressure to sign bloated contracts, shady land deals, contracts for useless PPE that Albertans are still paying to store, useless Turkish Tylenol, and another \$50 million spent on nothing, all linked to the best friend of the Minister of Justice and the subject of multiple investigations, yet he apparently never told the Premier about this relationship until last week? Either the minister played the Premier for the fool by not telling her and not recusing himself or the Premier knew and she’s trying to play Albertans for the fool now. Either way, Albertans deserve better. Albertans deserve ethical, competent government now. The Premier must fire the minister.

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:06.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I guess the member opposite has a poor eye for watches. I don’t have a Rolex on. That’s a bit ridiculous.

Second off, this is the same government that attempted to destroy Alberta. They hate everything about this province. They even hate the electorate, Mr. Speaker, because this is the same electorate that rejected every single thing they did and made them the first one-term government in the history of this province. That’s a real problem for them. I get it. They’re upset, but maybe they should stick to the business of the day and not personal attacks.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, the government claims the Minister of Justice has had no involvement in the ongoing investigation into his family member Sam Mraiche, but nothing can be further from the truth. On April 14 the Minister of Justice stated, “the Premier has asked and I’ve directed Justice officials to reach out to the Auditor General and make sure that the interviews and the records are being complied with.” The Minister of Justice himself admitted in this House that he is involved in the investigation. Why hasn’t the Premier removed him?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question from the member opposite. Of all members in this Chamber he would know about botched investigations, especially when it comes to Serenity.

Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that on this side of the House we believe in independent investigations, specifically when it comes to

the three bodies that are investigating this: the Auditor General, the RCMP, and the judicial review. I’m not sure why the members opposite have such a conflict or an issue with the former Chief Justice of Manitoba. They are calling into question the integrity of a former Chief Justice of a province. What is that?

Mr. Sabir: Given that the Premier is aware that the Minister of Justice is overseeing an investigation involving his own family member and given that the Premier said, and I quote, “I have asked my Justice minister to ensure that the Auditor General has everything that he needs,” end quote, given that she is not just aware of it; she is enabling her cabinet minister to interfere in these investigations, the Premier knows the minister meddled in the investigation because she directed him to.

2:10

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Sabir: Why won’t she do the right thing and fire him?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:10.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being this wrong so many times in a row has got to be some kind of a record, but saying it over and over and over again doesn’t it make it true. Doesn’t it make it true. Every member in this House knows that we as elected officials do not investigate. We don’t carry out investigations. The members opposite are being very fast and loose with the facts – very fast and loose with the facts – and I wish that they’d get on the right page.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the minister doubled down about his staff mediating the Auditor General investigation in a scrum, saying, and I quote again, “I have directed my Justice officials to reach out to the AG’s office as well,” end quote, and given that the AG clearly stated that triaging what people and information he can access isn’t helping him do his job, will the minister explain why he thinks it is appropriate to interfere in an investigation that includes his own family member while he remains in this role? Fire him.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate to hear the member opposite disparage the public service. The public service simply was involved to make sure that everything was being supported and supplied as necessary. Again, it is disappointing to hear members opposite, a caucus that has several lawyers in there, but apparently not many of them quite understand the law. With that said, it is unfortunate that members opposite continue to rail and malign the character of the Minister of Justice rather than focus on the important issues that Albertans care about . . .

Ms Pancholi: You want to take us out back?

Mr. Schow: . . . things like affordability, something we are focused on all day every day.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:12.

Citizen-initiated Referendums

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, today is a happy day for Alberta. We are amending the Citizen Initiative Act so that it is not a fake law. It is very good to listen to Albertans. Referendums are good for Alberta, but we do not want fake and disingenuous referendum petition thresholds that are impossible to meet. That was very bad.

Petition thresholds should be difficult but achievable. To the minister: why is this the better way?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by recognizing the hon. member for his good question. The citizen initiative process has been around for many years, where if a citizen wants to put an important question on a ballot, they should be entitled to do so. The member is right. The number of signatures required to launch a petition should be difficult, but it should be achievable. That's why we've lowered the threshold in Bill 54 to 10 per cent of eligible voters and increased the amount of time to 120 days. All Albertans in this province should have the ability to have their voices heard.

Mr. Stephan: Given that Ottawa is not the boss of Alberta and given that no special-interest group figurehead or talking head or activist judge is the boss of Alberta and given that neither this NDP or their mother ship is the boss and given that the Alberta government is not the boss of Alberta and given that it is the bosses of this government and of Alberta who vote in referendums, to the minister: who are the bosses of Alberta?

The Speaker: The keeper of the Great Seal of Alberta.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are the bosses of Alberta. All members on this side of the House know that as we serve our constituents diligently.

Albertans expect our elections to not only be fair but free as well. Along with other democratic processes like citizen initiatives, we're introducing a number of different sweeping changes in Bill 54 to protect democracy, to make our elections free, to make them fair, to have them be conducted with integrity, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of this legislation. I know members on this side of the House are as well.

Mr. Stephan: Given that referendums give Albertans a voice if politicians do not listen to them and given that referendums give Albertans the opportunity to decide priorities and given that referendums are a check and balance and given that referendums engage Albertans to participate in democratic processes and given that Alberta is the best and referendums recognize Albertans are the boss of Alberta, to the minister: why are referendums very ...

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, they are very good for Alberta because any Albertan can put forward a petition on any issue important to them. It is not, as the NDP have tried to fearmonger in recent weeks, about separation. I hear the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall chirping. Yesterday I had said to him ...

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Amery: ... look through this 144-page document. Find me one place where it mentions separation. He could not. This is about allowing Albertans to be able to participate in the democratic process. It's about having them have their say. It's about allowing Albertans to make decisions.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:16 p.m.

The next question goes to the Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Affordability Measures

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are terrible at handling the cost of living. Under this UCP government we have seen costs go up and affordability go away. They have introduced 38 new fees, and insurance companies are hiking rates by 15 per cent while the UCP are taking away the right to sue. Can the minister explain exactly how price increases make life more affordable for Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we're very focused on affordability. We know that this is still a priority for Albertans, a priority for all Canadians. Unfortunately, over the past few years Canada hasn't made the economy and growing the economy a priority. That's why I'm happy to see that even in some of the language from our new Prime Minister, it's focused on growing the economy of the entire country. He's talking about pipelines. He's talking about having the most robust economy in the entire G-7. That's where we need to get to have wage growth, more jobs, and hopefully we can continue to be ...

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Deol: Given that the UCP's poor performance on affordability doesn't end at our insurance but that utilities are yet another aspect of everyday life that Albertans cannot afford and given that the UCP's response to this crisis was to set the rate of last resort at nearly double the market average, how does this minister justify letting utility costs get so expensive for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of affordability.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to be part of a government that takes affordability and the lives of Albertans very seriously. We worked across every ministry. I'm proud to stand with our Finance minister who brought in a tax cut, saving every family working household at least \$750 a year every year that it's in place. I'm very proud to be part of a government that supported changes to our electricity system to stabilize it and bring electricity prices down 63 per cent from the peak they were. We are making the reforms that we need to make, fixing the messes the NDP left behind, and making sure that we're putting Albertans first.

Mr. Deol: Given that grocery costs are only skyrocketing, with Food Banks Canada reporting Albertans saw a 90 per cent increase in dependency on food banks over the last five years, and given that groceries are so unaffordable that parents decide that means sending their kids to school with either an apple or an orange because they cannot afford to have both, how is this government making life more affordable when our insurance, utilities, grocery bills, and cost of living are only increasing?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government under the leadership of this Premier that is the only government in history that has actually invested provincial money in food banks. The former minister, my little brother, invested in food banks, as have we.

At the same time, we've continued to make life more affordable for Albertans. The number one thing we did was that we got rid of the NDP carbon tax that was making life more expensive, and we led the fight across the country to finally get the federal government to get rid of the carbon tax despite the fact that the NDP continued to fight each and every day to keep that damaging tax on the people of Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

2:20

**Eastern Slopes Protection
and Coal Development Policies**

Member Miyashiro: This government claims Alberta's coal modernization initiative will ban open-pit mining in the foothills and keep selenium out of our water. It will prohibit mountaintop removal mining and require that any new mining must use techniques that prevent adding selenium to waterways. Albertans remain skeptical. They've seen the realities with Teck in B.C., who spent billions to remove selenium from water and failed. They know the coal is under the mountaintops and the best way to get at it is to dig it out. To the minister of energy: what is the difference between mountaintop removal mining and open-pit mining?

Mr. Jean: I thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are very curious and are concerned, and that's why they know that this government is going to do a better job than the former NDP government was trying to do and certainly better than the B.C. government is doing with coal mining in B.C.

What Albertans really want to know is: where is No-show Nenshi, Mr. Speaker? They've been looking everywhere for him. You know, we've seen him in the past. He's been wearing a Calgary jersey, he's been wearing an Edmonton jersey, and now he's wearing a Winnipeg jersey. We don't know where he is. We're asking if he could actually show up for work because I know Albertans need him.

Member Miyashiro: Given that the minister obviously didn't hear my first question, given that there's no difference between mountaintop removal and open-pit mining, given that even Montem Resources has asked for the distinction to be rescinded because the only way they can extract their coal is through open-pit mining, given that no matter how you get at it, the coal is under the mountaintop, which would need to be removed, given that the minister has also referred to high-wall mining as a solution for this conundrum, can he explain how high-wall mining is different from open-pit mining?

Mr. Jean: I appreciate the question, Mr. Speaker, but what we do over on this side of the House is that we actually let experts decide on these types of things. If he goes to the website of the AER, he can clearly see the definitions. I know they've been having problems with them. I know they're not prepared to be educated by experts, but go on the AER website, use this new tool on a computer called Google, put in your website search engine, and they can find exactly the definitions they're interested in. What I can tell them is that we're going to do the job right. We're going to protect air. We're going to protect humans. We're going to protect water because water is life. We're certainly not going to take any lessons from them or their cousins in B.C. on what to do with coal mining.

Member Miyashiro: Given that high-wall mining involves mining coal seams of an open-pit mine, meaning there needs to be an open pit before high-wall mining can begin, given that high-wall mining is a method used when surface mining has reached its technical limits and given that although high-wall mining still contaminates water and is restricted by the depth of the coal seam, it all starts with an open pit, to the minister: if there's no open-pit mining and there's no technical way to extract eastern slopes coal without it, does he agree that there cannot be any open-pit coal mining on the eastern slopes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're going to do a great job on protecting Albertans, the water, the air, the animals, human life.

But what Albertans want to know is – he started off with Calgary, then he went to Edmonton, then he went to Winnipeg; he went Liberal, he went NDP, then he went Liberal, maybe Alberta Party in there, Mr. Speaker. Now, apparently, if you go orange, purple, and red, it makes this yucky-looking brown colour. I'm just concerned about that generally, and I think Albertans want to know: what does he actually stand for? We just want to know before going into the summer break, and I'd really like to know, too.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the next question. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Proposed Amendments to Water Act

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Alberta grows, access to sustainable water for municipalities, businesses, and agriculture becomes increasingly important. Our water management system has served us well, but with shifting weather conditions and rising demand, updates to the Water Act are necessary. Alberta's water system needs to balance environmental needs, economic development, and the well-being of communities. Can the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas provide an overview of the proposed amendments to the Water Act and explain how they will ensure more sustainable water availability for all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that important question. Communities, farms, and industries across our province are growing, and we want to make sure that they have the water they need to support that growth. We've heard from Albertans that the Water Act generally is working well, but there are, of course, some things that we can improve. We are looking for feedback on changes to simplifying and speeding up decisions even more than we already have, making water use information more transparent to the public and those who want to invest here, allowing lower risk interbasin transfers where it's safe to do that, and improving how we use and manage all of the water that Alberta receives.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the first phase of engagement revealed a demand for improved water storage, conservation, and efficiency, especially in rural areas, and given that streamlining regulatory decisions is a critical step but rural municipalities, agriculture producers, and industries that depend on water require tailored solutions, can the minister explain how these amendments will meet the needs of rural communities and industries, ensuring their concerns are addressed while promoting a more sustainable and efficient water management system?

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our department has already sped up Water Act approvals by close to 60 per cent. That's great news for those looking to invest here. New agribusinesses, food processing plants, and industries are looking to come to our province. We want to make sure that they have the water to support that growth but also protect the water that farmers, ranchers, and all communities across the province need. Our government is already investing in expanding water storage. Work is under way on the Bow River, Ardley, and Eyremore reservoirs, and we're improving how information is collected about water use and making it easier to amend licences. More to come, but this will absolutely support those in rural Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowsell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many Albertans are concerned about maintaining fairness of the first in time, first in right, or FITFIR, system, which has been a cornerstone of water allocation, and given that proposed changes such as enabling interbasin transfers and water reuse offer potential solutions to water scarcity, can the minister further elaborate on how the proposed amendments will preserve the FITFIR system's integrity while introducing flexibility to support sectors facing water access challenges, particularly in areas of high demand or scarcity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we've heard is that our priority system has largely been working well for the last 100 years, and with all of the uncertainty that folks are seeing, they would like to value stability in that first in time, first in right system. We're not looking at large-scale changes to allocations, new royalties, or volumetric pricing for water at this time, but what we are looking at are practical, common-sense changes, like making it easier for Albertans to collect and use rainwater and stormwater, providing flexibility for water users to manage their operations within their approved allocations. We're going to take a common-sense approach.

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

Bill 54 and First Nation Treaty Rights

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 1 the Premier received a cease-and-desist letter from the chiefs of the First Nations of Alberta calling on the Premier to immediately stop her harmful separatist agenda attacking inherent and treaty rights. The chiefs were clear. They want Bill 54 scrapped. As Chief Tuccaro stated: it's garbage. End quote. Why hasn't the Premier listened to the chiefs of Alberta and scrapped her, quote, garbage Bill 54?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we respect the chiefs, and we listen very closely to them. I've been having many conversations over the last few days about some things we could do, and the nonabrogation clause is probably something we could be looking at. It's important to the chiefs, so it's important to us. We'll be looking at some ways that we can work more closely together with them on this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the Premier self-identifies as being Cherokee, she must clearly understand how to listen to elders, how to respect chiefs, how to uphold inherent and treaty rights but given that the Premier responded to the chiefs with an insulting, condescending letter begging them to go to Ottawa to fix her problem that she's made would suggest otherwise, to the Premier: how does she not see how her response letter desecrates this government's relationship with First Nations leadership?

Mr. Wilson: Thank you for the question. It's been such an honour working with all the chiefs across the province, Mr. Speaker. I've become great friends with them, and to understand that they're hurting right now makes me hurt. I want to work with them. We've done so many great things together like programs like our community

support fund program to support missing, murdered Indigenous women. You'll see us wearing the moose hide patch for men to stand up against violence towards Indigenous women. We just did a great meeting the other day working . . .

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the treaty chiefs from treaties 6, 7, and 8 and citizens will hold a peaceful demonstration on the steps of the Legislature tomorrow afternoon to protest against this government's separatist agenda and the attack on inherent and sovereign rights and given that I was asked to invite the Premier to attend on the condition that she abandons her harmful separatist rhetoric and finally scrap her dangerous Bill 54 before it becomes law, will the Premier accept these terms, scrap the garbage Bill 54, and attend the peaceful demonstration to speak to Albertans and treaty chiefs?

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've said time and again that the Alberta government is absolutely committed to protecting, upholding, and honouring the rights of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in this province. Any citizen-led referendum must be constitutional. We've made that abundantly clear. We've also said that we respect and we honour the concerns of the First Nations communities. That's exactly why later on today I will be introducing an amendment in this Assembly. I've said that to the member opposite multiple times. The members opposite know full well. Enough with the fearmongering.

Investment in Rural Alberta

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, in the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills every spring farmers invest in seeds and fertilizer to make the crops grow, just like our government invests in infrastructure and the future of our province to make this province grow. With new schools and innovative projects we reap the benefits of that growth. The government has invested millions of dollars in Olds College. To the Minister of Advanced Education. Please inform this House of what that incredible investment has done for the outstanding constituency of Olds . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. Last week I was pleased to join the hon. member at Olds College to announce a \$63 million investment over three years for the expansion of the W.J. Elliott Building. This expansion will create 440 new apprenticeship seats as well as 100 new dual credit seats. Since 2019 we have also provided Olds College with almost \$200 million in operating grants and over \$27 million in CMR funding. I want to thank the member for his incredible advocacy on behalf of his constituents over the last . . .

Mr. Cooper: Given, Mr. Speaker, that investing in rural Alberta is a long-standing government policy of this side of the House and given that in Acme, Alberta, our government is building a rural centre of training excellence in conjunction with a new high school there, to the Minister of Education: why are these investments important, and why is giving students in rural Alberta training opportunities in rural Alberta keeping rural Alberta vibrant?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the very important question. Indeed, as he mentioned, investing in rural Alberta is a long-time priority of our government, and indeed this is a very unique opportunity in Acme, as he's mentioned. Part of the reason that we want to ensure there are adequate education and training opportunities in rural Alberta is so that we can grow talent right at home so that students and individuals can find the training opportunities that they need, contribute to their local community and local economy right from home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cooper: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that rural Alberta is the backbone of the Alberta economy and is literally where it all begins and given that no government in Alberta's history has had a better grasp on the importance of rural Alberta than this one, to the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: what are your favourite investments to make in rural Alberta? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's hard to pick just one. I'm proud to say that the hon. member was one of the first people to support me in my by-election in 2018, but it took him 2,499 days, or six years, 10 months, and three days, to actually ask me a question in this House. During those years the NDP lost not just one but two elections.

I would be happy to talk about all the great work we're doing in the outstanding member's riding in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Mr. Speaker. Mountain View county in this last provincial budget got \$3.5 million for a critical water project.

School Infrastructure Maintenance and Renewal

Ms Chapman: Unlike wine and cheese, schools do not age well. HVAC systems wear out. Plumbing starts to leak. Electrical systems malfunction. Forget about preventative maintenance because school boards can only afford to operate in crisis mode when it comes to their aging schools. Seventy per cent of Edmonton public schools are 50 years or older. The estimated cost to modernize Edmonton public schools that need updating is \$900 million. Total deferred maintenance is over a billion. How is the minister planning to fund the maintenance the school board needs?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we've made important investments in Budget '25 that will help address maintenance needs of our school divisions. In addition to that, of course, we've also announced one of the largest school construction programs in Alberta history, and through that program we will be initiating a number of different projects to modernize and/or fully replace aging infrastructure in many corners of our province. That's in addition to the almost 100 new schools that we aim to build as a consequence of that project. We are taking the necessary action to make sure that our schools are there for our kids.

Ms Chapman: Given that the CBE is another school board with a billion dollars in deferred maintenance, given that school boards can only MacGuyver their way through so many repairs before crumbling infrastructure will need to be replaced, given that every year the CBE spends \$10 million more on maintenance than the UCP government provides, what exactly does the minister suggest the school board do to make up the funding shortfall? Or is the minister just okay with Calgary schools falling into disrepair?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, the situation is not as the member articulates and tries to draw attention to. Of course, we understand that that's the typical NDP approach, to spread fear and misinformation. Now, there is indeed no question that we have a lot of schools that are older schools, and we are working with our school divisions to provide funding to help them address their maintenance and repair needs and, as I just mentioned a moment ago, an \$8.6 billion commitment to build new schools, modernize and replace schools that need to be.

Ms Chapman: Given that the UCP has failed to maintain the schools Albertans have, pushing the problem off for a future competent government to manage, given that the UCP has failed to build the schools Albertans need, packing kids into classrooms until they're bursting at the seams, given that the UCP has failed in the most basic requirements to open a school, forgetting to check if there are things like road access, is the minister waiting for component failure to become the norm, or does he plan to start funding school maintenance appropriately?

Mr. Nicolaides: Of course not, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned a moment ago, we are providing maintenance funding to our school boards for them to manage, and we are providing a significant investment to build and modernize new schools.

The member opposite and the NDP want to talk about competent government. I'm happy to talk about the NDP all day. When they were in government, they drove Albertans out of the province. In fact, they even went so far as to tell them to leave Alberta. They drove away billions of dollars of investment and significantly impacted our economic strength. Thankfully, we've reversed and got things back on the right track.

2:40

Provincial Wine Taxes

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, in amongst all the stealth tax increases the UCP's brought in, smuggled in between the bracket creep and the real estate transfer fee and the \$2,400 disability benefit clawback tax increase and the \$250 tax increase for every Calgarian with a roof over their head, they also snuck in an increase on the wine sales tax, not on beer or hard alcohol, just on wine. My Calgary-Elbow constituents are up in arms. Can the minister explain why he discriminatorily raised taxes on wine and only on wine?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, that's not true. We took a look at the markup system to bring in more transparency, more fairness. Yeah, there were some categories that went up; there were some categories that went down a little bit. We also introduced an ad valorem tax on high-end wine. We certainly haven't experienced that on this end of the House, but I'm sure, obviously, it happens over there a lot. Yeah, it's a small tax. It's about 40 cents on a \$25 bottle of wine.

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, given that I've talked to constituents in the wine business who have product out on the water right now that they won't be able to sell because this wine tax increase came with zero consultation or warning and given that restaurants already struggling with high costs were blindsided and will face massive impacts to their profitability while the large, powerful multinational beer and spirit companies now enjoy a competitive advantage gifted to them by this government, does this government's fomenting a national unity crisis start with cheap bourbon and economic warfare against Okanagan wines?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, again, the ad valorem tax on high-end wine is less than 40 cents on a \$25 a bottle of wine. It is not a light-your-hair-on-fire moment, but here's what I will say. Since we've come to government, we've reduced corporate taxes, we've cut red tape, we've created a business-friendly environment, and we've created more private-sector jobs in this province than the rest of the country.

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, I'm so glad the minister has given such a great clip to my stakeholders.

Given that wine drinkers shouldn't be left to clean up the fiscal mess the UCP keeps overseeing and given that cheap commodity wines imported from the U.S. are exempt from the wine sales tax increase and given that more expensive Canadian wines are disproportionately impacted by the UCP's tax on wine and fun, how can the UCP claim to be playing on Team Canada when they increase taxes disproportionately on Canadian wines?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, this ad valorem tax that we put on high-end wine actually applies to only 18 per cent of wine sold in this province. Again, 18 per cent. This is not a light-your-hair-on-fire moment.

But let me tell you this. We have cut red tape over 34 per cent, we've saved job creators \$3 billion, and we're bringing in automatic yes to speed up the time frame for permit approvals. We will have an investment-friendly province that focuses on job creation for Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds, preferably less, we will continue with the day's agenda.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, the Official Opposition Deputy House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts it's an honour to table the committee's report on its trial of audit-focused meetings reviewing reports of the Auditor General.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is an e-mail from a constituent expressing concern about the hunt of a female cougar outside of Canmore and asking for an RCMP investigation into that incident.

My second tabling is from a constituent who's an anaesthesiologist in my riding and is constantly pulled in to work in private surgical clinics instead of public ones.

The Speaker: Edmonton-South.

Member Hoyle: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a letter from my constituent Denise L'Heureux. Due to incredibly long wait times for diagnostics and testing, Denise's cancer diagnosis was missed and is now terminal. She hopes her story can push this government to change course and invest in our public health care...

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

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table copies of a *National Post* article titled Mark Carney's Five-year Plan for Soviet-style Housing, which rightfully compares the costly Liberal housing plan to North...

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of a report, Operation Profit: Private Surgical Contracts Deliver Higher Costs and Longer Waits.

The Speaker: Calgary-Elbow.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have multiple tablings. I have a letter from Joel Lethaby asking the transport minister to stay in his lane on bike lanes.

I have a letter from Heather Hudson, Aiden, Randall Burke, and Raven Sinclair asking that the Premier stop being on Team Trump, a letter from Nicole saying the same, and also Abby Ingraham.

I have a letter from Edward Alberts asking for more support for soccer fields, and a letter from Mark Kuspira, who is the president of Crush Imports, asking for a new look at the wine taxes.

The Speaker: I'm just going to take a moment here. See, that was like five or six tablings and not a speech amongst them. Nice work, hon. member.

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a new study that highlights the need to address personal and professional challenges overqualified immigrants face in precarious work environments in this province.

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

Member Irwin: Oh, wonderful. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the executive summary of Homeward Trust's Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness over a 24-hour period in October, showing the highest record ever of unhoused folks, 3,902 counted that night. I hope the minister reads this report.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the report I referenced yesterday, the 2025 Silent Cries: Child Abuse Trends in Alberta. I hope the minister reads it and applies these recommendations, in addition...

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park. Oh, I said that wrong. St. Albert. Everybody knows that.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Close. Doughnut.

It's an op-ed from the *Globe and Mail* that I'm tabling, five copies. It's entitled We Wasted 60 Years Indulging Secessionist Fantasies in Quebec; Must We Make the Same Mistake in Alberta?

The Speaker: Okay. Any more? Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton...

Mr. Dach: McClung.

The Speaker: ... McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a handful of tablings. I'll be quick. I have an article from the *Edmonton Journal* detailing that our anthem singer and my guest today sings the

Canadian anthem and always tries to amplify Indigenous voices in her own language.

I have tablings from constituents' letters on topics such as a broken heart in light of recent child care subsidy cuts; another one not supporting Alberta's separation from Canada; another letter from a constituent not supporting Bill 55 and against privatization of hospitals and other constituent rights, Bill 55 is forcing us to consider leaving the province entirely; and \$80 being paid for monitoring of glaucoma condition in the last six years, never had to pay for this before.

2:50

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of a report pulled together by the Water for Food group in southern Alberta, and it's titled Government Scientists Identify Coal Mining's Threats to Southern Alberta Agribusiness.

The Speaker: Are there any more? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of some data from Statistics Canada about rural crime, showing that a much higher incidence of violent crime is from an intimate partner or a family member versus urban violent crime.

The Speaker: Any more? Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Mr. Speaker, I've got two tablings, five copies: Alberta's 10-year Strategy to End Gender-Based Violence, that I have read, so there is no shame. I encourage all members to read it . . .

The Speaker: Okay.

Ms Hayter: I have a second tabling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: All right. I just wanted to make sure the speech from the first one was over. Go ahead.

Ms Hayter: Yes. I want to be quick, like the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Speaker, I also rise for a second tabling today. I'd like to table a CBC article from June 24, 2024, where the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods was named the Official Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition. I believe all members in this House . . .

The Speaker: See, we're speechifying again. But I'm happy to hear the . . .

Ms Hayter: Can I just say two really very nice things about her, please?

The Speaker: You know what? Ten seconds.

Ms Hayter: Ten seconds. I believe all members in this Chamber can agree that we appreciate your service in this role, the knowledge during points of order, your level-headedness, and mostly your kindness. Thank you for your leadership. [applause]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I cut the member some slack. The member promised to make her extended remarks nonpartisan. I think she honoured that. Please forgive me.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Ms Schulz, Minister of Environment and Protected Areas, responses to questions raised on March 13, 2025, Ministry of Environment and Protected Areas 2025-26 main estimates debate.

On behalf of hon. Mrs. Sawhney, Minister of Advanced Education, pursuant to the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta 2023 annual report and pursuant to the Agrology Profession Act Alberta Institute of Agrologists 2024 annual report.

The Speaker: Ladies and gentlemen, hon. members, it is time for points of order. The first point of order that was called by the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to withdraw points of order 1 and 2.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you, hon. member.

That takes us to point of order 3, called by the assistant Government House Leader.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order under 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." At the time referenced, at 2:06, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was speaking in response to an answer from the Government House Leader, where the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud said something along the lines of "talk about rich" and continued on to say, as I have written down, "check out the Rolex on the minister's wrist." This is abusive or insulting language because it is now creating personal attributes based on someone's character, based on their dress, and that is obviously inappropriate. Whether someone dresses well or poorly, as long as it fits within the requirements of appropriate contemporary business dress, it is appropriate for this Chamber.

It would be equally inappropriate to reference someone's skin colour, to reference somebody's haircut, to reference someone's weight, to reference somebody's personal attributes, or the choices they make in how they dress. It is discriminatory to talk about somebody's personal attire. The very purpose of the standing orders and of our privilege in this place is so that we talk about ideas and oppose the office, not the individual. When it becomes individualized, it becomes inappropriate, and members opposite have to be very serious about their — if I may continue my point of order.

The Speaker: I think you've made your point very well.

Mr. Williams: I have a few more points to raise if I may.

The Speaker: Be quick. Be real quick.

Mr. Williams: I will. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud recently, March 24, has apologized to this Chamber. Quoting under a point of privilege apology: "My conduct negatively affected the decorum of [our] House and our work, and I apologize sincerely for doing so."

The Speaker: Any response?

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Commenting on appearance and dress: on behalf of the member I would apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Well done. Thank you.

Okay. Next point of order is 4, called at 2:10 by the hon. Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Point of Order

Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), but also I'd like to draw your attention to *Hansard* from yesterday, Tuesday afternoon, May 13, 2025, specifically pages 3400 and 3401. I won't belabour the point, but it was as you were making your first ruling, I believe, from the chair, Mr. Speaker, about a situation that took place yesterday in regard to the Government House Leader, where a point of order had been called when he was clearly asking individuals, if they wanted to make accusations, to go outside and risk the legal action by not seeing the privileges that they enjoy in this place of not risking legal action. But specifically in that exchange, I would think, relevant to this point of order is a quote from the Opposition House Leader in which she says, "I believe the threat to take it outside was absolutely unacceptable and alluded to a threat of violence." Mr. Speaker, you would go on to rule that you didn't think the Government House Leader was interacting in a violent way but that people can interpret things two ways.

Now, why this is relevant to this point of order is that I was shocked, after watching that exchange, to watch the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud during question period, at the time that I called this point of order, then go to the hon. Government House Leader and say, "Want to take it outside?" and then motion towards the Opposition House Leader to do so. Now, she certainly was not talking about going outside to discuss for legal action at that point because that was the point where they were asking the hon. member whether he owned a Rolex or not, and he'll be happy, I'm sure, to speak outside the Chamber that he does not. It clearly could be interpreted as a violent action and asking for something violent to take place.

Mr. Speaker, given that that member has already had to apologize in this Chamber for a point of privilege this year for the same circumstances, which is a very serious issue, she should rise and apologize for that. This is going to create disorder if the opposition continues to act like that. I would call on them to act like adults and respect the Chamber that they're in.

The Speaker: Is there any . . .

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, and although the member sits directly beside me, I tell you honestly that I did not hear this interaction. I'm told by my colleagues that she may have said, "Are you going to ask him to take it outside?" making a reference to yesterday. But using that language in any form the day after what happened yesterday should not have happened, and on behalf of the member I will apologize and withdraw. I don't think anyone should be talking about taking things outside. As I said yesterday, it does carry with it an allusion of violence, so I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, I consider the matter dealt with and closed.

But by comment and, I hope, some advice from the Speaker is that on any given day in the future the Speaker's decision yesterday is best not used as a weapon today by anybody on any side of the

House. If you make it harder for the Speaker to keep order in here, it won't be intentional but everybody will suffer. So let's just all agree, shall we, that – while we have a lot to disagree on, let's just do our best not to go there, please.

Now, I'm going to ask for your forgiveness because I went to point of order 5 instead of 4. So this is me putting it in reverse. Point of order 4 was called at 2:10 by the Government House Leader.

3:00

Mr. Schow: That was a lifetime ago, Mr. Speaker. Withdraw.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, that concludes points of order. Pardon me? Is there another one? My goodness. Imagine, folks, two mistakes in the same day. There it is.

Point of order 6. Looks like it was called by the Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Speaker, I just thank you very much for your first two days of service in the chair. There's been a lot for your first few days. I will withdraw that point of order.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, nothing like trying to make me right. I appreciate that, but I know I wasn't.

That takes us to – and I will say it in the spirit of gratefulness to the previous Speaker – Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, prior to going to Government Motion 79, I did have a request for unanimous consent. I don't think I beat the table officer to that standing up to my feet, but is it possible to go back to that? It is? Okay.

Before moving to Government Motion 79, I do wish to rise to seek unanimous consent of the Assembly to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of the afternoon sitting, including the first bell in Committee of the Whole.

The Speaker: I feel very comfortable going back since it takes unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Motions

Committee Membership Changes

79. Mr. Schow moved:
Be it resolved that the membership of the Assembly's committees be replaced as follows:
(a) on the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services that Hon. Mr. McIver replace Mr. Cooper as chair and that Hon. Mr. McIver replace Mr. Cooper.

The Speaker: Is there any debate?

[Government Motion 79 carried]

Private Bills

Second Reading

Bill Pr. 5

Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act

Member Miyashiro: Thank you very much. Just let me get my act together here. I'd like to introduce this so you know what the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta is

all about. The Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta was incorporated in 1966 by the Lethbridge foundation act of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta and continued under the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act, 2010.

It has been supporting the community for over five decades. Since 1966 they have built their endowment funds to more than \$44 million with the intent to support the community forever. Their grants come from these funds and support the charities that are working hard to make our communities great places to live. This also helps donors connect with causes that are close to their hearts, and thanks to their generosity the community foundation has funded over \$20 million in grants throughout the region. The foundation is also a registered Canadian charity and is the ninth oldest of Canada's 202 community foundations, and the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta serve residents of the constituencies of Livingstone-Macleod, Cardston-Siksika, Taber-Warner, Lethbridge-West, and Lethbridge-East.

They have a number of different funds, Mr. Speaker, that they fund. One is the community priorities fund. Over \$450,000 was given out from this fund over the last year. They also have the Henry S. Varley fund for rural life, which is specifically for rural projects that enhance communities in our rural parts of this region. They also do a youth-in-action grants program, and they were part of the community services recovery fund during COVID. As well, they gave out extra money during the emerald anniversary grants program.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to let you know that it's not all about Lethbridge; this is also about southwestern Alberta. In Livingstone-Macleod grants in 2024 totalled \$212,900 and in 2025 has already received \$189,000 for a total of \$401,000 in the last 18 months. In Cardston-Siksika the 2024 grants were \$122,200, and already in 2025 they've received \$98,600 for a total of \$220,800. In Taber-Warner the 2024 grants were \$141,900, and already in 2025 they've received \$66,400 for a total of \$208,300. All together that's \$831,000 in the last 18 months for the areas surrounding Lethbridge, so this isn't including Lethbridge.

The reason we're bringing this forward today is because the foundation was created by an act of this Legislature. Any changes to their bylaws and any changes to their operation must come through by approval of this body.

The Speaker: Hon. member, words that I didn't hear come out of your mouth – and if they didn't, it would be a good time for you to say those words now – would be: I move second reading of Bill Pr. 5.

Member Miyashiro: Sorry. I missed that part.
I move second reading of Bill Pr. 5.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Is there any debate?

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 5 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 6

Burman University Amendment Act, 2025

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill Pr. 6, Burman University Amendment Act, 2025.

The purpose of this bill presented to me by Dr. Loren Agrey of Burman University was just to clean up some language in the bill. Previously in the old bill they were part of College Heights, which was in the county of Lacombe. The city of Lacombe has now

annexed that piece of land, so it's no longer College Heights; it is Lacombe. They're just cleaning up that language.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there any debate?

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 6 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 49

Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly rise today in support of Bill 49, Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. The bill is about one thing. It's about protecting Albertans. You know, whether it be from crime or natural disasters or threat to individual liberties from potential government overreach, the bill aims to protect our province.

However, today I want to specifically talk about how this government aims to provide effective policing for Albertans, especially in rural Alberta. Whether you live in Peace River or Coutts or Lloydminster or Grande Prairie or wherever in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, rural Albertans expect the same level of service in their communities as the residents of our large or midsize municipalities. It's about consistency and choice for the unique policing needs of communities across the province. It's our intention to ensure that Albertans get what they pay for and that they feel safe and secure in their own homes. We've spoken with communities from across the province and asked one question. Are they happy with the policing in their communities? The answer I hear right throughout this province with over 50 municipalities, 40 First Nations communities is a resounding no.

Before I unpack this response any further, I just want to be clear. I'm in alignment with the local leaders and community members across Alberta when it comes to who our frustration is directed at. We're not frustrated or upset with the good men and women in the RCMP. I know that. These people put their lives on the line, and I respect them each and every day for everything that they do, and they are doing the best that they can.

3:10

As a matter of fact, I'm frustrated and angry for them, Mr. Speaker. It's been a failure of the organization at the highest levels that has allowed vacancy rates and mismanagement to get us to this particular point, not just here in Alberta but right across Canada. To the front-line RCMP members: you're valued. You are valued members of our community. You put your lives on the line to keep rural Albertans safe. It's Ottawa managers, unions that have gotten us to this current position that has required strong and swift action from this government to work with the federal government.

Let's talk about the reality of our current position, Mr. Speaker. I understand that many members on the other side of the House have questions. They have questions, and I respect that. What I'd like to explain is the reality that is outside Edmonton, outside Calgary, outside those jurisdictions that have their own municipal police service. Staffing levels are inadequate, with officers sometimes taking days to attend calls. As a result, crime in rural areas has exploded. Some areas are so understaffed that criminals know

exactly what time the local officer returns home, giving them free rein over the community.

Mr. Speaker, we have listened. We have listened to municipal leaders; we have listened to First Nations communities, and as I've indicated many times before, we want to work with them. We're empowering them. It is them that are making these choices to move beyond their current contract service provider. One town has said that their region has collectively spent over a million dollars throughout the last few years with no corresponding increase in staffing levels or enhanced services from their local detachment. One Cree nation told me that they are gravely concerned with the lack of RCMP presence and the activity. Another First Nation wrote to me and told me that their detachment hasn't received an increase of officers in over 18 years, yet their vacancy rate still sits at 50 per cent.

One community in central Alberta that I met with: I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that they had concerns that there was no police between 2 a.m. and 8 a.m. This led to thefts. It led to people, unfortunately, resorting to trying to take things into their own hands. I've mentioned other stories from other First Nations, from other municipal leaders about vigilantism. I can go on and on and on.

You know, one Indigenous community near the capital told me, referring to the RCMP: we pay for them to be on our nation; however, we receive very little in return. They go on to even say that there's a lack of interest from the officers, from the RCMP as an organization and that they're not prepared to accept their services anymore. It's not me, the public safety minister for all of Alberta, Mr. Speaker. I listen to what this community has asked, and I'm helping them facilitate what their wants and what their needs are. I'm not imposing anything on them.

Mr. Speaker, one issue that may have caused me the most concern is the Indigenous community telling me that emergency calls can take not just hours but sometimes up to six days. I've mentioned this before, that another Indigenous community had indicated to me that they just have accepted it now, that they don't even bother calling because they know that nobody is going to show up. That doesn't mean that's a resolution to a call to service. That's a failure. That's a failure of an organization. That's a failure in public trust, to think: "I know I'm in trouble, but you know what? I know that if I call, nobody's coming." I'm not sure anyone – anyone – who lives in a municipality that has their own municipal police service really, truly understands what that feels like.

Mr. Speaker, Indigenous communities, villages, towns, and counties: they've been chronically understaffed. We've heard repeated calls from these communities for more resources, for more officers, more results. Some First Nations communities now must employ individuals to undertake secondary policing. What is secondary policing? Well, I can tell you what it is. It's mercenaries. The one nation up in northern Alberta told me that they had a violent repeat criminal offender. The police said: we don't have anybody to come and deal with the person. So the chief spent over \$50,000 for mercenaries to come and deal with something that the police should be dealing with. That's unacceptable. We're not tolerating that in this province anymore.

We are going to continue to help our First Nations communities. We're going to continue to help the folks in rural Alberta. Crime has gotten worse. Again, I've said this many times before: officer presence matters. We need to make sure that we're getting the police out there. Mr. Speaker, that's why Bill 49 is helping us to create this police service, to get officers out there quickly.

Now, I get it. Not everybody understands the difference between a peace officer and a police officer, but I can tell you that there is a huge difference between a peace officer and a police officer, and it has to do with the level of training and the ability to respond to that

call to service. We've imposed so much pressure on our peace officers within the sheriffs to supplement and support and augment police services all throughout the province, from Calgary to Edmonton to rural Alberta. I must say that I give them credit for stepping up to doing the job as a police officer, but it's time for fairness. It's time for training. It's time to make sure that they are treated with the responsibilities which we are giving them on a regular basis and pressure we put on them as Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, people will say that it's about money. In 2025-26 Alberta will pay \$380.5 million for the provincial police service agreement, an increase of \$3.8 million from '24-25. We invested an additional \$20.9 million in 2024 budget to increase the RCMP's capacity.

Additionally, we temporarily froze the increases in our rural communities. Their costs were going to increase by 50 per cent, and I said: well, wait a second; I'm not going to put that burden on them. This government chose – and I'm proud of these folks in this government – to pay \$27 million on behalf of the people of Alberta to say: whoa, wait a second; we don't want you as small municipalities to be burdened with this, so we're covering those costs.

However, if there are municipalities that wish to choose to stay with their current contract service provider, they need to understand with eyes wide open that their costs are going to increase by at least 50 per cent. Some of those municipalities have said: we can't afford that. Therefore, we're providing them that additional option, Mr. Speaker, and that's what Bill 49 does.

I have also indicated that we currently pay for \$16 million worth of services that we don't get from the money that I, obviously, previously mentioned. That, Mr. Speaker, is not acceptable. Now, is that more, or is it less? I'll be honest with you. I don't know because I, as the minister of public safety, can't get a straight answer from the RCMP as to what our authorized strength levels are in this province. I have heard various numbers over the last short, you know, year or two that I've been in this particular role. That in itself is continuing to be unacceptable.

Now, I'm going to raise this again. I know many of the folks here have heard this before. I know you've heard this before, Mr. Speaker, but I want to turn the House's attention to the March 10, 2025, report from the federal government *A New Policing Vision for Canada: Modernizing the RCMP*. Public Safety Canada is planning to move away from contract policing. Full stop. It's not the UCP. It's not the Alberta government. It has nothing to do with any wild, imaginative idea that the members opposite seem to be coming up with. It's just not true. The report clearly states, "Canada's role in supporting provinces in their delivery of policing services must evolve. The federal government should be committed to working closely with Provinces to support a transition away from contract policing." Mr. Speaker, it's there. It's in black and white.

3:20

If I don't do this, then I will get criticized by the members opposite for being negligent. Why didn't I prepare? Why didn't I do the right thing? Why am I not out there protecting rural Albertans? Why am I not making sure that we're preparing for what is coming in 2032, Mr. Speaker?

The report further states that the federal government's "vision should be to establish the RCMP as a [premier], intelligence-led, federal policing organization." RCMP are not going anywhere. They're just transitioning the role because they have been struggling when it comes to contract policing. They are still going to be the RCMP, Mr. Speaker, focusing on the most serious crimes affecting Canadians, national crimes.

I want to break this down even further. It acknowledges, not me, Mr. Speaker – I know that everybody seems to think that it's me that's

saying all this; it's not – that there is a staffing crisis amongst the RCMP detachments across the country. It recognizes that the status quo simply cannot remain and that there must be comprehensive changes to how provincial governments engage with policing, making clear that “Canada's role in supporting provinces in their delivery of policing services must evolve.” It recommends that the federal government should be committed to working closely with provinces to support, again – I'm going to say this again – a transition away from the current contract policing model.

This is simple, quite frankly. Frankly, it is, again, negligent on my part if I do not read the document that is provided to me by the federal government, that is publicly available for everyone in this House to read, to make sure that we are meeting the needs of rural Albertans, Mr. Speaker. The report clearly states, “Canada's role in supporting the provinces in their delivery of policing services must evolve. The federal government should be committed to working closely with Provinces.” Again, Mr. Speaker, “a transition away from contract policing.”

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that the day could be long. I know that I can talk about this even more, but I'm going to just wrap it up by saying this. The police service agreement is ending in 2032. It has been made perfectly clear by the federal government that they are looking at moving away from contract policing. I have empowered all municipalities throughout this province. I am providing them options, whether it be helping them with their own police service like I am with Siksika Nation, with Enoch Nation or helping a regional approach with other areas within the province. In some cases some have indicated that they want the sheriffs to be their contractor and police of jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, this is about listening. This is about consulting. This is about making sure that we are meeting the needs of rural Albertans and making sure that we have the officers on the street to respond to the calls to service so that we can reduce crime, especially in rural Alberta.

With that, I adjourn debate.

The Speaker: Before you do that, hon. Deputy Premier, I think this House needs to hear the words from you: I move third reading of Bill 49.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. With all that, Mr. Speaker – I appreciate that – I do move third reading of Bill 49.

And then I adjourn debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:24 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Jean	Rowswell
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Johnson	Sawhney
Boitchenko	Jones	Schow
Bouchard	LaGrange	Schulz
Cooper	Loewen	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Long	Singh
de Jonge	Lovely	Stephan
Dreeshen	Lunty	Turton
Dyck	McDougall	van Dijken
Ellis	Nally	Wiebe
Fir	Neudorf	Wilson

Getson	Nicolaides	Wright, J.
Glubish	Nixon	Yao
Horner	Petrovic	Yaseen
Hunter	Pitt	

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Ganley	Renaud
Batten	Gray	Schmidt
Boparai	Hoyle	Shepherd
Calahoo Stonehouse	Irwin	Sweet
Ellingson	Kayande	Tejada
Eremenko	Metz	Wright, P.
Totals:	For – 44	Against – 18

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

(continued)

Time Allocation on Bill 54

71. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 54, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

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

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In just a couple of weeks, June 3, Calgary-Currie is hosting a town hall for our constituents. You know, we use this as a bit of an opportunity at the end of session to invite folks from all over the riding to come and hear a little bit, get an update on the session, give an opportunity for folks to voice their concerns. I'm going to have to stand at this town hall and tell them that despite the incredible number of bills that came forward to us in this spring session, there was a stunning lack of debate on some critical, critical pieces of legislation that were brought forward.

3:30

The average Joe, Mr. Speaker, does not know what time allocation means, but I have to stand before the constituents in my riding regardless of political stripe, because I certainly encourage everybody to come to the town hall, whether they are a voter for the Alberta New Democrats or not, because that's the job, and it is my responsibility to explain how I use my time with taxpayer dollars to do the job of service to them as constituents of Calgary-Currie. I have to tell them that on these critical pieces of legislation, including Bill 54, we were limited to talk for just one hour.

They would say: “MLA, how is that possible? This is unpacking some fundamental pieces of our democracy in the ways that we access elections, in the ways that we exercise our right as citizens to vote for our elected representatives. How is something so fundamental limited to one hour?” And I can say: “Well, your government made it so. Over and over and over and over again they put the limits on it. We were here to do our job.” Our job when we're in these four walls is to debate important pieces of legislation, which is the job that we have been elected and that we are paid to do, but this government wants to limit that more than any government that came before it.

Mr. Speaker, I was raised in a home where – you know, we didn't go to church, but we still had some pretty important kind of codes

that we lived by in our home, and it's certainly those codes that I try to teach my kids about. One of them is that just because you can doesn't mean you should. That is precisely what this government is doing with their insistence on yet another time allocation motion to limit debate on Bill 54. Ironically, Bill 54 is precisely about democratic processes in this province, yet the government is exercising possibly one of the most antidemocratic mechanisms they have at their disposal. Just because you can doesn't mean you should. Another one that we live by in our home is that you should always leave a place better than you found it. Debatable on that front, too.

Despite many efforts from my colleagues, in the last several days and certainly in the months that precede now and a couple more times even before we actually adjourn for the summer, we're going to have to stand a couple more times here, Mr. Speaker, and talk about just how detrimental and harmful this idea of time allocation is and what an abuse of power it is to exert it as many times as we have had to hear about it in the 31st Legislature. The numbers really are staggering. It is truly exceptional.

Again, I would love to hear how any of the members opposite can stand and explain this to their own constituents, because we all ultimately – after this evening I know we are all going to be going back home to our respective constituencies, hopefully catching your breath a little bit, catching up on some sleep, giving your kids a hug. Goodness knows we all need that a little bit. Then we're going to be right out into the communities talking to the people who ultimately gave us the privilege of sitting in this place. I think every single one of us has to be able to talk about and explain how we spent our time in this space, and we have to explain why this government chose this action today.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 71.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 71 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:35 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Gray	Renaud
Batten	Hayter	Schmidt
Boparai	Hoyle	Shepherd
Calahoo Stonehouse	Irwin	Sweet

Ellingson	Kayande	Tejada
Eremenko	Metz	Wright, P.
Ganley		
Totals:	For – 43	Against – 19

[Government Motion 71 carried]

Time Allocation on Bill 55

72. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 55, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: Is there any debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

3:40

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This UCP government is forcing controversial bills at an alarming rate. They're abusing their power by cutting off debate on major pieces of legislation, but at least as important is that they are tabling critical legislation with no time for meaningful public awareness. They tabled this 164-page piece of legislation that will change the face of health care exactly two weeks ago with no meaningful briefing, and they are limiting our time for public inclusion of this bill. Academics, journalists, unions, professional associations have had very little chance to review it, to consider it, to discuss it, and to share their feedback. This is a huge bill. There are parts of it that we will not have time to raise during this very limited debate.

This bill explicitly enables privatization of health care, but they continue to deny that because the government will still, for now, be the insurer, so they consider this public health care. At least the minimum services will apparently be required as under the Canada Health Act, but they are explicitly allowing our public hospitals to be operated by private corporations. That is privatization because those corporations will need to make a profit.

They do that in at least four ways. We as Albertans may pay more for the services that it will cost for provision of these hospital services, and that is what we are seeing right now with the private surgical centres, where we are paying sometimes double the price for surgery. These hospitals operated by a corporation that needs money may only provide profitable services. We see that also now with private surgical centres, who are only doing the simple, straightforward cases.

Another way is that they may cut their expenses by paying staff less, forcing them to do more work, and using substandard products and cutting out quality controls. Or they may charge patients extra. This bill allows that by being clear that only the services necessary under the Canada Health Act will necessarily be covered. When you are hospitalized, it may not be entirely clear what is required under the Canada Health Act and what is a frill. In the U.S. you may now pay for a tissue. You pay for bandages. Are those covered under the Canada Health Act, or now are people going to need to pay for those if the hospital operator needs to make a profit?

This is enabling legislation, and by limiting debate and limiting the time for Albertans to provide feedback, maybe to protest, that may in fact be the goal of rushing this through. We know that when Ralph Klein tried to do this, public protests made him change his mind. This government must do better. Albertans need a chance to speak. They need to suspend this bill and give a chance for

Albertans to have a voice. We need a new Health minister. We need a new government. Better is possible. Only a change of government will end these dodgy tactics.

Albertans want access to health care. They want a family doctor. They don't want to wait for surgery. Private pay for health care that will be enabled by this bill even to a greater degree does not alleviate health wait times. In Alberta more surgeries are already moving to private surgical clinics, and increases in the wait times for nine of 11 surgeries, including all cancer surgeries, are happening.

Without giving Albertans time to comment on this bill, the government is expanding their privatization of health care by opening the door to privately run hospitals. This minister must tell us how she will staff these privately operated hospitals because with limited supply the easiest source is our public hospitals.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 72.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 72 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:45 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Gray	Renaud
Batten	Hayter	Schmidt
Boparai	Hoyle	Shepherd
Calahoo Stonehouse	Irwin	Sweet
Ellingson	Kayande	Tejada
Eremenko	Metz	Wright, P.
Ganley		

Totals: For – 43 Against – 19

[Government Motion 72 carried]

3:50 Time Allocation on Bill 49

76. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 49, Public Safety and Emergency Services 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.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, as we consider this time allocation motion on Bill 49, it puts me in mind of an article that was just published today by columnist Jen Gerson, *A Few Thoughts on Leadership*. I want to share some pieces from that. She says:

To be a leader doesn't mean following others. It doesn't mean just listening to people, or empathizing with them. It certainly doesn't mean reflecting their basest emotions back at them. Being a leader means standing up for a set of positions. It requires the ability to persuade people about the rightness of those positions, to demonstrate competency and moral clarity.

We entrust our leaders to lead us because we have invested certain values in them — values like good judgement. And with those traits, they have a duty to, amongst other things, set the terms of our shared debates in ways that are constructive.

Ms Gerson goes on:

One of the major failings of modern conservatism (if we can even call it that anymore) is that it consistently declines to accept this minimum duty of care to its own constituents.

If the premier of Alberta has to legislate to an idea that she knows will be destructive to the province and the nation because she fears she won't be able to govern her party otherwise, then she's not a leader.

Whether she knows it or not, what she's admitting is that she, personally, lacks the moral authority and the persuasive capacity to manage her own party.

If [the Premier's] best argument for her actions is some variation of: "we need to humour destructive policies to placate our most vocal and angry minority" then what she's actually arguing is that her party is governed by a vocal and angry minority. They have her hostage, not the other way around. She's confessing that she lacks the moral clarity required to stand up to the tyranny of the minority. She's arguing that the mantle and responsibilities of leadership rightly belong elsewhere. Either with another leader, or with another party that can [actually] properly manage itself.

Ms Gerson says:

I think what makes me most angry about all of this is that [the Premier and this government] talk[s] a grandiose game about the glories of direct democracy through a referendum, but her commitment to these ideals, to referenda, and to debate, is hypocritical and selective.

She talks about how they "dropped plans for a referendum on an Alberta Pension Plan" pretty quickly when it became clear they would fail at it, that they've "ignored rural municipalities' demands for a referendum on implementing a provincial police force" like they're doing with Bill 49. Ms Gerson notes that "during the 2023 election, [the Premier] ran a campaign that stayed laser-focused on corporate taxes, health-care reform" other mainstream concerns, and they dropped any mention of the sovereignty act, downplayed RCMP reform, put away the pension plan, consciously sidelined it.

Ms Gerson says:

Democratic mandates only matter when UCP party unity isn't on the line, I guess. That's clearly what matters most, here.

[The Premier] did not earn a democratic mandate to subject us all to the whims of her separatist minority.

These people know how to give vent to anger, but they don't have the skills or patience to build the successful and enduring institutions that would persuade people to their cause over time. [The Premier's and this government's] duty

is to protect us from “solutions” like this, not leave the door unlocked and lay out the mat.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I would say not to use the power and the purse of the government to force through half-baked, destructive ideas.

Ms Gerson concludes:

If the premier can't be the version of herself that a plurality of Albertans elected, if she can't persuade her own followers that the saner bet is the better bet, then she and her party are unfit for purpose. She's not a leader.

What we see here in the House today, Mr. Speaker, is an admission that this government doesn't know how to lead. They know how to dominate. They know how to use the brute force of the rules of this Legislature to force through an agenda that Albertans were not even given the opportunity to vote for because this government did not discuss it. This government hid their agenda, and what we have here now is the government limiting debate on a significant piece of legislation on an element that comes from a separatist agenda, the free Alberta strategy, the provincial police force.

I'll have a lot more to say about the details of that in answer to what the minister put forward today, but what I can say is that this government is betraying its own values. It is betraying Albertans. It is demonstrating antidemocracy in this House today by limiting our ability to debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 76.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 76 carried]

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

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

4:00

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Gray	Renaud
Batten	Hayter	Schmidt
Boparai	Hoyle	Shepherd
Calahoo Stonehouse	Irwin	Sweet
Ellingson	Kayande	Tejada
Eremenko	Metz	Wright, P.
Totals:	For – 42	Against – 18

[Government Motion 76 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 49

Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 76, agreed to earlier this afternoon, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of Bill 49, Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, in third reading.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak at third reading of Bill 49. Now, the minister of public safety has made some extensive remarks. I will say that they were much more balanced remarks, certainly delivered in a much more thoughtful tone than I've heard from the minister on this bill so far, and I do appreciate the consideration he put into it. I want to talk through a little bit about what the minister had to say and sort of share some of my concerns.

The minister started out by talking. He said that Bill 49 is about providing effective policing for Albertans, particularly in rural Alberta, that those in rural Alberta should be able to expect the same level of service in their communities as in large municipalities, that Albertans should get what they pay for and they should feel safe and secure in their homes. Mr. Speaker, on that I can say we agree. We have the same goal. Me as the MLA for the heart of Edmonton and the minister from the suburbs of south Calgary, both of us in our urban privilege agree that those in communities across the province should be able to expect support from police, to feel safe in their communities, to get value for their dollars that are spent on policing.

Indeed, I've had a chance to talk with a lot of folks from around the province about this, too, much like the minister has had some excellent conversations recently with representatives at the Alberta Association of Police Governance Conference in Westlock, with folks who came here to Edmonton from across the province for the Alberta Community Crime Prevention Association Conference last week. Now, the minister talked about how he asked folks one question: are you happy with policing in your community? He said that he heard a resounding no, and he blamed that, Mr. Speaker. He said that he had to do something about the RCMP. Well, I will tell you that we have polling data from Pollara Strategic Insights from June of last year that noted 77 per cent of Albertans in RCMP-served communities remain satisfied with the policing services they receive; 86 per cent of them wanted to retain the RCMP.

The minister took a strikingly different tone today in speaking about the RCMP, and I did appreciate that. We have seen some very combative language from the minister previously. Indeed, we are in National Police Week, which I recognized yesterday, and even last year in his statement for National Police Week the minister could not resist taking a swipe at the RCMP, so I do appreciate that he took a moment today to clarify his support for the men and women on the front lines and the work they do. I would suggest to the minister that it's not quite so easy to divorce those men and women from their union, which he has attacked and in which many of those members themselves serve, and from the administration in other portions of that organization.

Now, he has talked at length a number of times about concerns around vacancy rates and the numbers, and certainly the minister has some very creative interpretations, likes to play a little fast and loose with the numbers. You know, not quite sure whether he understands them or

not. We've heard him change his tune a number of times. But he talked about meeting with municipal leaders. He talked about meeting with people in different communities. He talked about meeting with First Nation leaders, and he said that that is where he had his support. You know, he shared a number of stories, a number of anecdotes. Didn't provide, I noted, the single name of an actual councillor, mayor, First Nations chief, not even a specific community, perhaps because the last time he did that in previous debate, well, a number of people had to call him out, even actually taking out an advertisement in the *Edmonton Journal* to combat misinformation in what they believed were misstatements by the minister on the record. So he was a little more careful today.

And I'll be clear, Mr. Speaker. You know what? I imagine there is some truth in what the minister is saying. People are frustrated. They are concerned. I don't dispute with the minister that there is, in fact, a problem here. But the thing is that we're not here today to debate whether there is a problem. When the government is bringing forward Bill 49, what they are asking us to debate is their proposed solution. Now, the minister's argument appears to be that the problem is so bad that we should be willing to just blindly accept any solution he brings forward, whatever he puts on the table, just rubber-stamp it, push it through as we sit here in time allocation at third reading of this bill. But the fact is that if this minister's solution is so good, he must be doing a terrible job of selling it because the fact is that the minister has not brought forward a single validator for Bill 49. Not one. We've heard anecdotes. We've heard stories. We have not seen a single person stand and endorse Bill 49, not one mayor, not one councillor, not one First Nations chief or councillor, not even the sheriffs themselves.

Now, a number of those folks have expressed deep concerns with Bill 49. They have a number of questions about this minister's proposed solutions, but he has not been able to put forward a single person that endorses it, likely because – well, let's be honest, Mr. Speaker – the minister has entirely failed to consult on his solution. I have to question whether there is even an understanding with this government about what consultation actually means, what it entails. Consultation means ongoing engagement, actually checking in at multiple points as you develop a plan, as you work towards a solution to make sure all the pieces are going to work, get the perspectives of all the people that are going to be involved, all the people that are going to be impacted. Then you bring a draft of that plan forward, and then you ask for feedback, you ask for the considerations. You say: is there anything I'm missing here? Are there blind spots? Are there places where this is not going to work? You do that before you put the solution on the table, before you bake it into legislation and propose to spend hundreds of millions of public dollars on it.

The minister has done none of that. He stands in the House and he talks about the problem. He has had relatively little to say about the many, many questions about his proposed solution. The minister says that he's doing this for municipalities. Well, the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that municipalities: many of them are saying that they do not want this. Certainly, the large majority of municipalities through their elected representatives, through Rural Municipalities of Alberta, through Alberta Municipalities are saying that they have a lot of questions that they want to see answered before they'd even consider this minister's proposed solution. Again, if there are this many questions existing now – and let's be clear. A lot of the questions that exist now are exactly the same questions that were raised over a year ago, when the minister introduced the first piece in these two pieces, Bill 11. The fact that these folks are still asking the same questions this year with Bill 49 means that this minister clearly has not consulted. He's bringing forward a solution to what

is a real problem but a solution on which he has not bothered to talk to any of the people he claims he's trying to help.

4:10

From the Rural Municipalities of Alberta's analysis they ask: well, what is the rationale for the creation of this independent police force? Mr. Speaker, they are asking: why are you doing this? If that is the question your primary stakeholders are asking, the folks you say that you're trying to help, I'd say that you've failed at your job. If they don't know why the heck you're doing what you're doing, you have utterly failed in your communication, your engagement, your consultation.

Again, this is not a small thing. This is the creation of an entirely new independent police force in the province of Alberta that will wield extraordinary power, that will cost hundreds of millions of dollars, that will require significant infrastructure and investment in training. They're asking: what are the training requirements for the officers that you're going to be putting into this agency? Is that training going to be standardized across the province? What's the cost of that training going to be? What's the cost of the service going to be? The minister spoke at length about his deep concerns about the cost of RCMP policing. He's deeply concerned, he says, about that cost going up. Mr. Speaker, he cannot, he has not, he has refused to give a single even vague estimate of what the service he's going to provide will cost. He's going to offer a franchise, but he's not going to tell anybody what the price is going to be.

Now, what we have seen with this government is that they've gone out of their way to subsidize competition. This is what this government does, Mr. Speaker. If they see something they don't like, often it's a public service, whether that's, you know, public health care, surgeries, hospitals, in this case it's policing – it's already happened with lab services. What this government does is that it uses the power of government and the public purse to create competition to try to drive the public service out of business. They will heavily subsidize in order to do that. That comes at a cost to the taxpayer. So far in every case where the government has done this, primarily in health care, it has resulted in worse service and higher costs; in the case of DynaLife, government having to bail out the private provider and take it back into the public at an increased cost to taxpayers.

When municipalities, when First Nations, and folks ask this minister for some actual details about what all of this is going to cost, they've got darn good reason. So far this minister has been either unable to provide an answer or simply is refusing to do so because he doesn't want to actually be open about what that cost is going to be. He can stand here and he can criticize the RCMP all he wants, but until he puts his figures on the table, his solution is no solution at all. It is a shell. It is an empty claim. That's why municipalities aren't buying it. That's why they are not convinced. That is why they continue to ask questions and speak out against Bill 49.

Now, let's talk about another one of the minister's claims, Mr. Speaker. The minister likes to talk about this report, the study he's quoting, that he claims is official policy of the federal government. What he is talking about is a document called *A New Policing Vision for Canada: Modernizing the RCMP*, published, as he said, on March 10, 2025. Let's be absolutely clear about what this is. This is not a statement from the RCMP. This is not the official policy of Public Safety Canada. What it is: it's a white paper that was commissioned by the former Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau. He dropped that white paper on his last day in office, on his way out the door, dropped it in the basket and walked off into the sunset. That is what this minister is ranting about when he claims he is basing his \$100 million solution on, that nobody seems to endorse or want, on a former Prime Minister who is no longer in office, at a

time when we have an entirely new government of Canada, a new Prime Minister, new ministers, none of whom have endorsed this paper. What I would say, Mr. Speaker, is if that is the basis of the minister's arguments of what he is claiming, his solution that he believes everyone should vote for without costing, without detail, he's dealing in weak sauce.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, we know where the roots of this come from. This all started years back with the Fair Deal Panel under Premier Kenney when he was doing a light version of what we see the Premier pursuing now, trying to coddle separatists, trying to tamp down a faction of his party that ended up taking him out and taking him down, bringing us to the current Premier. As part of those discussions they talked about an Alberta pension plan, they talked about an Alberta provincial police force, and they made recommendations, and they brought forward actual – at that time, at least they had the courage to actually do the study and put out the costing. When we saw that costing, when municipalities got a look at it, they said, “No, thank you,” because we were looking at significant costs.

Suddenly the minister claims that he's got a miracle cure. He's found a new solution. The minister talks about how he's, in fact, going to build it around Alberta sheriffs and that's going to save all kinds of money. Now, of course, the minister says that he also wants to pay sheriffs more, so we don't know where he's going to save this money, and the fact is we know he also didn't even talk to Alberta sheriffs when he prepared for this bill. He's had a year; six months since the Premier promised that any municipality in the province could have a detachment of Alberta sheriffs if they wanted one. They haven't even bothered to talk to the sheriffs themselves.

On that, Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment because when I make a mistake I want to admit it. The Alberta Sheriff Branch Office Association, when Bill 49 was tabled, put out a letter expressing their concerns with this bill. Let's be clear; it did not express support for the bill; it expressed many different concerns. I want to acknowledge on the record that I misread and misinterpreted some aspects of that letter, and so I misspoke in some of my earliest critiques of this bill, in which I said that Alberta sheriffs did not support the creation of an Alberta provincial police force.

What I want to clarify is that indeed there are Alberta sheriffs who have taken on significant policing responsibilities under this minister who has increased their responsibilities – and he talked about it himself – increased their stress, their responsibilities and that, but he has not increased their pay commensurately. But there are Alberta sheriffs who enjoy that, and welcome that, and would welcome an opportunity to become full peace officers, to work as police. So I will correct my statement and I will acknowledge that is a desire.

But I will also say, you know, I took the opportunity and actually sat down and met with Dornubari Tornwe, the president of that association, to discuss it. My colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview met with representatives for sheriffs with their union AUPE, which, Mr. Speaker, again is more than the minister has done despite the fact that it is his bill, his solution, his claim that he wants to help these men and women in our province.

But we did take the opportunity to speak with them and hear their concerns, and yes, they are interested in this path to become full police, but they have significant concerns with Bill 49 about: what is training actually going to be? What are the wages going to be? The sheriffs do not agree with the minister's plan, that he floated without ever speaking to them, of taking half of them away into a different agency and leaving the other half behind. They want to remain unified.

One of the other things, you know, when I spoke with them, when I met with them, when we met with them, sheriffs themselves said that they have problems with staffing, too, and they are concerned

that if this minister takes half of the sheriff's force away – they said that they are already struggling to cover some of their core duties, prisoner transfers, court coverage. They say: “If the minister takes half the sheriffs away, who's going to cover that; that going to fall on the rest of us? We don't have enough people to staff.”

Now, the minister accuses the RCMP a lot when it comes to staffing and numbers, but you know what the Rural Municipalities of Alberta said, Mr. Speaker?

The Minister has indicated that staffing shortages and delayed response times in rural areas are key reasons for creating [this independent police service.] However, recruitment and retention of police officers is a challenge, not only throughout the province, but nationwide. Unfortunately, there has been a lack of transparency regarding the current state of policing in Alberta. Without reputable or consistent data being made available to understand the status of policing in the province, there is no evidence to show that a new policing agency would remedy this issue.

4:20

I'm coming to the end of my time, Mr. Speaker. I think I've covered a lot of ground. Again, what I want to be absolutely clear about is that we as Alberta New Democrats recognize the problem. We believe that Albertans deserve a solution. Albertans and rural communities deserve a real solution. But what we can see clearly is that what we have in front of us is either a half-baked solution or one where the minister is hiding his intent because there are a lot of unanswered questions that have been out in the open for over a year, numerous requests from the very stakeholders that this minister claims he is trying to help, that he is refusing to answer those questions, leaving sweeping amounts of how all of this is going to work, how this is going to function to regulations that are going to be written behind closed doors. That is not leadership. That is not what an ethical, competent government does, and that is why I cannot support Bill 49.

We need to find a solution for our communities, but it's pretty clear that this solution is not about doing what municipalities need. It is about doing what this minister, this Premier, this government want, and those are two very different things, Mr. Speaker. We owe Albertans better. We owe them real solutions, real investments across the board on a number of fronts in the complexity of all the different services, all the different partners and collaborators that are going to help us build safe communities. Policing? Absolutely a key component of that. We need a better solution than what this minister is putting forward and his questionable reasons for doing so. So I will not be voting in support of Bill 49.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this bill with some thoughts and concerns around how we got here. Members of this Chamber have learned, I think, about me that I'm very much about: don't repeat things; learn from history. You know, there's history that can teach us what we should and shouldn't do, and repeating history is always a bad idea.

I want to start off chatting a little bit – and sorry; I need to make sure I don't speak long – about 2001, June 24, to be exact. Back in the day of 2001 there was a letter written, and it was a letter that was an open letter to Ralph Klein, Premier Ralph Klein. The letter was drafted by the Hon. Stephen Harper, by Tom Flanagan, Ted Morton, Rainer Knopff, Andrew Crooks, Ken Boessenkool, I think, and former policy adviser Stockwell Day. That was 24 years ago; 24 years ago. I know it doesn't seem like that long, but it is.

In that open letter to Ralph Klein that was printed in many of the newspapers across Alberta but also in the country there were some steps that Mr. Harper was laying out with many of his other influential

Conservative colleagues, many people who continue to or did up until more recently work within the Conservative movement more at the federal level. But part of those conversations 24 years ago was that Premier Ralph Klein should start preparing now to let the contract with the RCMP run out in 2012 and create an Alberta provincial police force.

Alberta is a major province. Like the other major provinces of Ontario and Quebec, we should have our own provincial police force. We have no doubt that Alberta can run a more efficient and effective police force than Ottawa can [and] one that will not be misused . . .

This is the point that I want to highlight.

. . . as a laboratory for experiments in social engineering.

I'm not quite sure how that statement relates to our relationship with the RCMP. I find it a very interesting statement in relation to thinking that somehow there would be some influence with the RCMP to start, you know, maybe supporting human rights or, like, working on some of the justice concerns that Canadians and Albertans might have. I don't know why in a letter someone would say that the RCMP is a laboratory for experiments in social engineering. However, it was written, and it was provided to Premier Klein by Prime Minister Harper, not at the time but was soon to be Prime Minister Harper, and many other influential Conservatives.

What's interesting about this letter though – and I'll probably bring it up a couple more times in debate as we go through the next few days, or today. There are some other things that are in this letter about health care and things like that, but the piece about the RCMP that I find really fascinating is that if it was meant to be and the Conservatives truly believed that in 2012 we should have been pulled out of the RCMP contract with the feds and we should have already had a provincial police force and that it was a good idea, Ralph Klein would have done it. He would've initiated the movement to pull us out of the RCMP contract so that by 2012 there was no need to have to re-sign.

Why didn't Ralph Klein do that? Well, the one thing that I will give Premier Klein credit for is that he was very politically astute. He knew that the one thing that he did very well was that he would play the politics and the populist politics to a T. He read Albertans. He understood what they wanted. He understood when he went over too far one way, and he knew when to pull back and to be more moderate on his policies. He was very good at it. So if that's the case and we're thinking about moderate policy and we're thinking about that it's been 24 years since this proposal was put forward and we had a Conservative government up until 2015 and we had a federal Conservative government at that time as well, history would dictate that we would have a provincial police force by now. But we don't, and we don't because Albertans don't want it.

An Hon. Member: They do.

Ms Sweet: They don't. The polling suggests that they don't, and the member opposite can argue across the floor all he wants. I mean, there would be more time to have this conversation if we weren't time allocated, but we are. I'm not going to engage in a back and forth across the floor about whether or not the member agrees with me.

The facts are the facts. Albertans have said that they don't support leaving the RCMP. They just don't. Klein didn't support it. Every provincial Premier that was a Conservative Premier since then has not supported it, and when Harper was in the federal government and had the ability to do it as the Prime Minister of our country, he didn't do it either. Lesson learned government. You might want to look at your history of your own party and go: wait a minute, why not?

The argument that the minister is giving us now around, "well, this is so we can pay the sheriffs more" is farcical. It can be done. There's collective bargaining happening right now. There are pay grids, and adjustments to pay grids happen. Every member in this Chamber would know that because we just did it for our own staff in our constituency offices. We adjusted the pay grids. Adjust the pay grid. If you believe that sheriffs deserve to be paid more for the work that they do, pay them more. Do not reclassify them into a new position and then say: you're getting paid more. When you reclassify and the government reclassifies, you do more work. Therefore, you're not actually making any more money because now your workload has increased and responsibilities have increased.

If the argument by the government is, "well, the sheriffs are going to be the provincial police force," that's not what they are right now. We haven't heard from this government what an increase would look like and what justifications there would be for the government to be doing this, and I haven't heard the minister give us a good rationale or to define what the change of category and/or work requirements would be for these sheriffs.

If they are going to be active police officers, then their whole job description changes. Their responsibilities change. Their workload changes, and they deserve to be compensated for that. But if this is about the argument of, "We just want to pay the sheriffs more," then pay them more now with the same amount of work that they're doing now, and that's fine.

4:30

Don't use it as an excuse, though, to do reclassifications, pay them less than what the RCMP officers are making or what municipal police officers are making and just try to make a provincial police force that you don't have to pay fair wages for, because that's actually what this sounds like. Work harder, make less, which is conservative policy 101. We see it with our minimum wage, and we see it with how this government is doing these things and trying to move forward with this provincial police force. It's not fair to the sheriffs, and they deserve to get paid their fair wages.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in this House, as always, to offer my comments on a bill, this Bill 49, Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Just to reiterate what my colleague said a little bit earlier because I think it's worth talking about: 86 per cent of Albertans want to retain the RCMP, and 84 per cent of Albertans believe we have other pressing priorities. There are so many things. There are issues that are public safety, that are caused by poverty. There are so many things we could be doing around poverty retention. We know there are massive deficits in infrastructure in municipalities. We know that there is a massive housing deficit. We know there's a massive deficit of accessible housing, that's for sure. But the point of this is that I think that Albertans have been fairly clear that establishing a new police force or a provincial police force is not something that they think is a priority right now.

I think our job as elected people, Mr. Speaker, is to listen to our constituents. Now, it is quite interesting that in the city that I represent, a sliver of the city or a piece of the city actually belongs to another riding, to Morinville-St. Albert, and I'm pretty sure that another member and I share constituents. I mean, they're all in the same city. What I hear repeatedly from constituents when I meet them at events, whether it's a trade fair or it's an event of some kind where we're just doing outreach or they e-mail my office or they come in for the purpose of this, and that doesn't happen all the time,

but when they do come in and want to address this particular issue, they're pretty crystal clear: this is not a priority for them.

They never say that the RCMP are perfect in St. Albert. They don't say that there is nothing that could happen to improve the services that are provided to the people of St. Albert. What they do say is that they're concerned with the lack of information, and this is something that is just not a priority for them right now. I think St. Albertans have been pretty clear about what their priorities are.

Let me just also add that what makes this also very troubling – well, it's a pattern, honestly, with this government; I could actually have the same notes for almost every bill debate, unfortunately – is that the lack of transparency that this government actively works at creates even more questions. You know, I would suggest that if they were seriously trying to make a case to all Albertans that this is something that they were doing because they believed that the majority of Albertans wanted it and it truly was a cost saver and it truly was going to improve services for Alberta and it truly wasn't going to result in less federal funding, then they would release all of the information that they have access to, and they have not. They're hiding the information on the cost and the impact, the cost of implementation. They've also really been fuzzy and unclear about the loss of funding in terms of the federal government.

Now, perhaps that's a strategy – I don't know – instead of an omission so that, you know, they can bellyache about Ottawa or the feds giving Alberta less money because they've transitioned away from the RCMP. Who knows? I don't try to figure out why they say the things that they do or why they misrepresent the priorities of Albertans, but here we are.

I have some concerns about, well, a few pieces of this legislation, but I'm going to focus on a couple. The first is the Emergency Management Act. One of the things that caught my eye is that it changes from "payment of compensation" to "provision of financial or other assistance" for disaster recovery. Now, one of the things that I've learned about this government is that, you know, kind of innocent-looking changes of phrases can actually have significant impact in terms of a loss or a benefit.

Last spring the UCP expanded the powers during emergencies, so fire, flood, all of those things. That was Bill 21, the Emergency Statutes Amendment Act, 2024. That gave the government of Alberta the ability to overtake local authorities where they determined that more oversight is needed. Now, of course, Mr. Speaker, what we don't tend to get with this government is a clear – I don't know – not a matrix but a decision-making list that would tell every Albertan that wants to know: what's different here? If you're going to take away the power of a municipality or a village or whatever it is to call an emergency or determine that there's a local emergency, government wants to take that away, but what are they doing? What is their framework for making this decision? We've not seen that. Again, it goes back to the lack of transparency that just never seems to end.

You know, I went back to some of the discussion and debate in 2024 around Bill 21. What we know is that this just another piece of legislation that continues to remove decision-making ability from municipalities or other orders of government and gives it to the government of Alberta, the UCP government. In 2024 under Bill 21 the Premier then said that the RMA wanted changes, but if you go back and look at statements that are publicly available, RMA, local governments have said that they weren't consulted. It's one thing for the Premier to misrepresent what local leaders are saying; it's quite another to actually look at the facts.

Their complaints, I think, have been pretty standard, Mr. Speaker. Municipalities, whether they are rural, suburban, whether large, big cities, have been very clear that they've been quite disappointed by the lack of consultation. Consultation can't just be

a check-the-box exercise. It can't just be: "Yeah, we talked to 56 people. Mostly they're friendlies. We sent out an online survey. All good. We're good." Consultation is much more than that.

I think for a government to stand up and say: we actually believe and we have the authority to say that we believe that we are doing precisely what the majority of Albertans want – I don't think that this government's consultation does that of any sort. You can look at that by the statements of municipal leaders, municipal organizations that have leaders involved in them. They're not saying: "Yeah, this is exactly what we needed and wanted. Yeah, we felt so heard. It's awesome." That's not the case, Mr. Speaker.

I would suggest that if, actually, these changes that this government is ushering in around the Police Act, around emergency management, if indeed they were exactly what Albertans wanted, they would have more proof than they do, but they don't, which is why all of us, well, on this side anyway, have been able to stand up and very easily bring up points that counter the rhetoric we've been hearing from the other side. This is not a priority for Albertans.

Bill 18 was another one. Bill 18 was another move to centralize power. It's a power grab. I think you can remember. I think we coined the phrase: everywhere, everything, all at once. That was again this government trying to consolidate their own power.

There's a PricewaterhouseCoopers report, commissioned by this very government, estimating the transition cost to an Alberta police force: \$1.386 billion over six years, not to mention the loss of I think it was over a billion dollars in federal funding.

We know Albertans don't want it. We know municipal leaders don't want it. The vast majority of Albertans are so focused on other things: affordability and health care and education or, if they're on AISH, worrying about the \$200 this government has taken away from them. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that creating an Alberta police force so they can continue to centralize power is not a priority.

With that, I'll take my seat. I will not be supporting this legislation.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise, speak on third reading of Bill 49. What I know is that over this session I've been incredibly moved, and I have mentioned this before, by some of the stories that I have heard about the challenges of policing in rural areas. What the minister said just today about, you know, the fear that if you call police because there's an incident going on and you can't protect yourself and no one comes is awful. I couldn't even imagine. I know that, I believe, the Member for Taber-Warner told a story that really stuck with me about somebody he knows whose entire garage continually gets raided with, like, extremely expensive equipment that just gets taken away by thieves all the time. That's awful.

4:40

So when the government – I mean, Calgary-Elbow is, of course, one of the most privilege urban privilege seats in Alberta. But that privilege does not – so it exists. I won't deny it. But that doesn't prevent those of us who live in Calgary, you know, those of my constituents who live in Calgary-Elbow, from feeling compassion and empathy for what's going on with what appears to be an extremely challenging rural crime problem, a rural crime problem that exists after six years of UCP government.

The challenge here is that there is very much a double standard from this UCP government where the rural crime problem cannot be blamed on their policies. Instead, it must be blamed on the government in place between 2015 and 2019. Yet at the same time that rural crime problem is being used to implement a strategy that, as the Member for Edmonton-Manning has mentioned, has existed

amongst the pro-sovereignty, firewall, Free Alberta wing nuts that have been a part of this province ever since Social Credit was in power.

This is the thematic issue I really have a problem with when it comes to Bill 49. It turns out, like the Winston Churchill saying that I often mention here, never let a crisis go to waste – there is a crisis in rural policing right now and in rural crime right now, just as there is a crisis of drug addiction in Alberta and just as there is a crisis of very high electricity prices and very low reliability and there is a crisis in health care. All of these crises can be laid at the feet of this UCP government, that has been in charge now for six years. Six years is long enough to really pin the blame exactly where it belongs. Albertans' lives are worse on so many different dimensions, and this government has no ideas.

Instead of fixing the recruitment problem, which could be done yesterday, could have been done a year ago, could have been done six years ago, could have been fixed a while ago, instead of doing that, they're going back to their playbook and saying: what pieces of the free Alberta strategy make sense based on the crisis that we have today?

And if you don't believe that, if you think I'm exaggerating, let's just look at the Turkish Tylenol situation, which is exactly an example of people who were faced with a lack of pain medication for their children. I have children. I couldn't get pain medication for them. It sucked. It was not good. And you know what? This government used this as an excuse to send \$70 million to their friends. That's what happened with that. So now we've got a crisis in rural policing that the government is using as an excuse to spend, according to the PricewaterhouseCooper's report, \$400 million standing up an Alberta police force that nobody thinks will help simply because it is a crisis that allows them to use pieces of the free Alberta strategy to do what they wanted anyway. Mr. Speaker, it's kind of gross.

Not only will there be \$400 million spent on standing up an Alberta police force, \$400 million that is nowhere in the budget, nowhere in this bill – this is not a money bill – but there will also be over the next six years that this police force is stood up a loss of approximately \$1 billion of federal transfers that the federal government is just giving us to help with policing. Very similar to the child care strategy and the dental care strategy, this is a government that is simply leaving money on the table. Just like with the orphan wells and the money that was given to the province of Alberta by the federal government to remediate wells, they decided: "You know what? We just couldn't get our act together, so we're sending the money back." A billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, over six years that this UCP government is just deciding: "You know what? We don't need your money." It's a Keystone XL pipeline to nowhere level of waste and inefficiency.

The total will be \$1.4 billion to stand up a police force that nobody wants. Mr. Speaker, that's more than two Sam Mraiches. It's more than double the amount of money that Alberta Health Services has sent over to Sam Mraiche and his various different companies so far, that we know of.

Mr. Speaker, you know, as the Member for Edmonton-City Centre so eloquently explained: the problems are very clear; secondly, the problems are of this government's making; and thirdly, this is not a solution to any of those problems. This is a proposed solution to make Alberta's sovereignty more real in the world.

Mr. Speaker, I can't support it. Thank you.

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

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am also pleased to stand and speak against Bill 49, the Public Safety and Emergency Services

Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. The minister has talked at length about how this legislation, which sets the stage for a provincial police force in Alberta, is to address rural crime. The statements made by the minister are that there are simply not enough RCMP officers in rural areas to address crime.

This raises the first of many questions that I have regarding this legislation. Has this government done the work to understand why the RCMP is struggling to recruit and put forward other potential solutions to address this challenge? It appears that the answer to that question is no, that they have not. But that isn't surprising. This government seems to be allergic to data and performance-based outcomes. As my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre pointed out: we're not here to debate the challenges. We agree on the challenges that are being faced. We're here to debate the proposed solution presented in Bill 49.

According to the Canadian Police Association recruitment and retention is a challenge faced across this country. They report that the rate of police strength across Canada is down 2 per cent since 2022. It's the lowest since 1970, the lowest in the G-7. In 2023 Alberta noticeably experienced a lower rate on a per 100,000 basis than the rest of the country.

4:50

The lower number of officers in and of itself presents challenges to recruitment and retention as officers have more mental and physical health challenges, burnout, and declining work-life balance. The association notes that the perception of law enforcement is changing with today's younger generation expressing concerns with the risks of policing as a profession and the negative media portraying policing. Police officers now need a more diverse set of skills, including community engagement, crisis intervention, de-escalation, and cultural sensitivity. Further, policing faces competition from a growing and diverse job market that maybe offers other opportunities and potentially higher pay.

Oddly the association doesn't present the creation of a provincial police force in Alberta as a solution. Rather, they desire the government to work together with them to develop a nation-wide recruitment strategy, and they desire support in counteracting negative media against policing. But has the government of Alberta stepped up and offered to work with the federal government and other provinces and the CPA on a co-ordinated recruitment strategy? I haven't seen it.

Is it true that rural crime rates are higher than urban crime rates? Yes. This is also consistent across the country. What I haven't heard the government talk about is how the divide between rural and urban crime is highest in Alberta. Is this uniquely due to understaffing in the RCMP? Is RCMP staffing in Alberta markedly lower in Alberta than it is in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, both of which have lower rural urban crime differentials than we have in Alberta, or are there other reasons for having the highest urban-rural divide in the country?

Further, Statistics Canada notes some salient points about rural crime in a page that I tabled earlier today, that northern rural crime rates are higher than southern rural crime rates. So I'll ask the question: in Bill 49 is the government doing any work to address the differential between northern rural communities and southern rural communities? I haven't really seen that in Bill 49. It's not specifically mentioned in Bill 49.

The rates of violent crime perpetrated by an intimate partner or someone known to the victim is considerably higher in rural areas, including here in Alberta, so I will ask: what work has the government done to understand the causes of the higher rate in rural Alberta versus urban Alberta? Is policing the only path to address these issues of violent crime? Does the recently released, and tabled by my

colleague, gender-based violence strategy name and address this? Is the government increasing funding to family violence and gender-based violence specifically in rural areas and in northern rural areas where it's higher? Of course, none of this is mentioned in Bill 49. I haven't heard the government members debate any of this with respect to rural crime.

Also perpetrators of violent rural crime in rural Alberta are generally older than they are in urban Alberta. Do we have an idea of working with RCMP and different kinds of intervention strategies to prevent crime when we're talking about a different demographic? Again, just offering more police officers is not necessarily a complete solution.

The government really isn't going to want to hear this, but violent firearm-related offences, uttering threats against peace officers, are overrepresented in rural Alberta. Other than this bill, what is the government doing to acknowledge this or address this? It is clear from the data and the studies that the simple creation of an Alberta police force does not in and of itself address the higher incidence of rural crime. This government isn't doing anything to understand the root causes or to address those. They are lost in the delusion that creating a provincial police force will solve the challenges of recruitment and retention. They are lost in the delusion that a provincial police force will cost less and deliver more. This simply is not the case. If you want more officers on the ground, you're going to have to pay more. Full stop.

Maybe the government should tell Albertans the real reason for Bill 49 and creating a provincial police force. As my colleagues have mentioned, this is in the Fair Deal Panel, recommendation number 14. The panel's report says that in Alberta creating its own law enforcement to Ottawa, Alberta is in charge of its own destiny. Let's be honest, that's the real reason the government brought forward Bill 49: as part of their separatist agenda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 49. It's a bill that creates another Crown corporation and a bill that establishes an Alberta provincial police force, and this is really a good segue from the Member for Calgary-Foothills because I was just going to say that it all started with the 2020 Fair Deal Panel. This is not new. The Fair Deal Panel not only recommended the independent police force, but it also recommended to withdraw from the Canada pension plan and to create an Alberta pension plan instead. Now we have this flirting with separation from Canada in the name of advocating for our interests.

I want to start by prefacing my debate today, Mr. Speaker, by saying: I love Canada. Our country is alive and well, and it is worth fighting for despite the many differences we have with other provinces and the federal government. But we keep hearing a lot of UCP government tantrums, and it cannot be: if you do not give me what I want, I will leave Canada. It cannot be: if you do not give me what I want, I will leave the Canada pension plan. It cannot be: if you do not give me what I want, I will recklessly spend taxpayer money and create my own police force.

I did hear the minister passionately talk about safety today, and there's no question that he cares deeply about this topic, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely need to keep our communities safe in both urban and rural communities. And, yes, there is discrepancy in resources between urban and rural centres. This is real, and no one is disputing that this is a problem. We also see this on energy bills, for example, specifically in distribution costs.

The last 24 hours in Calgary have been heartbreaking as well, Mr. Speaker. A city bus driver was brutally attacked while on the job at 1

a.m. A young man died in a rollover crash. A 16-year-old boy was struck in a crosswalk and left with life-altering injuries. A paramedic was injured while responding to the collision. Safety is critical, and we need to bring all the agencies and all the stakeholders to keep our communities safe. I want to take this opportunity to thank the police officers, the RCMP, and all the front line for their service and for keeping us safe.

But, Mr. Speaker, this independent police force is a massive, costly experiment. It has a high start-up and ongoing costs over the years, plus Alberta loses on the federal funding. If you add up all these costs and subtract the loss of the federal funding, we are at the \$1 billion mark cost for our province and on taxpayer money. The minister has a responsibility to conserve taxpayer money and to be a real steward of public money, and I think this government has lost the plot.

The minister also talked at length about the white paper from former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on modernizing the RCMP. I did not know he was a fan of JT and his work. That was a nice surprise. The white paper is also looking at strengthening the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission as well as public reporting on misconduct, investigations and outcomes, and being transparent about all that. They're also looking at honouring the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, specifically those related to policing and justice. Since the minister agrees with this white paper and the modernizing in it, is the minister committed to these reforms and this type of transparency proposed in the white paper as he creates the Alberta independent police force?

5:00

I also heard the minister in a previous debate say that this is an opt-in program. The minister talked a lot about choice and asked: why does the Alberta NDP not support giving municipalities a choice? Well, no, Mr. Speaker, this is what we call a logical fallacy. It is a flawed way to construct an argument to force your own conclusion. We love choice. We believe in giving women a choice about their bodies and their reproductive choices, for example. I love the choice in having transportation. I love driving my car or taking the bus or taking my bike. You know, I hope the minister of transportation will maintain safe and well-maintained bike lanes so we can have all of these choices. We love choice. We love choice when it makes sense and when it creates the best value for Albertans and for taxpayers. An independent Alberta police force in this framework right now is a massive expense that neither makes sense nor creates the best value.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 76, agreed to earlier this afternoon, one hour of debate has now been completed, and I am required to put to the Assembly all necessary questions to dispose of Bill 49, Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, at third reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:03 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Johnson	Rowswell
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Jones	Schow
Bouchard	LaGrange	Schulz
Cooper	Loewen	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Long	Singh

de Jonge	Lovely	Smith
Dreeshen	Lundy	Stephan
Dyck	McDougall	Turton
Ellis	Nally	van Dijken
Fir	Neudorf	Wiebe
Getson	Nicolaides	Williams
Glubish	Nixon	Wilson
Horner	Petrovic	Wright, J.
Hunter	Pitt	Yaseen
Jean		

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Hayter	Renaud
Batten	Hoyle	Schmidt
Boparai	Irwin	Shepherd
Calahoo Stonehouse	Kayande	Sweet
Ellingson	Metz	Wright, P.
Eremenko		

Totals: For – 43 Against – 16

[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cooper in the chair]

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

Bill 55 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

The Acting Chair: The Committee of the Whole has under consideration Bill 55. Are there any comments, questions, amendments to be offered with respect to Bill 55? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor.

Dr. Metz: Mr. Chair, I would like to propose an amendment. This is an amendment to Bill 55, which is brought forth by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. The purpose of this amendment is to protect people who are . . .

The Acting Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, but if you can help us out. Just sending through some amendments, the stack there. Give us about 30 seconds or less for us to make sure that the amendment is in order, and then we'll turn it back to you.

Hon. members, this amendment will be referred to as A3.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

5:10

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This amendment to Bill 55, which is now called A3, is proposed to protect people who are experiencing homelessness. I bring it forward on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora. This amendment amends the act so that the hospital operator cannot transfer houseless people back to the street. It specifies the location of a transfer, one of the options being a shelter, and specifically says that it "may not be a hotel, motel, short-term housing" place. As it stands now, the hospital operator, which could be through the operator or the administrator, may transfer patients anywhere they consider appropriate.

Why is this amendment important? Well, because we have a responsibility to look after vulnerable people, and people that are houseless are indeed some of our most vulnerable. We must do our best to protect them. They have no voice. This is also a very minor

amendment to just tweak this legislation and specify that they can't be transferred out to some very clearly inappropriate places.

Also this is important because we're in a housing crisis, and we know that the number of people that are homeless is only going to go up with the lack of any real attention to this problem. We want to assure that they at least would be transferred to a shelter if not to another institution or another ward within that institution.

Because this bill enables private hospital operators, and private operators must make a profit, one way to make a profit is to limit who they care for. We need to be sure that these operators are not profitable because they transfer out these helpless people. Possibly they will go to another publicly operated facility, but we want to be sure they don't send them out to the street.

As our public hospitals now have to take everyone they serve, that is the most likely place that patients that are not going to be profitable will be sent. This amendment will at least ensure they don't go to the street or a motel. We already know that this government has shown a bit of affinity for sending people to motels that don't meet the basic needs of the people going there. We certainly can't expect a private operator, which is required by law to focus on shareholder profits, not on patients, to be concerned about where a patient will be transferred.

This amendment limits the types of places that they can send the patient, and I believe that the members opposite will accept that this just strengthens the legislation. It protects vulnerable individuals. I believe that they will also want to protect them and will acknowledge that it was an error sending people to a hotel and that this amendment can therefore improve this bill and protect both their reputation as well as the patients.

I would like to have us vote on this amendment.

The Acting Chair: Is there anyone wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. the Minister of Justice, the keeper.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's nice to see you in that role, and you're doing a wonderful job.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity spoke very eloquently about this proposed amendment. The amendment was introduced on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. But there is a problem in the inconsistency with what the Member for Calgary-Varsity said and what this amendment actually seeks to achieve. The amendment proposes a wording substitution which requires the location to be a shelter. By the Member for Calgary-Varsity's own submission, she stated that it could be another institution, it could be another ward, or some other place. None of those would be achieved by the restrictive language of this amendment, and because of that, I would suggest that members of this Assembly vote it down.

The Acting Chair: Are there others?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call the question. On amendment A3 – oh, sorry, my apologies.

Mr. Nixon: It's okay.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: First time at that table. I'll excuse it, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: I couldn't see you.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you very much. I'll be quick because I understand the opposition would like some more time.

I do want to respond very quickly to the amendment. I think there's a tremendous amount of misinformation associated with the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity's comments, that is very

important when it comes to working with some of the most vulnerable people in the health care system.

The challenge we have with what the NDP continue to put forward with how to care for the homeless is that we will continue to end up in situations that we're seeing all across the province, which is people who truly need help with things like addiction – sometimes complex mental health issues, housing – being put into the wrong spot to receive that housing. We're seeing that all across the province. We saw that where people ended up outside of hospitals in things like encampments and in tents and in situations where they were being forced to try to heat their living environment and were dying from being burnt to death. The government then stepped in and created things like the navigation centre, beefed up supports inside our emergency shelters, because that's the wrong spot to be in, to be inside an encampment. It's dangerous for a variety of different reasons, and we need to create appropriate places for people to get help.

The second challenge, though, is that if you're in hospitals, to say that that is the appropriate place for somebody who's experiencing homelessness or a lot of the chronic issues associated with homelessness – that's the worst spot that those individuals could be in, Mr. Speaker. It's causing challenges for those individuals because it's not where they can get access to the appropriate services that they need for their circumstances. It's causing challenges for people who also then need to access that acute-care system, who are in need of being able to go to the hospital to receive services because of what's been taking place. We now have beds that have people in them that don't need the services of those beds, that need to go to the other services.

At its core the challenge is that the Official Opposition continues to not want to work with the large nonprofit sector that we depend on to care for the homeless, and that's the challenge with this amendment. It would indicate that individuals could not leave to go to the appropriate social services and receive the appropriate treatment because of the great dislike of the Official Opposition for a lot of things like homeless shelters and other organizations, often faith-based organizations, that care for individuals like that.

Again, why this matters, though, is because the individual doesn't get help. The emergency room for somebody experiencing homelessness that is not an acute-care need is the Edmonton and Calgary navigation centres, is places like the appropriate shelters that are funded to care for those people, is recovery programs, not an acute-care hospital where you're not receiving any of those services and actually are impacting other people who need acute-care services.

My last point – I mean, I'd be happy to talk about this for another 20 minutes if the opposition would like – is that the implication that the hospitals are discharging people to the streets is false. It's not accurate. Often you'll hear the opposition talk about hotel medicine and this implication that people were being discharged into hotels that needed medical service. Nobody was discharged to a hotel that needed medical service. That is 100 per cent false, Mr. Chair. A hundred per cent false. Each individual in the circumstances that we're talking about had been medically discharged, and it's important that we actually intervene at that point to make sure they get to an appropriate facility. The NDP's way would open up opportunities for people not to end up where they need to be.

I don't want anybody in the public to think that the good-working, hard-working people in our acute-care facilities take homeless people and dump them in bus stops or kick them out of the hospitals. It's not the case. But if we pass this amendment, this would guarantee that individuals would not be able to get access to services, it would continue to disrupt the acute-care system, and at the end of the day what really matters is that it would hurt people.

It would hurt people that need to get acute-care services, and it would hurt people who need appropriate social services.

So I urge every member of this Chamber to reject the NDP amendment because, again, it is very dangerous for the very people that it's said to help.

The Acting Chair: Now, are there others?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity is rising.

5:20

Dr. Metz: Mr. Chair, I'm going to be speaking to the main bill, Bill 55. There is really a lot in this bill that needs to be reviewed, talked about, and brought forward, but of course we have so very little time to address this. I do want to just leave the minister with a few questions. How will the minister assure that private corporations who will run some of our hospitals will make a profit? If and when they do not, Albertans will be left to bail them out, just like we have seen with DynaLife and 20 years ago in Calgary with the Health Resource Centre. We have seen Conservative governments repeatedly trying and failing to privatize health care, which only leads to lousy care and huge bailout costs for Albertans. Given that the literature also shows that we are not going after a win here by trying to beat this dog, we should move on to other things and keep our public health care system.

Second question is: given that central wait-lists are known to reduce wait times and that a stated goal of privatization is to reduce wait times, how will the minister implement this strategy to improve wait times when hospitals are competing with each other rather than co-operating? When will this government start being transparent about the wait times so they can prove their strategy is effective?

With that, I will end my speaking and pass time over to my colleagues.

The Acting Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has the floor.

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to be able to stand and speak to Bill 55 here, the second Health Statutes Amendment Act that we've actually had to debate in this Chamber in this session. Of course, it does follow Bill 22, that we were debating exactly around this time last year. I think to better understand Bill 55, I am going to take just a minute of my opportunity here to address Bill 22, because it does give us some important context on the bill debate today.

Bill 22 was the enabling legislation, Mr. Chair, that really kick-started the dissolution of Alberta Health Services and replaced its capacity with four provincial health agencies, many sectoral ministers, an oversight minister, all kinds of different layers of bureaucracy, frankly, that certainly doesn't seem to have fidelity to the red tape reduction that this government seems very proud of espousing.

During her opening remarks on Bill 22 the minister stated, in regard to breaking down Alberta's health care system, that these amendments would enable the creation of four new provincial health agencies focused on delivering the very best health care to Albertans. She further added that in regard to engagement sessions and outreach activities, when they factored in telephone town halls and online feedback, they'd received input from more than 18,000 Albertans and health care workers. I think we need to be really clear

that they never actually asked the question of how people feel about the dissolution of Alberta Health Services and the health care system in Alberta as we know it. The question was never – you know, it's like asking, "What's your favourite colour?" and then saying: "Great. We're having pizza for dinner tonight." Like, they have nothing to do with each other. That's precisely what a lot of those engagements actually did. You know, I think it's totally safe to say that the government had already presupposed the outcome of those consultations. They were committed to breaking down Alberta Health Services, to really taking it out at the knees, and creating these four silos, that have, in fact, a year since actually demonstrated that it has become already a terribly convoluted and incredibly confusing process for people to try and navigate.

You know, I think about a personal experience that my own family had to go through during COVID, where my mom landed in the emergency department and had to be committed for a time and got the kind of ALC code, which is the alternative levels of care assignment, meaning that she was going to be next in line for long-term care, but there were no spaces available. It's precisely that kind of example that I think is creating a great deal of confusion and misery for Albertans right now when it comes to trying to navigate these four silos.

Frankly, I can't imagine it's particularly easy for the people who are actually trying to manage that system themselves, Mr. Chair, where almost inevitably a patient is going to require service and care and administration from multiple, two or more, of these silos of health care service delivery. It begs the question about just what an immensely administratively burdensome task it is to actually try to co-ordinate across all of these columns.

Indeed, what we had warned about when we debated Bill 22 has actually come to pass, which is why we're now talking about Bill 55; that is, just trying to unpack how shortsighted the plans were for the UCP to actually explode Alberta's health care system and create this new approach that is not being duplicated anywhere else in the world. Every other major country, you know, that kind of compares in terms of our GDP and our economy is working to better integrate the systems. Here we are dismantling the whole thing, but lo and behold it's actually going to take a lot more co-ordination than that.

Bill 55, for example, creates the shared sector services agency that's going to manage HR and IT and admin functions across all of these silos. As shadow minister of Mental Health and Addiction I've had an opportunity to speak with many of the health care workers that have been impacted by this transition and by the development of Recovery Alberta, for example, the very first of the silos to be kind of formalized. Let me tell you. That transition was not a smooth one, and I think we have barely scratched the surface to better understand just how deep those implications will actually run, particularly not just for the patients who have to work across multiple silos but for the actual physicians and specialists, registered nurses, and addiction specialists, for example, who will also be working across these various silos.

I think we have a bit of a hornets' nest in the making here, Mr. Chair, but Bill 55 does nothing but double down. It doubles down with the added extremely worrisome component of privatization. My question to the minister yesterday, I think, really highlighted just exactly the kind of, you know, mental gymnastics that are being pursued here in Bill 55 to justify: "No, no. This isn't privatization. There are no operators who are going to be running private hospitals." But that's not what we're saying here, nor is that what the bill says. The bill says that there can be private operators running approved hospitals. They're not the same thing. Where you put the words matters.

The suggestion that a private operator is going to be running one of these approved hospitals begs the question about where exactly the profit motive is going to lie. I would imagine that in those Bill 22 consultations, those 18,000 Albertans that called in, the workers

that were engaged in every corner of this province – I am going to wager that privatization was not one of the topics of that conversation. It wasn't a question to put to the floor, I would imagine, nor was it one of the pieces of feedback that those individuals provided.

You know what Alberta really needs to address our worker shortage, to address our long wait times, to address years-long waits for hip and knee replacement surgeries? We better privatize. Let's undermine one of the things that we hold most sacred in this province and across this country. That is the ability to access health care without ever having to pull out your credit card, without ever having to, as the Premier has suggested, ask for friends, to crowdsource for medical treatment. That is not what Albertans have asked for, and Bill 55 doubles down.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to take a moment to speak briefly to Bill 55. I want to address what my colleague from Calgary-Currie was speaking about just now as well, this particular piece of Bill 55 by which the government is looking to give itself the power to appoint a person to run a hospital but which we know that would also include a corporation.

5:30

Now, this is something that the Premier has been advocating for for some time. We go back to 2021. Transforming Alberta Health Services is part of the Freedom Talk series. The Premier outlined a three-part plan to split the rules of health provision to purchaser, provider, and auditor, to take those away from AHS, have AHS just become a contractor running hospitals. So we have seen the Premier follow through on that. She has done precisely what she said she would do.

Now, in another piece we've seen the Premier talk about charter hospitals, and she has said that there should be similar options that she talked about in a paper that she wrote for the University of Calgary, talked about charter schools and public schools and said: "You know what? Health care: we should have the same thing."

There should be similar options. Public hospitals that are publicly funded and publicly delivered. Charter hospitals that are publicly funded and privately delivered and cannot charge extra fees. Private hospitals that can receive contracts for publicly paid services as well as serve paid customers,

so work for profit. In the Premier's view she said that

Charter hospitals . . . create a world of new opportunity. They can specialize in the delivery of a particular service [like] hernias [or] the prestigious Shouldice Clinic.

She talks about knees and hips, and then she references:

like the Health Resource Centre did before the government shut them down.

Now, Mr. Chair, the Health Resource Centre was not in fact shut down by the government. The Health Resource Centre went bankrupt. This was a private surgical clinic that was set up in Calgary that was contracted by the government, and then it was found that they were in fact charging more for their surgeries. Sound familiar? It's certainly what we're seeing and hearing in corrupt care. These guys were charging more than the public facilities to provide the same surgeries, and even with that extra money they couldn't make it work. They went bankrupt, and the public had to bail them out. The Premier here touts them as a success, something she would like to emulate.

So the concern here, Mr. Chair, is that the Premier has clearly been on the record advocating for what she calls charter hospitals, that is, a public hospital, public funded but run by a private corporation or a private group. [interjections] The fact is that that is unprecedented for an entire hospital, and what we have seen in every case where this government has pursued, as the minister for Community and Social services heckles across the aisle – he’s well aware. He’s been at the table for all these reports. He knows this government has been spending far more on chartered surgical facilities and getting far less. He’s well aware of that. The fact is that he was at the table for the DynaLife fiasco, so he was well aware of the decisions that were made that led to the fact that we had to bail out that private corporation at a cost to Albertans. They delivered less, worse service at a greater cost.

And that is what this government is proposing now, it wants to enable itself to do with our hospitals, Mr. Chair, the place people go when they are at their sickest, the place where we have people who are at the risk of their lives. The place where people go, the chartered surgical facilities: they don’t take the complex cases. They do all the simple knees and hips. The tricky ones: those go to the hospital, the places where we have empty ORs sitting right now because we don’t have enough doctors. We don’t have enough anaesthesiologists. We don’t have enough OR nurses because of this government’s massive expansion of chartered surgical facilities, which has sucked them all away.

Now this government wants to give themselves the option to privatize the entire hospital, have private control with public dollars.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Shepherd: “Hear, hear,” says the minister of agriculture, cheering for this. Oh, pardon me. Not the minister of agriculture. I apologize. I misheard. It was another member across the aisle, but certainly the minister of community and social services seems very supportive of going in this direction as he heckles from across the aisle. It’s disappointing, Mr. Chair, that we have ministers of the Crown that do not take this seriously, that do not consider how these dollars are actually spent, the risk to people’s lives, the risk to our health care system.

The fact is, Mr. Chair, that I am deeply concerned . . .

Mr. Nixon: Worst opposition ever.

Mr. Shepherd: “Worst opposition,” says the worst minister we’ve had for community and social services by a long shot I’d say, Mr. Chair. [interjections]

The Acting Chair: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Shepherd: I apologize and withdraw, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: I just think that a tit-for-tat is probably fine, but out of an abundance of caution and a desire to not have things go further off the rails, if we can get back to your main point I think we’ll be well served.

Mr. Shepherd: I’m happy to, and I invite the minister to find his own opportunity to join the debate if he so wishes.

I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that going to private operators is not going to solve the problem that we have in rural Alberta, where they can’t staff these hospitals still. It’s not a problem with AHS. It’s not a problem with Covenant Health. It’s a problem with a government that has mismanaged the system, and them going to choose to hire a private operator, a private corporation to offer a public facility, a private corporation that’s going to need to look for profit is not

going to solve that problem for anyone, including the constituents of the minister for community and social services.

Bill 55 does not provide any solutions to the problems in front of us. It’s more of the set dressing, the rearranging of the furniture that this government is doing to claim it is acting to improve the health care system for Albertans while they continue to fail Albertans at every front. I’d be disappointed, but that’s pretty much been the record of this government, Mr. Chair.

I will not be voting in favour of Bill 55.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m rising to give some context that I think the government seems to conveniently try to avoid talking about. They’ve spun a lot of information trying to look at the success of some of the work that they’ve had when it’s come to the Alberta surgical initiative and using it as a base for an argument for this piece of legislation.

Now, I have some data that I’ll share with the Chamber, recognizing that there’s a gap between some of the information because during COVID the numbers just don’t make any sense because it was a unique time and there was lots of different things happening. I think it’s important to recognize – and I’ll talk about 2021-2022 and then ’23-24. But the Alberta government’s decline in per capita investment in public hospitals is a significant concern. Public hospitals have been put basically up against private, and they’re serving a growing and aging population with very few resources.

Between ’18 and ’19 and ’22 and ’23, leaving the COVID years out, public payments to for-profit surgical facilities increased by 66 per cent out of the budget, while public or expenditures increased by 12 per cent. In one year alone public payments to for-profit facilities nearly doubled. Public payments totalled \$28.6 million in ’22-23 and jumped to \$55.8 million in ’23-24. Since the Alberta surgical initiative started in 2018-2019 to ’23-24 public payments to the for-profit facilities have increased by 225 per cent. Let’s compare that to what we do for our public system. It’s not comparable.

Alberta government continues to claim that greater for-profit investment and surgical outsourcing reduces wait times, but wait time data doesn’t actually show this. The reason I say that is median wait times are longer for most priority procedures under the Alberta surgical initiative. For nine of 11 priority procedures that are tracked by the Canadian institute of health median wait times increased under this model, including knee replacements and all cancer surgeries. Median wait times, that is how long patients in the 50th percentile wait, increased by 8 per cent for surgery to 48 per cent for lung cancer surgery. Even for knee replacements, the one that the minister often refers to, one of the main orthopaedic procedures outsourced to for-profit facilities has median wait increases of 27 per cent. Cataract and hip replacement surgery wait times declined by 31 per cent respectively, but notable cancer surgeries performed in public hospitals significantly increased.

5:40

I guess if the success that this government wants to go off of is knees and hips are great but people with cancer are going to wait longer, I guess that’s a success story. I would say it’s probably not a success story that people that are most vulnerable and have the most severe illnesses are the ones that are waiting longer now under this model.

I would also challenge that due to this model now we’re seeing that hospitals are not being funded or staffed up appropriately. Public hospitals are not funded and staffed during evenings and weekends. In most cases Alberta doesn’t lack the physical space to

perform surgeries – we all know that hospitals have emergency rooms that are waiting and sitting vacant – but what it does lack is nursing and anaesthetist workforces to increase surgical activity because of paying for-profit providers a premium rate. They have more than two times the funding that hospitals have; therefore, they recruit and they're able to attain that workforce that we need in the public service model.

Again, the government has introduced Bill 55. Their argument is that it's about efficiency and it's about serving Albertans, but in fact what it is – this data supports it and indicates that even a year ago what is happening is that the government has made a clear decision to start funding, again, up to 224 per cent more to private delivery services for health care while eroding public service investment. The recruitment of specialists that are needed to do these surgeries is now being driven to the private sector and for-profit sector. We can't retain people in the public sector because the government is choosing not to fund the public sector to the same rate that they are funding the private sector. So the whole premise of this bill is inaccurate, and it's false.

Because of that, I cannot support it. The data that the government is telling Albertans for the rationale for this bill isn't even accurate data. Until the government wants to be open and transparent about what they're actually doing, I can't in good conscience stand here and vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak in strong opposition to Bill 55, the so-called Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. This bill represents yet another dangerous step in the UCP government's ongoing campaign to dismantle and privatize Alberta's public health care system, a system that Albertans have built, paid for, and defended time and time again. Let me be clear. Albertans don't want American-style, two-tiered, Trump-style health care. They want a health care system that's there when they need it, whether they live in Edmonton or on a reserve or in northern Alberta, whether they're wealthy or working class, whether they have a credit card or not. But instead of investing in public solutions, more doctors, shorter wait times, timely surgeries, this government is making it easier for private corporations to run our hospitals. That's what this bill does. It allows private for-profit operators to be designated as approved hospitals with sweeping powers over patient care. It isn't modernization; it's monetization.

We've seen this playbook before, first with Bill 30 in 2020 and then Bill 26 last fall, and now with Bill 55 the government is finishing the job, winding down Alberta Health Services, handing over governance of hospital services to four new sector-based corporations – Primary Care Alberta, Acute Care Alberta, Recovery Alberta, and assisted living Alberta – and behind it all, a quiet, calculated expansion of privatization. Bill 55 gives the Health minister and now so-called sector ministers broad powers to hand control of hospitals to any person or corporation they deem capable. That could include private companies, that could include friends and donors, and it could certainly include large, for-profit health care providers like Telus Health or others waiting in the wings.

Let's not forget that under Alberta law corporations are persons, so when this bill says a person can run a hospital, that's not a typo; it's an invitation. So let's ask the obvious questions. Will this bill allow private for-profit companies to operate public hospitals? Can chartered surgical facilities be designated as approved hospitals? What happens when decisions about hospital care are

made in boardrooms, not by health professionals? And why do these decisions, buried in regulation, not spell out clearly in legislation that Albertans deserve transparency, not more smoke and mirrors? This bill isn't just deplorable; it's dangerous, and it's cruel. Buried in the pages of the clauses that allow hospitals to discharge patients to motels – nothing like good old hotel medicine, shelters, or even the streets. That's not health care. It's abandonment.

Imagine being a recovering patient, maybe a senior or someone battling addiction or maybe giving birth, only to be told your hospital stay is over. This is a reality. There have been times when I've been supporting individuals in the hospital where the baby is taken by child welfare and immediately the mother is released to the streets. This is not how we treat people in a just society. This is not how we honour the dignity of patients who have nowhere else to go. It's how we care for our elders, our loved ones, our neighbours. And let me say this as a Nehiyaw Haudenosaunee iskwew, someone who knows first-hand the gaps in health care, they fall hardest on First Nations and Métis communities. Privatization has never served Indigenous people. We know what it means. It means that we get left behind, and we get left behind by waiting months, years, and oftentimes that's too late. Often we see that people are discharged too soon, or their braids are cut, or young people are turned away, because they don't care.

This bill will only make things worse for those in the margins, people living in the rural and remote communities, Indigenous communities, seniors, people with disabilities, low-income families. Mr. Chair, our vulnerable citizens deserve a government that will protect them and look after them, and that is not what we have here in this bill.

Let's be honest. This bill is about cutting corners and shifting costs. It's about moving risk away from the government and on to patients and families. That's why Albertans are now being told to bring their credit cards to hospitals. That's why we're seeing out-of-pocket fees creep in bit by bit, and that's why this bill should be stopped. Albertans want and deserve a health care system that puts patients before profits – publicly funded, publicly delivered, and publicly accountable – one that recruits and retains doctors, nurses, front-line workers, folks that help clean the places and spaces, one that reduces ER wait times, one that ensures a grandmother in High Level has the same access as a child in Calgary. Bill 55 does none of that. It creates chaos, breeds corruption, and opens the door for more cruelty. I stand opposed to this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. In the interest of time I would like to move an amendment to Bill 55, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

The Acting Chair: Thank you. Go ahead, please. Just give me a moment to get it.

Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A4.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you again, Mr. Chair. These are housekeeping amendments. The amendments will help ensure that the newly created health corporations that are being created now are explicitly authorized to conduct internal quality assurance and clarify ministerial jurisdictions, specifically the changes at provincial health corporations in section 2, created under the Provincial Health Agencies Act, to the list of bodies allowed to appoint these committees. It also removes some outdated references, one of which is the reference to regional health authorities, which no longer exist in the same form. Finally, it updates which minister is responsible, switching away from the term "Minister of Health" to a term used now in the proposed amendment,

which indicates that we would move to the Minister responsible for the Provincial Health Agencies Act.

The second amendment, of course, Mr. Chair, is to section 25 of the Health Information Act. It's a large amendment package that modernizes the way that we refer to people and departments that are allowed to handle health information. It introduces two new terms: "departmental custodian," which refers to specific government departments that are allowed to manage health data under the law, and "ministerial custodian," which refers to the ministers responsible for specific areas like mental health, public health, or continuing care. Of course, these updated terms provide consistency across the law and are a much-needed cleanup that will make future amendments and the implementation of Bill 55 smoother. This amendment also creates new clauses to reflect the current responsibilities of various Health ministers, including the minister responsible for mental health services, public health, and continuing care.

5:50

The third amendment, Mr. Chair, is to section 45 of the Provincial Health Agencies Act. This is a simple cleanup item that corrects a reference to the wrong piece of legislation. It removes a reference to the outdated Alberta Health Act and replaces it with the correct statute, which is, in fact, the Public Health Act.

Finally, the fourth amendment is to section 48 of the Public Inquiries Act. It updates the language to reflect the current structure of health governance. It removes a reference to "other hospital," a term that no longer fits with how facilities are categorized. It updates the reference from Minister of Health to the Minister responsible for the Provincial Health Agencies Act or the Minister responsible for the Public Health Act.

Mr. Chair, these are simple housekeeping amendments. I trust that the members of this Assembly will vote in favour of them. These amendments are intended to make sure that our statutory framework is clear, more up to date, and easier to apply across various departments.

Thank you.

Dr. Metz: Of course, this is a fairly hefty amendment that's coming fairly late in the process. The one concern that I would raise is that it shares personal health information with a new position, a ministerial custodian. We have some concerns about this sharing of personal information without the person's consent. Otherwise, there's not anything else in here that we're specifically going to address.

The Acting Chair: Are there others wishing to speak to amendment A4? The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Yeah. I think, just briefly, to echo what my colleague just said. Given the fact that we were presented with this amendment very late – there's a lot here. I think we've expressed our concerns around this government and privacy legislation with Bill 46. So I think my colleague's concerns around privacy are rightly founded. I would encourage the minister and the government next time to try to work with us a little bit more closely on amendments so that we can have a fulsome debate, but as we see with time allocation, they're not interested in fulsome debate.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Are there others?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment A4 carried]

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Committee of the Whole on Bill 55. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood now has the call.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Honoured to have you there in that spot.

You know, I talked last night, as I rallied against this government's use of time allocation, about just how incredibly antidemocratic this government is and continues to be. In front of us tonight we have a 332-page bill that includes significant changes to Alberta's health care system, impacting 54 pieces of legislation under 19 ministries of this government. This is a giant omnibus bill, with huge implications for all of us and for all of the constituents that we represent, yet we are only getting a few measly hours of debate on this bill. What an absolute shame and what an antidemocratic move, a move that this UCP government has made 71 times since 2019, since I was elected, more than any government ever. I stand here saying this, you know, at a time when health care workers are under extreme pressure. It's National Nurses Week. There are just so many things that this government could be doing through policy, through legislation to be uplifting and supporting health care workers, but they're not.

I want to take a moment to quote a few stakeholders who've been, you know, really rallying on the fight against Bill 55 and, perhaps worded more positively, the fight for public health care in this province. Friends of Medicare is an incredible organization doing really important work protecting public health care, and they point out that while there are many worrying parts contained in this proposed legislation, the change on page 90 is of particular concern.

What happens on page 90? Well, this consolidates all existing hospital designations under a new designation of hospital operators section, which would allow the government to appoint entities other than a provincial health agency or provincial health corporation to operate hospitals, allowing for an easy pathway for the government to turn over designated hospital sites to for-profit corporations at the will of the minister.

That's right. You heard me correctly, for the people watching at home, and I know for a fact there are at least three. In fact, actually, I know there are a lot because people are paying attention to Bill 55, and they are fired up. We had a number of people in the gallery earlier today as well who are health care workers and who are adamantly opposed to this piece of legislation. That's right.

Bill 55 allows the government to appoint anyone who is not a provincial health agency or provincial health corporation to operate Alberta's hospitals. To quote the fabulous Sandra Azocar from AUPE, who was here as well, she notes that "Because of Bill 55 and Budget 2025, the government now has 380 land titles & 700 structures it can sell . . . all hospitals and health care facilities," all important health care institutions "that Albertans have paid for and depend on." That's right. This government that we can't trust on anything else has now decided that they are dead set on attacking public health care and opening up our system to much privatization. Wow.

We've seen nothing but spin from the minister and the Premier on this. The minister has repeatedly said that we're wrong. I think we can hear her voice echoing in our heads. Nothing could be further from the truth. Well, it's right here, Minister. It's in the bill in black and white. She mentioned that we hadn't read the bill. Well, we've read the bill, and it's there.

The Premier, too, refuses to acknowledge what's happening. As Friends of Medicare points out, at a press conference on February 28 the Premier was asked if this was part of a plan to sell hospitals to private entities or private corporations. She could neither confirm nor deny, but instead she stated that the change will allow us to choose the operator, and that will allow us to repurpose them to our

needs. Yikes. Not the type of words that we could be trusting from this Premier.

I noted nurses earlier. It's National Nurses Week, and I am a big fan of nurses, as many people know, so let's quote UNA, United Nurses of Alberta, on this. I note my colleague from Calgary-Acadia, just close to me, a fabulous nurse and somebody who we are just so grateful to have in the Chamber with us today, not that she's here, present or absent, just to be clear. They note that it is very clear that despite claims they intend to protect public health care, the UCP plans to open the door wide to full U.S.-style privatization of Alberta's public health care system. They also believe that parts of Bill 55 may be in violation of the Canada Health Act. We should all be concerned about that as well, and I

think we can imagine that there will potentially be some pushback on that and perhaps some legal recourse.

This is interesting. The United Nurses and so many other stakeholders who have stood with us, the NDP, throughout the fight against Bill 55 have been clear. Private corporations must never be allowed to run and profit from public hospitals, full stop. Albertans have been clear, too. They want our public health care system protected. They want to be able to access health care with their health care card, not their credit card.

The Acting Chair: Hon. members, the time is now 6 o'clock, and the committee is recessed until 7:30.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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