

Remarks by Rakhi Pancholi, Deputy Leader, Alberta NDP

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“So it has really been a wild ride this fall. In the over six years that I’ve been in MLA, I’ve seen the UCP do a lot of damage, but never in so short of a time. And the personal impact of government’s choices in the past two months on so many Albertans is unprecedented. There is not a person in this province who has not been affected by the government’s choices, and I share Naheed’s comments, which echoes what I hear from Albertans daily. What is this government doing? So as we do a recap of the fall sitting, let’s review what the UCP actually did, shall we? I’m gonna have to warn you, buckle up.

“The government forced 51,000 striking teachers back to work under a contract that 91% of teachers rejected. They did this by using the Notwithstanding Clause, stripping away the rights of every Alberta teacher, and rammed it through the Legislature in one day by limiting the amount of time that MLAs could debate it. Oh, and the premier didn’t even show up to defend it or to vote on it. No, she flew off to the Middle East and left her education minister to defend it, which is maybe no surprise why he’s now the first UCP MLA to face recall. The Premier and the UCP put teachers and students back into the same crowded classrooms with no improvements and only the weakest promises that, one day, they might help public education. Oh yeah, and still, the lowest education funding per student in Canada.

“The government then took away the rights of even more Albertans by using the Notwithstanding Clause three more times against trans youth, women and girls, medical professionals, and parents. While actively dismantling AHS and our public health care system over the past two years, the UCP then officially established American style, two-tier private health care in Alberta. It won’t mean better health care for Albertans, and it won’t mean more Alberta Health care workers. It just means those who can afford it will get care before those who can’t.

“We’re not done. The government cut financial supports for people with disabilities by forcing a switch from the AISH program to their new program, ADAP. This reduces the monthly income of Albertans with severe disabilities.

“Even more, after inviting newcomers to Alberta for years, the UCP is putting citizenship markers on drivers’ licenses, which has no purpose other than to stigmatize immigrants and lay the groundwork for cutting people’s access to provincial services. It’s divisive and ,frankly, un-Canadian.

“The UCP gave *nine* of their own Parliamentary secretaries a raise while voting down a minimum wage increase that could have helped 114,000 Alberta workers.

“The Minister of Justice gave himself immunity from any professional discipline. The top lawyer in the province now has the lowest professional standards of any lawyer in Alberta.

“UCP changed the rules mid game on citizen initiative petitions and referendum questions to appease their separatist supporters. They denied adequate funding to elections Alberta just to do the work that they’re required to do on recall and citizen initiatives, the laws created by the UCP themselves.

“They regularly use time allocation, basically cutting off debate in the Legislature to ram through some of the most controversial bills. And that’s just what happened within the Legislature.

“Let’s not forget, September started with a poorly-thought-out book ban that the UCP had to then reverse. Thanks to a reckless and dangerous aversion to public health measures by this government, Canada lost its measles-free status and Alberta recorded its first measles death in a generation.

“The UCP announced Alberta will opt out of the federal dental care program that will impact thousands of Albertans. Let’s keep going. The UCP’s tacit support for separatism was soundly rejected by almost half a million Albertans who signed the Forever Canada petition, confirming that Albertans are indeed proud Canadians. The Auditor General Report on DynaLife identified 125 million public dollars wasted on failed lab privatization efforts, and that the UCP went ahead with it against the advice of AHS. This same report also shared that records were destroyed and that AHS staff feared repercussions for speaking out.

“The government then essentially announced plans to fire the Auditor General this coming spring, just as the AG is expected to finish his investigation into ‘Corrupt Care.’ And speaking of ‘Corrupt Care,’ Judge Wyant released his report into health care corruption allegations. Remember, MH Care, Turkish Tylenol, and all the others? Well, it found that there absolutely were breaches of AHS procurement policy, confirming what AHS CEO Athana Mentzelopoulos was fired by the UCP for investigating.

“And then we found out that the individual at the heart of that, Jitendra Prasad, had met several times with Danielle Smith before she became premier. But on the question of whether there was any political interference in these shitty contracts. Well, Judge Wyant said himself he couldn’t say because of the limitations that the UCP placed on controlling what evidence he could see. Oh, and not one UCP minister or political staff was actually interviewed by him, proving, once again, that Albertans need a full public inquiry into ‘Corrupt Care,’ now.

This session, it has become clear that this government is running scared. They are scared of opposition. They are scared of political competition. They are scared of being questioned, or challenged. They are scared of *Albertans*.

“And so we’ve seen incredible overreach by the government into all areas of Albertans’ lives, into all aspects of civil society and the judicial system, into the homes, doctors’ offices, businesses, workplaces of Albertans, and into the very democratic processes of this province.

“This is a government that thinks it knows best and wants the final word on everything. But instead has demonstrated just out of how out of touch they are with the priorities of Albertans. And while I have listed off an incredible line of damaging actions by this government, I hope Albertans watching don’t lose hope, Because Alberta’s New Democrats have stayed laser focused on the issues that matter to you.” ...