Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, March 10, 2026
3:30 p.m.

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participants

Ministry of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
Hon. Dale Nally, Minister
Brandy Cox, Deputy Minister

Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis
Kandice Machado, Chief Executive Officer

Alberta iGaming Corporation
Dan Keene, Interim Chief Executive Officer

3:30 p.m. **Tuesday, March 10, 2026**

[Mr. Wiebe in the chair]

Ministry of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
Consideration of Main Estimates

The Chair: Good afternoon. I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. This committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials who are joining you at the table. My name is Ron Wiebe. I'm the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti and the chair of this committee. We will begin, starting to my right.

Mr. Wright: Good afternoon, everyone. Justin Wright, MLA for the charming constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Ms de Jonge: Good afternoon. Chantelle de Jonge, MLA for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mr. van Dijken: Glenn van Dijken, MLA for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. Bouchard: Eric Bouchard, MLA for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Stephan: Jason Stephan, MLA, Red Deer-South.

Mr. Nally: Dale Nally, Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction. Beside me is Brandy Cox, deputy minister, and I will let her finish the introductions for her team.

Ms Cox: Thank you. Hello, everyone. Brandy Cox, Deputy Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction. I have with me Anne Clayton, who's an assistant deputy minister responsible for alcohol, gaming, and cannabis policy; as well as Richard Isaak, who is our senior financial officer and assistant deputy minister; Trevor Bergen, who is assistant deputy minister of the consumer registry and strategic services division.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Hello, everyone. Gurtej Singh Brar, MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Gurinder Brar: Gurinder Brar, MLA for Calgary-North East.

Member Tejada: Lizette Tejada, MLA for Calgary-Klein.

Member Kayande: Samir Kayande, MLA, Calgary-Elbow.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to note the following substitution for the record: Member Tejada for Mr. Dach as deputy chair.

A few housekeeping items that we need to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of the meeting can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Members participating remotely are encouraged to turn your cameras on while speaking and mute your microphones when not speaking. Remote participants who wish to be placed on the speakers list are asked to e-mail or message the committee clerk, and members in the room should signal the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the main estimates for the Ministry of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction shall be considered for three hours. Standing Order 59.01 sets out the process for consideration of the main estimates in the legislative policy committees. Suborder 59.01(6) sets out the speaking rotation for this meeting. The speaking rotation chart is available on the committee's internal website, and hard copies have been provided to the ministry officials at the table. For each segment of the meeting blocks of speaking time will be combined only if both the minister and the member speaking agree. If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the main estimates schedule, and the committee will adjourn. Should members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please e-mail or message the committee clerk about the process.

With the concurrence of the committee I will call for a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting. However, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anybody oppose having a break? Hearing none.

Ministry officials who are present may, at the direction of the minister, address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to the microphone in the gallery area and are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commencing. Pages are available to deliver notes and other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members. However, members have priority to sit at the table at all times. Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and individual speaking times will be paused. However, the block of speaking time for the overall three-hour meeting will continue. Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

Finally, committee members should have the opportunity to hear both the questions and the answers without interruption during estimate debates. Debate flows through the chair at all times, including instances when speaking time is shared between the member and the minister.

I would now like to invite the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction to begin with your opening remarks. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Chair. It might be a three-hour meeting, but we're going to have some fun; it's only going to feel like two hours and 55 minutes. It's just going to fly right by.

I'm pleased to be here to discuss Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction's budget by presenting the ministry's estimates for '26-27. Before I get started, I would like to introduce my department's senior leadership team, who I've already introduced, but they're noteworthy to introduce them again because they're so important to today's conversation. That's Brandy Cox, my deputy minister; Richard Isaak, senior financial officer and assistant deputy minister of strategic planning and financial services; Trevor Bergen, assistant deputy minister of consumer registry and strategic services; Anne Clayton, assistant deputy minister of regulatory, transformation, compliance, and gaming, liquor, and cannabis policy. Also joining us in the gallery is Michael Hocken, assistant deputy minister of financial and administrative shared services; Kandice Machado, chief executive officer at Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis; and Dan Keene, interim chief executive officer at Alberta iGaming Corporation.

This year's budget theme focuses on what matters and reflects Alberta's fiscal reality, a reality in which global uncertainty, rising costs, and rapid population growth are putting more pressure on our essential services. Budget 2026 makes disciplined choices and takes decisive action, with Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction's budget being no exception. Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction has a key supporting role within government to deliver government programs, services, and information efficiently and effectively. We've worked hard to modernize the delivery of registry and consumer programs and services so we can continue to meet today's needs at a good value while also ensuring sustainability.

Our front-facing services impact all 5 million-plus Albertans at some point and typically multiple times throughout their lives. When you're registering a birth, getting married, obtaining a driver's licence or identification card, registering a vehicle, starting a business, applying for a consumer licence, buying a home, or resolving a dispute with your landlord, tenant, or condominium board, you are interacting with one of my departments, and we continue to seek better, faster, and smarter ways to deliver these services to Albertans.

We also protect Albertans and businesses in an increasingly complex economic and social environment and continue to support economic growth and service delivery by modernizing regulations and reducing red tape. Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction also provides crucial centralized services across the government of Alberta and access to information services to Albertans. We're also responsible for Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis, which oversees those industries. In addition, we are accountable for the development and launch of a private regulated iGaming market in Alberta later on this year. All that to say that this ministry is responsible for a broad range of services that underpin Alberta's resilient and growing economy. Budget 2026 makes responsible choices that benefit all Albertans and strengthen the long-term success and sustainability of services they rely on.

I'll now turn to our 2026 financials. Budget 2026 allocates more than $206 million to Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, an 11 per cent increase from last year's budget. Of the $206 million for '26-27, more than $91 million supports consumer registry and strategic services. This includes the delivery of our registry and tribunal services as well as initiatives to support ensuring a fair marketplace such as consumer licensing, registration programs, awareness, as well as advocacy.

Forty-seven point two million supports financial and administrative shared services, which includes goods, procurement services, access to information services, client service operations such as banking services and central logistics, which manages our government-wide fleet vehicles, our mail services, and our contact centres.

Sixty point nine million supports our regulatory, transformation, compliance, and gaming, liquor, and cannabis division, which will launch Alberta's regulated iGaming market later this year. This division is responsible for our red tape reduction initiatives and our audit and investigative branch, which protects consumers and businesses by enforcing consumer protection laws and investigates fraud.

3:40

Seven million is allocated for ministry support services, which includes the minister and deputy minister offices as well as corporate services. Our projected revenue is $3.3 billion, a $165.6 million increase from Budget 2025. This change is mainly due to anticipated revenue from Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis, including the launch of the iGaming initiative as well as the revenue anticipated for motor vehicle licence fees, the land titles registration levy, and other premiums, fees, and licences.

Capital investment this fiscal year is $67.6 million, a $4.8 million increase from Budget 2025. This commitment supports multiple initiatives, including $49.6 million for registry services, $5.2 million for general capital equipment, and $12.8 million for the ongoing replacement and maintenance of the government vehicle fleet, in line with previous years.

I'll now speak to some notable items in our budget, starting with access to information. This year's budget allocates $10.8 million to the human resources, supplies, and services and technology that support access to information services, which helps foster an open, accessible, and accountable government of Alberta. Albertans care about having access to information, and this funding will help us keep our strong record of responding to information requests. Last year we answered 99.94 per cent of these requests on time.

Another initiative, and perhaps our most important crossministry initiative, is red tape reduction. Budget 2026 allocates $900,000 to support the Alberta government's efforts to reduce regulatory burden and red tape. This includes a focus on measuring, benchmarking, and reducing wait times for permit processing across government. In 2019 we committed to reducing red tape by 33 per cent. Since then we've surpassed that goal with a 35 per cent reduction. We've reduced nearly 220,000 regulatory requirements, saving Albertans and Alberta businesses more than $3 billion, and passed 10 red tape reduction bills, which helped to eliminate nearly 4,300 regulatory requirements. Reducing red tape drives economic growth and job creation. It improves government programs and service delivery and, overall, makes life better for all Albertans. This is why we continue to explore opportunities that will save Albertans time and money while improving government service delivery.

In addition to these projects, we also have some previously announced multiyear budget items that we continue to make progress on, including the establishment of a Condominium Dispute Resolution Tribunal. This is particularly important because nearly 1 in 5 Albertans live in condos. This tribunal helps resolve common disputes that don't have to go through regular courts. In this year's budget $3.7 million is allocated for the implementation of this tribunal. I'm proud to say that the tribunal will launch this spring and provide Albertans living in condos with new resources and avenues to resolve disputes, from self-guided negotiation to mediation and, finally, adjudication as a last resort. Upon its launch the tribunal will cover disputes involving general meetings, monetary sanctions, and access to documents and will be reviewed for further expansion after one year.

Budget 2026 makes a $49.6 million capital investment to modernize land titles and surveys, motor vehicles, and other registry systems to help ensure that Albertans receive timely and efficient services. For example, in 2023 we were at 84 business days for land title document turnaround. Currently we're at approximately 40 days. While we still have work to do and acknowledge that this is far too long for Albertans, significant progress is being made through system modernization, and the aim is to get our turnaround time to under five days.

All in all, Alberta's government is investing more than $160 million to modernize five aging registry systems over a multiyear period. Through this investment, Albertans will benefit from replacing the existing land titles and surveys and motor vehicle systems and improving corporate, personal registry, and vital events registry systems. So far our incremental progress on this initiative has resulted in various successes, including the electronic medical and death information system, which enables the electronic submission of medical certificates of death to reduce paper-based processes, and court certificate portal, which allows law enforcement agencies and Crown prosecutors to request and track court certificates related to vehicle and plate registration, licence expiry, and suspensions.

As you can see, this year's budget for Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction is indeed focused on what matters. Our prudent and thoughtful approach ensures we can continue to deliver day-to-day services that Albertans count on while continuing to make progress on key initiatives that will benefit Albertans for years to come.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to the question-and-answer portion of the meeting. For the first 60 minutes members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Hon. members, you will be able to see the timer for your speaking block both in the committee room and on Microsoft Teams. Who will speak first? Mr. Brar. Member, would you like to combine your time with the minister?

Member Gurinder Brar: I'm okay with anything.

Mr. Nally: You know what? We did block last time, and it worked well. Let's do that again.

The Chair: Okay. We will go block time.

Member, you may begin.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Chair. Thank you to the public servants. Thank you for everything that you do to make sure that Albertans are well served. I really appreciate your work.

The Ministry of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction oversees vital registry services that touch every Albertan, from land title registrations for home purchases to motor vehicle licensing and personal identification. These services not only are foundational to our economy and daily life, but they also generate substantial revenue for the government. This year's budget reveals significant changes in how these registry services are funded and what they will cost Albertans.

There have been significant fee increases in Budget 2026 that squeeze the wallets of Albertans. On page 215 of the '26-27 government estimates the land titles registration levy is projected to bring in $191 million for the upcoming fiscal year. This represents yet another major increase in revenue collected from Albertans using land title services. Just a few years ago revenue from this levy sat around $78 million. Last year the government increased it dramatically to $161 million. Now, within a short period, this government is planning to increase it further. This means that within a very short time span the government will have more than doubled the amount it collects from Albertans every time they register a property transaction. These fees are not abstract accounting entries. They are real costs paid by Albertans trying to buy a home, refinance a mortgage, transfer land between family members, or complete other essential transactions.

In an environment where housing affordability is already a major concern for Albertans, every additional fee layered on to the home-buying process adds further pressure on families trying to enter the housing market. Last year when the government dramatically increased the land titles registration levy, the justification given was that the additional revenue would help modernize the land titles office, improve processing times, and address the serious operational problems that had caused long delays in registration and mortgage processing. Albertans were told that higher fees would translate into better service, better technology, and a more efficient registry system.

Now that the government is planning to collect even more revenue from the same levy, Albertans deserve a clear accounting of what has been achieved so far and how this additional increase will be used. Can the minister provide a detailed update on the modernization of the land titles office that was promised when the levy was increased? What specific upgrades to technology or systems have been completed to date? How much of the additional revenue collected from the levy over the past year has been reinvested into the land titles operation, including staffing, system upgrades, and service improvements?

3:50

What new digital systems, software platforms, or technological upgrades have been implemented as part of the modernization effort? How much did those upgrades cost, and which vendors were contracted to deliver them? Were these contracts sole-sourced? If yes, why so? If not, what procurement process was used to select these vendors? Were these contracts comparatively tendered, and what safeguards were put in place to ensure value for money for Albertans?

Most importantly, what measurable improvements in service delivery have resulted from these investments? For example, how have processing times for standard land title registrations changed since modernization efforts began? I have talked to multiple stakeholders who work closely with the land titles office, and they have repeatedly mentioned that the time shown on the website to process the services is shorter than they experience. Why is there a gap in what is shown on the website and what people experience on a daily basis?

If modernization has already been funded through previous fee increases, why is the government continuing to increase the levy rather than lowering the fees once system improvements are in place? Page 95 of the fiscal plan shows that $2 million was saved in expenses because the ministry laid off temporary staff that were hired to address the backlog in the land titles office. The government expects to increase the revenue by $191 million because of fee increases and more transactions but lays off staff at the same time. What business sense does that make? How does laying off staff address the problem? What if the backlog comes up again?

Albertans understand that land title systems require investment to function properly. However, when the government dramatically increased the fees year after year, people reasonably expect to see clear improvements in services, transparency in spending, and accountability for how their money is being used. Without that transparency it begins to look less like a service fee and more like a hidden tax on home ownership at a time when many families are already struggling with affordability.

Last year the government announced funding of $4 million over three years to modernize Alberta's health care card system, which many Albertans welcomed because the current paper health card is outdated, insecure, and prone to damage for fraud. According to the 2026 fiscal plan funding for this initiative was expected to spend $2 million to support modernization of the health care card system as part of service Alberta's digital infrastructure work. However, instead of seeing a new, modern health care card introduced, the government has now announced that Albertans may be given the option to place their health care number on their driver's licence or use a cellphone app to download the digital card. This raises some important questions about what the plans are for people who do not use cellphones or have language and technological barriers.

Many Albertans do not have a driver's licence, and others may not feel comfortable having their health care card numbers printed on another piece of identification due to privacy concerns. If the government's solution is simply to add the health number to a driver's licence or downloaded digital card, what happens to the broader modernization project that taxpayers were told would update the entire health card system? Albertans deserve clarity on whether the government still plans to replace the outdated paper health card with a modern card, like the other provinces have initiated, or whether this initiative has now been replaced with a narrower policy tied only to drivers' licences and downloadable digital cards.

Last year the government committed $4 million over three years to modernize Alberta's health care card system, yet this year the government has suggested that Albertans may instead place their health care card number on a driver's licence. Can the minister clarify whether the original health care card modernization project is still under way or whether it has effectively been replaced by this new driver's licence and digital card option? If Albertans choose not to place their health care card number on their driver's licence, will they continue using the existing paper health card? Does the government still plan to introduce a secure, modern health card for those Albertans who either do not have a driver's licence or lack language and technical skills?

The Chair: Minister, you now have up to 10 minutes to respond.

Mr. Nally: Okay. Well, thank you. Thank you for that. I appreciate the questions. We'll start off from the beginning. You made a comment on the significant fee increases that we're seeing in registries, but I have to tell you that I push back on that. I push back because, quite frankly, some of those fees have not been updated for 30 years, and the fees that were being charged just did not adequately reflect the service that was being delivered.

Don't forget there are two pieces here. One is, of course, the government fee, but it's also a fee that goes to the registry agent. We have to remember about registry agent sustainability. Now, we probably don't hear much about that in, let's say, northeast Calgary, but when you get into rural Alberta, registry sustainability is an issue. If you live in La Crête and your registry happens to shut down, you might have to drive an extra hour to renew your driver's licence or to renew your licence plates. For that reason we always have an eye on registry agent sustainability while also trying to manage affordability. That's probably the biggest reason why, you know, we haven't seen a fee increase in 30 years, because we manage that so tightly. But after 30 years of no increases in some cases it was time to reflect the current reality.

Also, even after the fee increases we have the lowest fees in the country on registries. This is important because if we don't like the direction that we're going in registries, you know, we can always borrow a half billion dollars and start up a government department of motor vehicles, but I can tell you I'm not interested in that. As the minister responsible for cutting red tape, I don't want to start up a department of motor vehicles. In fact, our registries are actually a jewel in the crown when it comes to privatization because it has done such an excellent job. We provide world-class service to Albertans in a timely and affordable manner.

As you deliver these services, sometimes there are fee increases. Like I said, I think we should celebrate that some of the fees haven't gone up in over 30 years, but you know, we need also to address the fact that occasionally sometimes fees do go up, and that's what we're seeing. But you have my assurances that when it comes to registries, we still have the lowest fees in the country, and it supports this private registry network, which I mentioned is a jewel in the crown.

You mentioned the land title transfer fee. A couple of things I want to unpack on this one. Our land transfer fee, just like other fees that we charge, is also the lowest in the country. If you had a $400,000 mortgage, in Alberta that transfer fee would be approximately $800. Now take that same mortgage in Saskatchewan; it'd be over $2,000. Take that same mortgage in B.C.; it would be over $5,000. Take that same mortgage in Ontario, and it's over $6,000.

I can tell you that when we were looking at ways to explore modernization of our registries and we realized that we were so fundamentally lower than the rest of the jurisdictions in Canada, I asked my department to look into what it would look like to pay for that modernization through an increase to the fee. But I made it very clear that it had to be a light touch because it's important that we maintain our competitive advantage, the Alberta advantage, essentially. It was important that we remain the lowest in Canada.

4:00

Like I said, I'm happy to say that the closest jurisdiction to us is Saskatchewan, and they're over double what we charge on land transfer fees, and in the case of B.C. and Ontario you're talking over 500 per cent. So we have an extremely low transfer fee, and we're proud of that. That's a competitive advantage we want to maintain, but we generated that fee because we needed to pay for modernization.

Now, the modernization could have been done in 2017. Unfortunately, the government at the time, the NDP government, cancelled the modernization, specifically with respect to motor vehicles. Sorry. I apologize. I misspoke. The land transfer automation was what they cancelled, and that was part of the reason when we started to see our land title volumes go through the roof and we lacked the scalability because it was purely manual. That's why we saw the backlog go up to 87 days. I mean, that was the worst backlog, 87 days. Had we had the automation in 2017, we would have had scalability and we never would have seen that.

And then on the motor vehicles, our motor vehicle registry is literally at end of life. The day will come. If we don't replace our motor vehicles, we will no longer have the capacity to issue a new driver's licence. In fact, we do custom plates, you know, Oilers, Calgary Flames, and we always get more requests for more custom plates, but the fact is that, well, actually we had one more spot to do a custom plate. Like, we did not have the bandwidth or the resources in motor vehicles to do two additional custom plates. Forestry and Parks was – I don't want to say hounding us, but they really wanted it. We let them have that last plate, so as of now there are no custom plates. If Red Deer saw a professional hockey team, we could not get Red Deer a plate just because we're that end of life on our motor vehicles. We need to modernize all of our registries, and the money that we are using to modernize is being paid for out of the land transfer fee. But again, like I mentioned, it is the lightest touch in Canada.

Now, you had asked for some detailed updates on where we are with land titles, and I'm happy to provide that. We hired 55 extra staff for land titles to stay on top of the backlog. There haven't been any layoffs.

In this province prior to the beginning of this modernization we couldn't process a land title on evenings or weekends, which is when realtors sell homes, evenings and weekends, so having land titles closed just wasn't optimal. We have now implemented four modules in land titles. The first and second releases of ARLO, which is what we call it, include the ability to search titles 24/7 online and the availability of an online customer service form. I would say to anyone in this room that if you have any friends, any colleagues, anyone that you know that is a realtor, ask them what they think of ARLO. I can tell you that for any realtor that has used ARLO, they absolutely love it because it's 24/7. It's a night-and-day difference.

We also had the creation of a driver's licence history report, which allows Albertans to receive their driving history report in minutes rather than weeks. For someone applying for a job, this is hugely important. The launch of the eMDI portal, which allows funeral homes and other stakeholders to digitally register deaths while accessing electronic medical death information from the office of the Chief Medical Examiner. In '25-26 product releases occurred regularly. Three successful releases of ARLO this year. Introduced the Alberta parcel map tool. It's an ability to search titles using an address and additional enhancements such as purchasing a title with a credit card. Law enforcement agencies and Crown prosecutors can now digitally submit and track fulfillment status of court certificate requests for vehicle and plate registration, licence expiry, and suspensions through the court certificates portal, which is a digital intake system.

So, as you can see, when it comes to the land titles – and we're not done. We're going to be almost 100 per cent done by the end of this year. You know, from the perspective of a realtor or a lawyer that's processing land title fees, I mean, they would probably tell you that we are done. We're just going to be doing a few other minor modules after that. Essentially, you'll see just about full functionality by the end of this year, and when you compare it to where we were just a couple of years ago, this is absolutely night and day.

The procurement process. Yeah. Our procurement process was always open and competitive, so we didn't sole-source anything. We have strict procurement rules, and all of our purchasing went to the open Alberta government site for procurement. You can go to the Alberta government website and search that at any time. So we use that.

You asked about why there was a difference in reported business days on the website and what people were saying. I mean, ultimately I couldn't answer that, but I would venture to guess that it's probably because we report on business days, so quite often it's not uncommon that people will report in actual days, but on the website it's business days.

Regarding putting the Alberta health care card on the back of a driver's licence: this is optional. You don't have to do it if you're not comfortable with it. We're doing it because Albertans asked for it. They will have the mobile card if they don't want to use that. If they don't have a driver's licence, they can get an Alberta identification card, so you don't have to have a driver's licence to get an ID card to put that on the back, and they could continue to use the original paper card.

The Chair: Okay. Member, you have another 10 minutes to ask questions or make comments to the minister.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The minister mentioned that the private registry system is the jewel in the crown. Well, that's costing everyday Albertans a lot every single day, and what should come first is the hard-earned money of Albertans. I understand that there has to be business sustainability, but raising fees for everyday Albertans should not be the option. There have to be other ways that the government should look into to help those businesses. The cost of living is a serious, serious issue for everyday Albertans. Insurance has gone up, utilities have gone up, tuition costs have gone up, minimum wage has not gone up, but raising fees for all these vital services that Albertans rely on: I think that is a bit questionable.

There are some questions that are still unanswered and I would repeat, and the minister can answer that in the next set. How much additional revenue collected from the increase of the land titles over the past year has been reinvested in the land titles operations, including staffing, system upgrades, and service improvements?

The minister also mentioned that there were no layoffs, but on page 95 of the fiscal plan it says that total expense "with a decrease of $6 million due to the conclusion of temporary staff hired to address the Land Titles backlog," so there is a full paragraph on it. It shows that $2 million was saved in expenses because the ministry laid off the temporary staff that was hired to address the backlog in the land titles office. The revenue of the government from land titles is going to be $192 million because of the fee increases and more transactions, but layoffs at this time raises some eyebrows and questions. I would request the minister to reconsider what's written on page 95 and explain a little bit further how this will help to reduce the backlog if it comes up again.

Going on to the next part, which is red tape reduction, the inclusion of red tape reduction in the title of the Ministry of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction is meant to signal the government's commitment to reducing unnecessary regulatory burden, simplifying processes, and accelerating approvals for businesses and individuals. In principle this is a goal that all parties can support. Efficient regulation can support economic growth, improve service delivery, and make government easier to navigate for Albertans.

However, the actual resources dedicated to this function remain extremely small. According to 2026-27 estimates program 3.1, red tape reduction, is now budgeted at approximately $1.45 million, a further reduction from the $1.765 million allocated the previous year. This funding level appears on page 210 of estimates as well. Given that this unit is intended to influence regulatory practices across the entire provincial government, the shrinking budget raises legitimate concerns about how effective the program can realistically be. A team operating with barely over $1 million in funding is expected to review regulatory requirements across dozens of ministries, evaluate the impact of proposed policies, and identify opportunities to eliminate administrative burden.

4:10

The government frequently highlights the number or percentage of regulatory requirements removed, and the ministry's business plan includes a performance measure tracking the percentage of red tape reduced. While this statistic sounds impressive, it does not always reflect the lived experience of businesses and investors navigating a government process. Removing outdated or minor regulatory requirements may improve a statistical metric, but it does not necessarily address the areas where Albertans most commonly encounter delays such as permitting processes, interdepartmental approvals, or regulatory uncertainty.

At the same time Albertans have witnessed government decisions that arguably introduce new regulatory uncertainty rather than reducing it. One such example was the renewable energy approval pause announced in 2023, which halted projects and created uncertainty for investors and municipalities. While this decision does not originate within the service Alberta ministry itself, it illustrates a broader issue, that the red tape reduction office is meant to influence crossgovernment decision-making, yet it is not always clear whether it has the authority or capacity to challenge policies that increase regulatory barriers.

Another big barrier that is a big issue these days is separatism. The regular rhetoric around this separatism is a big barrier. It is the biggest red tape at this point for businesses, and various businesses have spoken out.

Mr. Wright: Point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Wright: Point of order on 23(b), speaking to matters other than questions at hand. We're here to talk about Budget 2026, not about any other rumblings the members opposite may want to bring forward. I think it is out of line with the scope of what this meeting is pertaining to, and I think it's a point of order.

The Chair: Want to respond, Mr. Kayande?

Member Kayande: Yes, absolutely, Mr. Chair. Very clearly the member is talking about the impact of separatism and separatism conversation on the budgets of the department, specifically referencing the performance measures. I believe he talked about measure 2(a) around the red tape reduction percentages and as well specifically referring to the $1 million in change, I think is the number that I heard the member say, about the amount that the ministry is spending on these topics. I think it's a very reasonable question. Will the impact of separatism have an impact on the budgetary items? Therefore, I would respectfully submit that this is not a point of order.

The Chair: Well, I would say that separatism isn't really a part of this discussion here, and I would like the member to refer back to the budget because it does cause a disruption. I would not call this a point of order at this time, so I would just like to get you back on track.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, I was talking about the red tape and the barriers that businesses are facing these days in Alberta, and that will have significant impact on the economy of Alberta as well as the budget of Alberta as well as the revenue that the government gets because these businesses invest in Alberta. So I was just referring to that particular point.

However, the reduction in funding for the red tape reduction program also coincides with significant cuts in areas responsible for government procurement oversight, particularly within program 4, financial and administrative shared services. In the same estimates document procurement services, program 4.1, has seen a dramatic reduction in funding, dropping to approximately $6 million, roughly half of what it was previously. These parallel cuts raise an important question about how the government interprets the concept of cutting red tape. Red tape reduction should mean removing unnecessary bureaucracy while maintaining strong safeguards, transparency, and procurement standards. However, if the reduction of administrative processes results in fewer procurement checks, weaker oversight, or reduced capacity to manage contracts, the risk is that efficiency could come at the cost of accountability.

This concern is particularly relevant considering recent procurement controversies in Alberta's health sector, including allegations involving well-connected vendors.

Mr. Wright: Point of order under 23(b). These are not relevant to this discussion and this ministry. Any procurement conversations of another ministry should be directed towards that minister at this point in time.

The Chair: Member, would you like to respond?

Member Kayande: Yes, absolutely. I believe that the member is talking about procurement policies within this ministry and crossministry collaboration, and that's clearly a topic of consideration for these estimates.

The Chair: I would say that the member should refer to the business plan in his remarks to the minister. If you could refer back to the business plan. I will not call it a point of order, but I would like you to reference the business plan where you're drawing your information from.

Mr. Wright: Mr. Chair, if I may, directly referencing other ministries in his question, not pertaining to the ministry at hand, is the issue of my point of order, not whether he was referencing the business plan or not. I appreciate your ruling but just think that it should be clarified that the member opposite is speaking about other ministries.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Member.

If we could talk to the ministry at hand, that would be helpful. You can continue.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was referring to program 4.1, financial and administrative shared services, which is part of the business plan. I was talking about the importance of having strong safeguards. I'm sorry; I didn't refer to any other ministry. I'm saying this because we need to avoid these situations so people like Sam Mraiche could not benefit from the corruption in the government, and in that context . . .

Mr. Wright: Point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Wright: Thank you. The member opposite has specifically brought forward, again, things that are not relevant to the conversation at hand. Implying Sam Mraiche brings up conversations about health care. Also, under point of order 23(i), imputes false or unavowed motives, saying that corruption within government is implying – there is the false implication of corruption. That is a point of order, Mr. Chair, and I look forward to your ruling.

The Chair: Do you want to comment?

Member Kayande: Yes, please. The member did not mention anything else happening in any other ministry. The Premier herself has been very clear in the House on multiple occasions that there are issues with procurement, and it is a reasonable question of debate, and it is a reasonable question to ask the minister whether there are controls on procurement within the ministry. I assure you, looking at the member's script and his questions, that his only concern is to make sure that the people's taxpayer dollars are spent prudently, and I believe that is the entire purpose of this committee meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I would caution members that bringing other business into this conversation is not helpful. Again, I would caution you to stick to the ministry for which the estimates are under consideration. I will not, again, count it a point of order at this time, but you have been cautioned now again.

You may continue.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would refer to program 3.1. Red tape reduction is now budgeted at approximately $1.4 million instead of where it was earlier, $1.7 million. How does the minister justify reducing funding for the very office that is supposed to co-ordinate red tape reduction across the entire government? Can it function with these cuts? What capacity remains within this unit to review regulatory proposals from other ministries and ensure that they do not introduce unnecessary barriers?

4:20

The government frequently highlights the percentage of regulatory requirements removed, but this metric does not necessarily reflect the real-world experience, the businesses dealing with permitting delays or regulatory uncertainty. Can the minister explain how the percentage of red tape reduced metric is calculated? Does the minister account for new regulatory barriers introduced by other ministries, or does it only track reductions?

While program 3.1 funding has been reduced, the estimates also show major cuts to procurement services under program 4.1, which is responsible for overseeing government contracting, not just one ministry. How does the minister ensure that efforts to reduce red tape do not weaken the procurement oversight, vendor vetting, or due diligence processes within the government so that we don't have any more issues with contracts and procurements that we have seen in the past? We have learned our lesson, and we don't need to repeat that.

The Chair: Minister, it is now time for you to respond. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Chair. It just got a little spicier in here. But in all fairness, I mean, if we were 13 per cent down in the polls, maybe we'd be spicy, too. So we're just going to let that one go.

Here's what I can tell you, knock a few things off pretty quickly. On the procurement side effective April 1, 2026, strategic procurement functions formerly carried out by SARTR will be transferred to Executive Council to lead modernization and implement procurement review recommendations. This organizational shift will centralize procurement expertise, training, and policy leadership and will reinforce procurement as a pillar of government work and accelerate modernization efforts. I think that'll address your questions that you had in that regard.

Your comment in the beginning was that registry offices cost Albertans more and that this is at a time when affordability is an important issue. Look, I don't dispute that affordability is an important issue. It's not the number one issue on Albertans' minds. The fact is that we have a private registry network in this province. It is the jewel in the crown of privatization. It has been absolutely so successful because they've not only provided world-class services, but they've done so while keeping prices low. They've done an absolutely phenomenal job. Yeah, from time to time you will see an occasional price increase; in some cases 30 years without a price increase. I would say that we should probably give them a thumbs-up for the great job that they've done.

I want to push back. You mentioned utilities have gone up. That's just categorically not true. I mean, the electricity prices were over, like, 30 cents a couple of years ago, and they're far below that now, so I'm going to push back. I'm not going to say that affordability is not an issue – it is – but please don't say that utilities have gone up because, just frankly, it doesn't reflect reality.

The employee savings that you referenced: those are in future years, so not in this budget.

Then you asked how we will deal with a future backlog. The answer is that we'll deal with a future backlog in land titles by not having one. That's what automation will bring us. We will have scalability. If volumes continue to go through the roof, automation will give us the scalability that we need to stay on top of it so there won't be a backlog. I mean, I wish that we had proceeded with the automation in 2017 and we wouldn't be having this conversation, but unfortunately the NDP cancelled the modernization, and this is where we are now. Once we have completed it, we will have scalability, and we won't see this type of backlogs.

Now, a lot of questions came up on red tape reduction, specifically with regard to the amount that we spend on them. In '25-26 it was $1.7 million. This year it's going to be $311,000. Yes. I think that you hit on a very important point. The red tape reduction team punches above their weight class, and they do an absolutely phenomenal job.

Now, I'm just going to back it up just a little bit. We campaigned in 2019 on a platform of fiscal restraint, investment attraction, and job creation. If you recall, there was a jobs crisis at the time. You had mentioned that, you know, everybody can support red tape reduction. Well, actually, that's not quite true because the NDP didn't support it back in 2019. You could go through *Hansard* at the time, when we started the ministry of red tape reduction, and the NDP were making all these jokes in question period about: isn't the creation of a new ministry more red tape? They just couldn't handle it. The fact is that it was part of our strategy to attract investment and create jobs, and I would say that our plan is working.

We had a plan to cut red tape by 33 per cent, and we've actually exceeded that now. We're actually at 35 per cent, and we've saved job creators $3 billion. You want to know how it's calculated? The very first thing that we did in 2019 was count every regulatory requirement in government. I wasn't the minister at the time; Minister Hunter did a brilliant job. I think it took him almost a year to count every regulatory requirement, every regulation. So that's how. It's easy math once you know what you're starting with. So that's on the regulatory requirement reporting. On the dollars saved, that's industry reported. Industry tells us how much money we have saved them. Like I said, it's now over $3 billion.

Some of the achievements on the red tape reduction side, I mean, are significant. One of the most popular things that we have done to cut red tape: if you recall, in this province when you had a driver's licence, you were put on a GDL, a graduated driver's licence, and when you were able to come off it, you had to pay $158, go down to registries, get a new licence, and then you were now off the restricted licence. But there were a lot of people that didn't want to pay the $158. Funnily enough, I was surprised there were so many people that were still on their GDL. Imagine my surprise when I find out my adult daughter was on it for over 10 years. My fiancée was still on the GDL. There were a lot of Albertans that didn't want to pay the $158 because they saw it as red tape, so we cut that red tape. We got rid of that. Now with two years of a clean driving record you automatically graduate to that licence. You don't have to go into a registry. You don't have to pay $158. By far the most popular thing that we have done, and it's just one example of how red tape reduction makes life better for all Albertans.

If you want to talk about industry and why it's working so well, the biggest thing we did on red tape reduction was the commingling of abandoned wells. So high level on this: when you were trying to get wells approved, you could commingle them, but when you reclaimed them, you couldn't. Simply by commingling the abandoned wells, which was a small red tape reduction initiative, it saved industry $600 million. That's $600 million that could be reinvested in this province to create more jobs.

One I'm particularly proud of in the red tape reduction bill last fall. Professional associations were requiring Canadian work experience before they'd recognize their credentials. You have to have Canadian work experience to recognize their credential, but you can't get Canadian work experience because you don't have the credential. Do you see the circular logic there? It was our government in the fall of last year that got rid of that requirement. We made it easier for foreigners that come here to get their credentials recognized.

Then the last one I'll give you is online registries, right? I mean, we all know what it's like to go to registries; you've got to do it on a Saturday afternoon. Now you can apply for many registry services in your space at your pace from the comfort of your own home because we've put it online and been very successful.

The automatic yes. I bring that up because you mentioned permits. You asked the question: what does red tape reduction have to do with permits? Well, the fact is that automatic yes deals with the length of time it takes permits to get approved, because we did hear that from industry. Industry says: we love red tape reduction. I mean, you can see it in the job creation. Dow Chemical, Air Products, De Havilland: the list goes on, right? Wonder valley. Billions of dollars of investment. Our plan is working, but industry said, "We would still like to see permits be approved quicker," so we came out with automatic yes.

Automatic yes is about taking those low-risk, routine permits, getting rid of the permit entirely, replacing it with a checklist. The checklist could come with an assessment as well depending on the type. By getting rid of that permit – you know, we didn't get rid of the employees. We just moved them over to more complex permits so that we could approve those permits faster, and we were able to attach shot clocks. Now if we say to you that a permit is three months or six months, whatever the time frame is, because each one is different, if we say that it's approved in six months, if you haven't heard yes or no within six months, if that's the time frame, then it's deemed approved.

4:30

This puts us on the absolute forefront, not just in Canada but in North America, on permit approval, and let me tell you, industry has noticed. It's why we're backlogged at land titles, not just because we don't have automation but because our plan is working because industry is coming here. So when you look at red tape reduction, we are more than just the free-the-Zyn team. I mean, yeah, we want to do that as well, but we do so much more. We are about attracting investment. We're about creating jobs, and that is some of the big stuff that we do. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business:

> By embedding accountability and efficiency into regulatory processes, Alberta has set a new benchmark for modern governance – one that other jurisdictions can look to as a model for cutting red tape without compromising safety or oversight.

They can say that with great confidence because we actually defined red tape. Red tape isn't every piece of regulation. Red tape is burdensome and unnecessary red tape. So it gets rid of problems; it certainly doesn't create them. It's a small team, and they punch above their weight class. I've got to tell you that I am absolutely proud of the job that that team has done at red tape reduction. I can't tell you how many; I think this is a team of four, I believe. Regardless of the size, they punch above their weight class, and they continue to keep us at 35 per cent total red tape reduction.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Member Brar, you're now ready for your next 10-minute set of questions.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister for the answer. He has mentioned that the team of red tape reduction is doing a phenomenal job. If they were doing a phenomenal job, they would not see their funding cut, which they have seen in this budget. They used to have $1.76 million the previous year, and now they have $1.4 million. To appreciate the people who are doing more jobs – and they have a lot on their plate – I think they need more resources. The funding should have gone up, not down. So it would be better to reconsider that and provide them the resources that they need.

Other than that, I've been talking to so many of my constituents before the budget, and they have seen the affordability crisis as they are actually experiencing the affordability crisis. The minister has already acknowledged that it is the number one issue on top of the minds of every single Albertan. This ministry could have done a lot in this budget to help those Albertans – individuals, business owners, charities – because they are already facing rising costs in almost everything.

On page 149 of the business plan '26-27 under outcome 1 key objective 1.3 states, "provide Albertans with access to efficient, secure, and affordable registry services." On page 159 our fiscal plan shows the following fee increases: the residential and tenancy dispute resolution fee has been doubled, introduction of new land titles and surveys resubmission fee, land titles fee more than doubled, a 33 per cent increase – 33 per cent increase – in licensing and registration fees for businesses and charities, class 1 and 3 vehicle registration fees up 12 per cent. Class 2 vehicle registration fees: a whopping 20 per cent increase in those fees. How is it practically possible to provide affordable registry services while hiking these fees on services that Albertans rely on? How does the minister aim to achieve key objective 1.3 of outcome 1 on page 149 of the business plan?

On one hand, the government claims to be business friendly and cutting red tape; on the other hand, the government increases the registration for businesses and charities by 33 per cent. Which business-friendly government increases the registration fee by 33 per cent? How is increasing 33 per cent fees on business and charity organizations a reduction in red tape? Mr. Chair, these are seriously important questions that my constituents have put forward.

I want to highlight another two important aspects of red tape, that the red tape reduction office is meant to influence policy across government. Does every new regulatory proposal from another ministry undergo a red tape impact assessment, and does the red tape reduction office have the authority to recommend changes or stop proposals that would significantly increase the regulatory burden?

Can the minister confirm that red tape reduction does not mean lowering regulatory standards and weakening procurement safeguards or reducing oversight mechanisms? We have seen that there have been serious issues with the procurement within the government of Alberta, and Albertans have gone through and have seen these headlines in the past few months, whether that was the procurement in the health sector and other ministries. They demand the answers. Can the minister also explain what concrete steps the ministry is taking to ensure that efforts to streamline processes do not compromise transparency or public accountability?

Mr. Chair, registry and identification systems are essential public infrastructure. They determine how Albertans prove who they are and, increasingly, how they access services. When government changes what appears on a primary piece of photo ID, the impact is not just technical; it affects privacy, equality, and daily life for people who must show ID frequently, including newcomers and racialized Albertans. In September 2025 Alberta announced a plan to add citizenship markers to drivers' licences and other ID cards and to add Alberta health care numbers to those cards. Reporting on the announcement indicates that the province intends to add citizenship markers for Canadian citizens while noncitizens would not receive a citizenship marker.

The stated rationale states two main objectives, convenience for accessing services and integrity concerns. From an accountability lens this is a high-risk policy space for immigrant communities for three reasons. First, the citizenship marker creates a visible, everyday sorting mechanism on an ID that is used in many routine transactions, including banking, employment onboarding, age verification in private businesses. Even if government asserts it will not cause discrimination, the risk shifts to the environment where the card is shown: private businesses, front-line staff, and informal bias. The minister reportedly said that the change won't lead to discrimination and framed it as pure and simple convenience for benefits and entitlements.

Second thing: adding health care numbers onto a commonly presented card expands the exposure of a sensitive identifier. The government's framing is that it will help identity outliers and fix integrity issues in the health number registry, but without clear safeguards it also increases the number of times and places a health identifier may be presented, seen, copied, or even mishandled.

Third, implementation will run through private registry agents and front-line staff. This creates practical questions about burdens on Albertans at renewal documentation requirements, training, and complaint appeal processes, especially for immigrants, whose status documents can be complex and time sensitive. Because the service Alberta ministry oversees registry systems and sets the rules that registry agents must follow, the ministry must be able to demonstrate concrete service improvements, clear legal authority, human rights safeguards, and a credible privacy-by-design implementation.

So my questions are that antidiscrimination guardrails and immigrant community impacts are important, and the minister has been quoted as saying that adding citizenship markers and health care numbers to IDs won't lead to discrimination. Can the minister provide a detailed, well-written plan for preventing discrimination and unintended profiling, including whether the government conducted a formal human rights impact assessment and an equity impact assessment specific to immigrants, permanent residents, temporary residents, and racialized Albertans? If yes, how much money in this budget has been set aside, and where has it been set aside to do these important assessments? How will the government monitor and publicly report discrimination complaints attributed to the marker? How much funding has been allocated in this budget? Where is it allocated in this budget to deal with these discrimination complaints?

4:40

The government's public justification for printing health care numbers on a driver's licence includes the claim that adding the number to licences will help identify outliers. Can the minister explain what privacy analysis supports printing a sensitive health identifier on an ID that is frequently shown in nonhealth contexts, whether the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner was consulted, and whether a formal privacy impact assessment will be released publicly? How much money has been kept aside in this budget to do these things? What rules will govern to whom a person must show that number so that a measure justified as health registry integrity does not become a routine, unnecessary disclosure in everyday life?

Reporting indicates that legislation is to be brought forward and that the change is part of a broader redesign of licences and IDs, with further details to come. Can the minister explain three simple things? Since the ministry was supposed to reduce red tape to reduce inefficiency, how does asking Albertans to provide more supporting documents to prove their citizenship reduce red tape? In fact, it does the exact opposite. The expected additional processing time per transaction: how will this be prevented from creating longer lineups and higher administrative costs? The training plan escalation pathway and appeals mechanisms when an individual status documentation is disputed . . .

The Chair: Thank you.

Minister, you have approximately four minutes in this segment to respond.

Mr. Nally: Thank you. I wrote down one of your first statements, which was talking about the small reduction that the red tape reduction team had. You said that if they were doing a fine job, they wouldn't have had their funding cut. With respect, that is such an NDP thing to say. This is why the NDP weren't able to move the bar on health care when they were in government. They made the problem worse. Their answer to every problem is not to fix it; it's to throw more money at it. It's to bury it in cash, but that doesn't . . .

Member Kayande: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order is noted, Minister.

Mr. Nally: Oh, sorry. I didn't hear that. I apologize.

Member Kayande: Standing Order 23(b), speaking about matters which are not in front of the committee. We are talking about the estimates of the minister's ministry and nothing else. I would respectfully request that he keep his comments to his ministry.

Thank you.

The Chair: Would you like to respond?

Mr. Wright: Mr. Chair, this is a matter of debate. He is bringing forward the shortcomings of previous governments in charge of ministries, specifically ones that are now part of his ministry. This is not a point of order. This is a matter of debate.

Mr. Nally: Chair, may I make a comment as well?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nally: I was actually addressing a quote from the hon. member. I wrote it down, and I repeated it: if they're doing a fine job, they wouldn't have had their funding cut. That was the comment I was addressing, the comment that started over there.

The Chair: Thank you.

This is not a point of order.

Minister, you can continue.

Mr. Nally: Thank you although I confess I forget where I was now.

I mentioned in the very beginning that the red tape reduction team is a small team. They're an efficient team, and they punch above their weight class. Make no mistake. Don't judge them by the size of their budget. Judge them by the 35 per cent red tape reduction that we've achieved. Judge them by the $3 billion that they've saved Albertans. Judge them by how they have made life better for not just you but for your neighbours and for everyone.

Now, you commented about registries providing Alberta with efficient, affordable registry services. You do keep pushing your comments on the fee increases, so I want to just address that. Then we can just take it off the table, hopefully. These are in many cases a light touch. RTDRS, which you mentioned: actually, there's no fee increase unless the claim is over $7,500. For claims under $7,500: no increase. The increase was for claims over $7,500, and that was just to address the complexity of the claim.

Again, we have the lowest fees in the country. I thought I would just bring some examples. These are some of the fee increases we're talking about. A search for corporations, 3 per cent increase; certification per file, 3 per cent; printed search, 3 per cent increase; issuing a corrected certificate, 3 per cent increase; a certificate of change of a corporate name, 3 per cent increase; certificate amendment, company's regulation, 3 per cent increase. I mean, these are a light touch. I would argue that 3 per cent increases – I mean, the reason why we have the lowest registry fees in the country is because many fees we haven't increased in over 30 years, and these are the increases that we're talking about. A certificate of incorporation, 3 per cent increase; a society's regulation, 3 per cent increase; certificate of amendment for a society's regulation, 3 per cent increase.

I mean, you know, like, I could go on, but I can tell you that here's what I want you to take from this. When it comes to the fee increases, they were a light touch, many of them hadn't been increased in 30 years, and there are multiple examples of 3 per cent. And the bottom line that you should take is that we continue to have the lowest.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now move on to the government caucus and their 20-minute allotment. The first question goes to Member Bouchard. Member, would you like to combine your time with the minister?

Mr. Nally: You know, I always say dealer's choice. If you're okay with that, then let's go back and forth.

Mr. Bouchard: I'm good with that. Let's go back and forth.

The Chair: Minister, do you agree?

Mr. Nally: Yes, I'm in agreement.

The Chair: Okay. The block of shared time is 20 minutes, during which you may go back and forth with questions, comments, and responses. However, neither participant may speak for longer than 10 minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister. As a former small-business owner myself I appreciate your small team and punching through your weight, and on behalf of all small-business owners across the province they thank you, too.

As a former small-business owner myself I know that running a business is all consuming. When governments add on unnecessary regulatory hurdles, it takes up even more of a business owner's time despite not really having much time to spare. Without the time business owners need to add more staff or increase existing employees' hours. Ultimately, this impacts businesses' bottom line, and particularly in the food and retail space it means that sometimes they must cut costs that impact the quality of the products or increase their prices.

Looking at your business plan, I think all business owners will be relieved. On page 149 key objective 2.1 states that your ministry is leading the "government's red tape reduction activities to remove unnecessary regulatory and administrative burdens on Albertans and businesses and support continuous improvement in the delivery of government programs and services." Minister, through the chair, can you please speak to how your focus on red tape reduction makes life easier for Albertan business owners?

Mr. Nally: Thank you for the question. Absolutely. We know from speaking to small-business owners that they spend far too much time filling out forms and having to answer government's questions, and this is time they could be focusing on their business. This is time they could be expanding, quite frankly, hiring more Albertans. So we have committed to not just cutting red tape, because we've seen other jurisdictions that went down this path before us. They cut the red tape, they achieved the number, and they went, "Okay; that was great; good job," and they broke their arm patting themselves on the back. That was the biggest takeaway for us, that we can't break our arm patting ourselves on the back, because when it comes to red tape reduction, you can never be done. We've achieved our goal of 33 per cent, but we're not done. We've now got it to 35 per cent, and that's because we have created a culture of red tape reduction within government.

That means that if a minister brings in a program – quite frankly, we all bring in new programs to address needs that come up, and that will increase the regulatory count. We have a no-net-new policy, so ministers are expected to bring in new red tape reduction initiatives to essentially compensate for the regulations that they're bringing in. For example, I have the Alberta whisky act, which is about how we premiumize Alberta whisky. It's an incredible industry, right? I mean, we've got amazing grains – shout-out to the farmers – that go to Scotland. Like, we ship barley to Scotland that they use to make Scotch. Well, let's take those amazing grains and do something with it here. We're premiumizing Alberta whisky.

I'll stop the commercial for that now and just say that there will be an increase to the regulatory count in my department because of it. So, then, I now have two years to reduce the commensurate amount of red tape to make up for that. That speaks to the culture of red tape reduction that exists. It's our commitment to no net new.

4:50

I would also add that in terms of, you know, how we're doing it is the permits. The permits are a big part of red tape reduction. This is so important. It was business that told us, like: we love your red tape reduction. They literally said to us: we love your red tape reduction, but it's taking too long to get permits approved. That's how we came up with automatic yes. If we go across North America, we see different jurisdictions that have played with it a little bit, but I can tell that you nobody has gone as far as we have. We have taken all the routine and low-risk permits, got rid of them entirely, replaced it with a checklist. We actually did this before we came out with automatic yes.

I was the associate minister of natural gas and electricity, and it was taking several months to approve 10-megawatt generators. By the time the AUC had done something similar – they got rid of the permit, replaced with a checklist – 10-megawatt generators or less approved in five days. So tell me that those small-business operators weren't overjoyed. I was getting e-mails. The first e-mail I got told me that they had their generator approved in seven days. Then I get another e-mail saying: wait a minute; six days. And then I got another one a few days later saying that they had one approved in five days. It is proof that when you cut red tape and you get out of the way of entrepreneurs, they will do what they do best, and that's invest in their company and create new jobs. We're essentially getting rid of the regulatory malaise, the burdensome requirements that government often has, so that businesses can focus on what it is that they do best, which is investing in this province.

Ultimately, it creates jobs, right? We know this because, you know, during that four-year period when the NDP were in government, we lost 180,000 jobs. We had a jobs crisis when we got elected, and it was a few short years of us being in government and reducing corporate taxes and reducing red tape, creating a business-friendly environment, and all of a sudden we need more skilled trades to come to the province; we need more electricians; we need more pipefitters. So I will say that this plan has been working. The proof is in the pudding, and small-business owners have been very responsive to the red tape reductions that we've done.

Mr. Bouchard: That is awesome. I appreciate your enthusiasm and passion, Minister. On behalf of all small entrepreneurs thank you.

Mr. Nally: Thank you.

Mr. Bouchard: Yeah.

I also recently met with a local entrepreneur. They told me that their biggest barrier to expanding their operations wasn't demand, but it was navigating the regulatory requirements. She said that when processes are predictable and efficient, she hires faster and reinvests sooner. On page 149 key objective 2.1 of the business plan states that the ministry will "lead government's red tape reduction activities to remove unnecessary regulatory and administrative burdens on Albertans and businesses and support continuous improvement in the delivery of government programs and services." Minister, through the chair, can you highlight for the committee how this work is translating into concrete, measurable improvements for Alberta businesses?

Mr. Nally: Thank you. I feel like it's time for the daily double because we're going back to automatic yes. I apologize, but that's the answer to your question, which is automatic yes. When the Premier first challenged me with the automatic yes, we didn't even know how many permits we had within government. We didn't know how many departments had permits, and we didn't know how many permits there were in total. Now, I think it was 478. It was under 500, how many permits we had in government. So what we did is that we created a repository for all the permits. We discovered there were 17 departments that had – in my head the number is 478 – fewer than 500 permits. We've created this repository, this database of all the permits. That's all we did, create the database. And just by shining a light on those permits, 20 per cent of those permits started getting approved quicker. I mean, this was unbelievable. Like, we hadn't even started the process of coming up with automatic yes, and 20 per cent of the permits were getting approved quicker and by as much as 30 days, so it was quite sizable.

This was our response to those types of issues that you're raising, which is: how do you get permits approved quicker? As I mentioned, we get rid of the routine, the low-risk permits. We get rid of them entirely and we replace them, you know, with checklists. Sometimes the checklist has an assessment, and we don't terminate those employees. We put those employees on the complex permits, the higher risk ones so that we can not just do a better job, but we can do a faster job.

When I first got elected, the worst story that I heard of regulatory malaise was taking seven years to get a water permit approved. Seven years to get a water permit approved. How many jobs were lost? How much economic activity never transpired because that permit was just sitting on someone's desk? So we need to create a sense of urgency, and that's what automatic yes does. It gives us the bandwidth of resources to approve the permit so that if we say it's 120 days, then it will be done in 120 days, and if you haven't heard yes or no, then it's deemed approved.

I can tell you that business is thrilled. I've gone on trade missions to different jurisdictions. I've been to Texas, where they're doing this, but they're not going as far as we are. They're just touching on what we're doing with automatic yes. Our goal was to be on the forefront of permit approvals for Canada. We're actually on the forefront of permit approvals for North America. That's how impressive the work is that the team is doing on automatic yes.

I'm happy to report that the work is ongoing. The ministers are doing that heavy lifting now. I can tell you the work is done at AGLC. There are a couple. I think the Alberta Energy Regulator is also turning the corner on being done. So that work is happening right now, and we're starting to see faster approvals.

You know, we are seeing the results of job creation. We're in an interesting time with all the issues that we have going on now, whether it's war in Ukraine or tariffs to the south of us. And I'm not even going to talk about the recent events in the Middle East. Even prior to then we saw economic headwinds that were spelling recessionary trouble for some jurisdictions, and while that was going on, we continued to create jobs. Last year Alberta, which is 12 per cent of the population of Canada, created 25 per cent of the private-sector jobs. We don't brag about public-sector jobs; we brag about private-sector jobs – right? – because that job was paid for by an investor. So 12 per cent of the population, and we created 25 per cent of the private-sector jobs. This is a huge win, and it's evidence that our plan is working.

I've already read the quote from the CFIB about what the CFIB has to say about this, and they love the fact that this is about faster approvals but with appropriate off-ramps. People think automatic yes means you can't say no. It doesn't mean that at all. If there is a health and safety issue, then there's an off-ramp. If there is an environmental issue, then there's an off-ramp. I've said this quote before. You know, I don't have grandchildren, but I hope to someday have grandchildren, and I want them to enjoy the same clean air and clean water that I've come to enjoy. So if there are environmental reasons to not do something, that off-ramp will be there, but if there are no reasons to say no, if the answer is going to be yes, let's not take seven years to do it. That's how we're going to respond to job creators. That's how we're going to respond to business owners.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to Member Stephan for the next question.

Mr. Stephan: Thanks, Minister. I appreciate those answers, and I appreciate the presumption of yes.

It was interesting. I was meeting with representatives of the Alberta chamber and we were talking about the MOU with the federal government, and they've almost taken a different tack. Unfortunately, we had Canada's first NDP Prime Minister who just left but had created a regulatory framework where actually it was kind of an automatic no, and it was impossible to get through the red tape. Instead of addressing all the red tape that, you know, this NDP Prime Minister had created, they had to bring in Bill C-5, which basically is: no, unless government makes a special exception. That's essentially what has happened. Without government making a special exemption for a development permit, basically because of the laws they had put in, it was a no. So I'm really glad, and it's very refreshing to hear about the presumption of yes. I think that's a very positive thing.

I want to talk specifically about land titles. A lot of people are coming to Alberta. This is a place. It's the economic engine. You mentioned private-sector jobs. Just an aside, as you were saying that we have created private-sector jobs: one of the reasons I ran is that actually during the NDP, private-sector jobs actually decreased during their term. It was actually a horrible thing and devastating. You know, great personal cost.

5:00

Putting that aside, on the key objectives for outcome 1 on page 149 of the business plan your ministry states that you're allocating

$70.9 million "to maintain and modernize Land Titles services, Motor Vehicles, and other registry [services] to help ensure Albertans are receiving timely and efficient services." I know certainly on the land titles side from, you know, kind of my days practising law that sometimes the delays there could be quite significant, actually. Could you walk the committee through how these investments in modernization are going to improve timeliness, accessibility, and overall user experience for Albertans?

Mr. Nally: Absolutely. I would be happy to. I'm going to start with your comment about the automatic no with our predecessors and the federal government. I was the associate minister of natural gas and electricity, and the NGTL was my responsibility, but approvals for it – that's our gas system that delivers gas to all the communities across the province, and the approval to expand that pipeline was for the feds. I was responsible for the gas file, but I had to wait for the feds to approve the expansion, and the regulator had recommended approval. Like, the regulator literally said, "That should be approved," and it sat on the minister's desk for six months.

After six months and several phone calls, his response was, "You know what? I'm not happy that we consulted enough. I think we should go ask those same people a second time," and so we did a second round of consultation. It was unbelievable, and it ended up taking a year and a half in total before we got back with a yes. So that's an example of what happens when you don't embrace a culture of efficiency and try to create a business-friendly environment.

You asked, you know, in terms of these investments in modernization, how it will improve timelines, accessibility, and overall experience. Yeah. Let's go back to land titles. Most people – at least, I was shocked when I found out that land titles does $300 billion a year in Alberta, $300 billion a year of real estate transactions. It makes me want to be a real estate agent when I'm done politics.

The impact of not having an automated land title system was significant. When the economy was just chugging along or when it was actually contracting like it did under the NDP, it wasn't an issue because we could process the volumes without any degree of concern, but when we started to see people come to Alberta for the Alberta advantage because they saw that we're a great place to live, work, and invest, we saw the volumes just jump through the roof. We couldn't forecast. We were forecasting for gains and growth, but we couldn't forecast high enough because no matter how high we forecasted, we just broke through, and it was because our plan was working. You know, you could buy a one-bedroom condo for $700,000 in Toronto or get that same condo for $300,000 here. So we were attracting not just people that wanted to live, work, and raise their family; we were creating investors.

What was happening is that there are two parts of – there's a land title that you would know if you bought a house or a condo, but there's also a survey if you were a developer. It was a pain for the municipalities because they had to send tax bills to people, and they didn't know who owned the home because the land title hadn't gone through, but for developers it was worse because there were many cases where they would lose an entire construction period. They would have the land, they would be ready to go, they would have hired the people, and they're ready to break ground, and they're just waiting for government to say, "Yes. Your survey is acceptable. Go ahead," and it was taking several months.

Well, in this country if you lose your construction season and the snow comes, you're done. There were cases of developers that would lose an entire construction season, and they would have to lay people off. That's what, you know, we have to appreciate. When we think of what happens when you don't automate, when you have a manual system, it impacts people's jobs and investment, and that's what happens.

In terms of what this will do, this will create a scenario where land titles will be able to approve something in five days or fewer, and no matter how busy we get, we'll have the scalability that comes with automation and we'll never have to say to a developer: "I'm sorry that you lost that construction season. Try again in the spring." We'll never have to say that, and that means we'll never have to lay people off because government couldn't be efficient enough for the private sector.

I don't want to be too verbose in my enthusiasm, but I think this will allow government to move at the speed of business, and I think that's going to be good news for Albertans when government can move at the speed of business. So in terms of what it will do, that's exactly what it's going to do.

Thank you.

Mr. Stephan: Yeah. Thanks for that answer. It's great that we are moving the provision of registry services at the speed of business. I think that's really important.

You had mentioned that red tape is something that is continuous. You know, I appreciate the culture of continuous improvement in government because that's what business does. Frankly, they're always trying to be better. I know that when I worked as a tax lawyer, I met many different successful business owners. They're always trying to be better. There's always room for improvement. I appreciate the foundational role that your ministry provides in not only outward-facing reduction in red tape but also having a culture of continuous improvement in government internally with that.

I see that there are only about 30 seconds left. I don't think I'm going to have time to ask another question, so I'll just cede my time to our friends across the aisle.

Mr. Nally: I'll jump in, then. There's something that I meant to tell you, if I can steal your last 20 seconds. I just want to let you know that more modernization is coming for personal property, vital statistics, corporate registries. We spend all the time talking about land titles, but we forget all those other pieces. My department is making modernization efforts that will increase digital services, reduce wait times, and increase accessibility for Albertans such as our complete electronic medical and death information system that was just released.

The Chair: Thank you, members. That concludes the government's members first block of questions.

We will now take a five-minute break, and then we will move on to the next round.

[The committee adjourned from 5:07 p.m. to 5:12 p.m.]

The Chair: Well, good afternoon. We now move on to the second round of questions and responses. The caucus rotation going forward will be the same as in the first round, starting with the Official Opposition, followed by members of the government caucus. However, the speaking times are now reduced to five minutes for the duration of the meeting. We will begin this rotation with a member of the Official Opposition, who will have up to five minutes for questions and comments, followed by a response from the minister, who may speak up to five minutes. After both individuals have had an opportunity to speak once, we will then move on to the next caucus in the rotation. If the member and the minister agree to share time, we will proceed with a 10-minute segment during which neither member nor minister may speak for more than five minutes at a time. Members are reminded that they may not share any unused portion of their five minutes with another member.

Member Tejada, do you and the minister wish to share your time?

Member Tejada: I would prefer block if that's possible.

Mr. Nally: Block it is.

The Chair: Block time it is. Member, please proceed.

Member Tejada: All right. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Minister and ministry advisers and staff, thanks for all the good work you do in service Alberta. Fun fact: I used to work for a former minister of service Alberta. Yeah. Back then I think it was jokingly referred to as the ministry of licence plates, but as we all know, the ministry of service Alberta touches the lives of so many Albertans in a lot of really key ways. I know that there was a reference here in the business plan around, you know, the crossministry work that must happen, right? So we know that it does touch the lives of so many Albertans.

I was so very thrilled to see the work around the removal of Canadian work experience in my file. I talked to a lot of stakeholders, and I know that it was one of the recommendations that was listed in the Premier's council on immigration and multiculturalism but one that makes a big difference in how well people integrate and contribute. We know that when people come to Alberta, that is exactly what they endeavour to do.

I welcome a lot of the changes that were around the condominium legislation. As a former constituency manager I heard a lot about dispute resolution and how that was a gap.

You know, the only "but" I would say was around the reporting of the deaths of kids in care, which I thought maybe didn't belong in a red tape bill. I think all of that said, it really does speak to the impact of this ministry on the everyday lives of Albertans.

With that, I'll start some of the questions. In terms of the mandate for service Alberta on page 147 of the business plan the stated mandate is to

> optimize and modernize delivery of registry programs and services to meet existing and emerging needs . . . to provide good value for taxpayers; [and to] protect Albertans and businesses in an increasingly complex and changing economic and social environment.

Given the stated mandate, I believe that would extend to Albertan residents who have temporary resident status as either temporary foreign workers, international students, refugees, people who are on the path to permanent residency. They are, in fact, taxpayers and are eligible for, I would say, most of the services that we receive as Albertans that I've had the benefit of receiving my entire life here. Given that they're all taxpayers, I would ask the minister how having a citizenship marker would improve delivery of services for which these folks are already eligible. My sense from a lot of the people that I'm talking to is that, in fact, it could create barriers, and that is part of the fears that I'm hearing from the stakeholders that I speak with. I would also ask how having a positive CAN citizenship marker denoting Canadian citizenship would improve delivery of services for any Albertan given that we're already eligible for them and given that long wait times for health care and eligibility for services is not tied to one's citizenship.

My next question would be twofold based on the second stated focus. How do citizenship markers on ID cards protect Albertans? In reference to performance metric 2(a) we talk about red tape being reduced, and given that citizenship markers were included in a red tape reduction bill, how does adding a visual identifier reduce red tape?

I'd like to also consider a metric in the business plan. I'm specifically referencing 3(a) and 3(b), which deal with consumer complaints and actions taken to resolve disputes. I think in this case it would be great to see as one of the metrics, because the ID marker change is significant and many newcomer-serving agencies and organizations are reporting an uptick in discrimination, how the minister would take steps to ensure that we're collecting data on that and collecting data on possible and potential discrimination due to having that marker on an ID.

I saw another dispute resolution also referenced in the business plan. I know that the minister has stated that discrimination doesn't exist in Alberta, and I would wonder about that assertion and how that data and how that conclusion was reached. But I think there's a real opportunity for us to look at that potential and to take possible strategies to mitigate any harm that comes from having an identity marker on that card.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

We'll now go to the minister for his time.

Mr. Nally: Well, five minutes goes fast, doesn't it? It felt like two. Thank you for that, and thank you for your kind words in the very beginning. Those were some bills that I was pretty proud of. The removal of the Canadian work experience: that was a big one for me, and I was very proud of that, so thank you. The changes to the condo rules: I'm glad that you like those as well. I love that also. Minister Glubish started that work, and he regretted that he wasn't able to get it over the finish line, so he asked me to make sure that I could. Thank you for that. It means a lot.

You talked about modernizing registries and, you know, making sure that we get good value for taxpayers, and then you brought up the citizenship marker and you asked how it would it would improve services. First of all, there are a lot of different things that require applicants to provide proof of citizenship. Assured income for the severely handicapped, Alberta Student Aid, income support program, Alberta adult health benefit, and the persons with developmental disabilities program all require citizenship to be proven.

Someone close to me actually provides approval in one of those departments, so I hear first-hand the pain of having to prove your citizenship when you don't have a birth certificate. The example that she gave me was that when you're getting your dental benefits approved, if you have a child with dental pain – I mean, every one of us here, I'm sure, has had dental pain. For me that's the worst. But to have a child with dental pain: that just breaks your heart. To apply for the benefit for that and then to be told that, you know, you need a birth certificate and then you've got to go wait three weeks for a birth certificate to be approved: that's a precarious situation to put a child in.

5:20

That's just one part of the benefits. You know, whether it's AISH or Student Aid, the fact is that citizenship proof is required for a number of benefits and entitlements in this province, and there are many Albertans that don't have a birth certificate. I have my birth certificate. It is the original one from – I may as well say it; it's on Google – 54 years ago. It's a piece of paper and it's disintegrating, but I still have it. But there are a lot of people that don't, so putting it on your driver's licence is going to be just one more way to make it easier for Albertans, for taxpayers to prove their citizenship to qualify for these benefits.

But I have to say something. If I said that there is no discrimination in Alberta, then I apologize because, I mean, we know that's not true. If I did say that, I don't recall. What I would have intended to have said is that discrimination has no place in Alberta. My parents taught me that racism is a stain on the soul, okay? I believe strongly that there is no place for discrimination in this province.

You know, I think the hospitality industry is a great example. You have to be able to prove if you're purchasing cigarettes, a lottery ticket, or going into a bar. I worked in the hospitality industry, and I remember asking people for their driver's licence to prove they're 18. I didn't care whether they were a citizen, not a citizen. I didn't care what their postal code was or what their address was. That's all on the driver's licence, which I would say is probably far more precarious. I never cared about any of that because I just needed to know that they were 18 so that I wouldn't be fined by AGLC if I served a minor. That's what I cared about, and I believe that the vast majority of people asking for ID, whether it's a bartender or someone at the entrance to a club when they're asking for ID, are operating with good intentions. They just want to know that you're old enough to go in.

Now, if we have someone that for whatever reason would discriminate against someone because they didn't have that citizenship marker, well, we have processes in place to deal with that, and we will deal with it appropriately through the appropriate authorities. You know, I don't know that I could say that it would never happen with 5 million Albertans, but if it does happen, we have processes in place and we will deal with it. But it will be the exception and not the rule, and any potential risk of that will be outweighed by the benefit of being able to have an easier time for Albertans to prove citizenship.

The last thing I would mention on that is that this is done in 67 jurisdictions around the world. It boggles my mind that nobody says that it's racist when Brazil or Japan or Italy or Spain does it, but they only have a problem when Alberta does it. I reject that notion.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to the government caucus, and Member Wright will be speaking. Member, do you wish to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Wright: I'd like to go back and forth, Minister. I can do block, too, if that's convenient for you.

Mr. Nally: You know what? Let's go back and forth if you like that. Yeah.

Mr. Wright: I appreciate it.

The Chair: Hon. member, proceed.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Chair and through you to the minister. Minister, you know, there's a part of our budget that is very near and dear to my heart because it impacts large swaths of Canadians and they're often not thought of when it comes to a service Alberta or red tape bill, and that's our Canadian Armed Forces members. Alberta has long been a national leader in the Support Our Troops licence plate program. We continue to sell more plates than any other jurisdiction in the country, and it's thanks to the generosity of Albertans and the efficiency of the administration of this program that more than $3.5 million have been raised through the Support Our Troops licence plate program that go to supporting the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services at the Canadian 3rd Division here in Edmonton. It directly benefits the men and women who serve our country as well as their families.

Through the chair, Minister, can you speak to the continued success and impacts of the Canadian Armed Forces program of Support Our Troops, how these plates are supported within Budget 2026, and how we're maintaining or expanding the ministry's investment in this important initiative to ensure long-term sustainability and growth in supporting our CAF members?

Mr. Nally: Yeah, absolutely. First of all, let me thank you for the work that you've done to support and advocate for our troops. In my riding, Morinville-St. Albert, we have, of course, a base in the riding, and there are also, particularly in Morinville and Gibbons, a lot of military families that live in there, and it's something that I have been passionate about. Anybody who follows my social media knows the support that I've had for our Legions in getting the money to replace things like roofs and flooring because I am so humbled by the work that they have done and appreciative of what they've done.

When I first got elected, we did a military family celebration because it's – you know, the troops: I mean, I have so much respect for what they do, but it's also the families as well. The families are behind the scenes, so we do the military family night. We rented the Landmark theatre, and it was basically for troops and their families to come watch a movie. They provided them with some popcorn and pop, and you know what? It was just an amazing night. For anybody that's watching that is serving: I thank you for your service. We're humbled by it, and I am proud to continue to support our troops' plate program that gives Albertans the opportunity to have a licence plate that honours our Armed Forces.

Fifty-five dollars of the cost of this plate is provided to the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, CFMWS, so they can support military families and programs across Alberta. I really appreciate every Albertan who has stepped up to buy this plate as their recognition and support has raised $3,602,000 for this important initiative. I thank everybody that has done that. The fund supports current and former military families and members that are in Alberta. I would encourage anyone who would like to get one of those plates and support our troops. If you're wondering: yes, I do have one on the back of my car, and I'm very proud to support our troops with it.

Thank you for your support of that great initiative.

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Minister. I appreciate the answer and how you're continuing to support that in 2026.

Through the chair, you know, if we can transition, we're going to be talking about key objectives 2.1 to 2.3. Reducing red tape is essential to ensuring government works for people rather than standing in the way of small business or its citizens, which is why I think key objectives 2.1 through 2.3 are vital.

We've seen the consequences of when excessive bureaucracy or government interference take hold, most notably with the federally overseen Trans Mountain expansion to the project of the TMX. This was killed essentially with layers of regulatory delays which helped drive the cost from $4.5 billion to more than $35 billion, making it one of the most expensive public infrastructure projects in Canadian history. When regulatory red tape comes into play, it kills jobs both in the private sector as well as the public sector.

You know, we've seen some pretty substantial growth in our private-sector job creation thanks to red tape reduction, and we've led Canada for a number of years straight now. Minister, can you explain why Alberta's 2026 budget continues to commit to cutting red tape and why it's so important to protect the taxpayers, support the economic growth, and prevent the kinds of cost-adding regulations that hinder major projects within the province?

Mr. Nally: Yeah. Happy to. Does everybody remember what you were doing that moment that Rachel Notley stood next to Justin Trudeau and said that cancelling Northern Gateway was the right decision? Do you remember what you – there are a few moments in your life where you remember what you were doing. I remember what I was doing, when the hair went up on the back of my neck when Rachel Notley said that this is the right decision.

Northern Gateway was cancelled, Alberta Clipper was cancelled, Energy East was cancelled, KXL was cancelled, and this federal government and the previous NDP government put all of their eggs in one basket, or one pipeline getting to the coast, and they went all in on that. It is the perfect example why government should not do what the private sector does a better job of doing. So they got involved.

5:30

Let's not kid ourselves. Don't run a victory lap on taking a $5 billion pipeline and spending $35 billion to build a $5 billion pipeline. That's what happened, and that is because government should not own a pipeline, should not put – I mean, we should have built all of those pipelines that I just mentioned. Unfortunately, because of the regulatory malaise we put all the eggs in that one basket of TMX and had to spend $35 billion.

It's not just oil; it happened on gas. There were over 20 LNG export facilities that have been proposed somewhere on the coast of Canada, west coast, east coast, and despite all of those proposals one has actually been completed and is actually shipping gas, and it took seven years to approve and seven years to build. Today we only have that one export facility going, yet Qatar, yet the Gulf Coast, Australia have produced generational wealth. While we were stuck in regulatory malaise, all those projects, those 20 projects: they all gave up. They quit. And it's because of the regulatory malaise that they faced. We have a reputation in Canada of not being able to build projects, so the investors go to where they can build stuff fast. That's why Qatar and Australia and the Gulf Coast were so successful in generating all this generational wealth that came from LNG exports.

For us, we will continue to focus on cutting red tape. I'm proud to say that we have a better partner in Ottawa now, certainly better than the NDP friend Justin Trudeau. I think Carney has indicated an interest. You know, he has provided us movement on seven out of the nine bad laws, he's got an MOU, and the most important thing that he did is that he put Alberta in the driver's seat on approvals for Alberta projects. I mean, what a novel concept. We will continue to focus on red tape reduction and making a business-friendly environment so we can attract that investment back. Make no mistake. This is not even a political issue. Canada's reputation is that you can't get things built, so we need to focus on automatic yes. We need to continue to focus on red tape reduction and cutting red tape so that we can continue to get projects built.

I had the privilege of being on a phone call with Kevin O'Leary, the Premier, and three other ministers. We were talking about wonder valley, and this was before wonder valley was even wonder valley. It was just a concept that was being looked at in another jurisdiction. And Kevin O'Leary said: you can't build things in Canada. That's when we told him that, actually, this one we can because it's just within Alberta; it doesn't cross the border. That is what started the ball rolling on wonder valley.

Now, the good news is that because of the movement that the feds have done on the MOU and on putting Alberta in the driver's seat, we're starting to see some progress. The answer is not to take your foot off the gas pedal when you're getting progress. The answer is to put the pedal to the metal and to continue the work on automatic yes and making it even faster for approvals that make sense to get approved and continuing to cut red tape. Ultimately, we need to get out of the way of job creators, we need to get out of the way of investors, and we need to help get projects in this province built.

I thank you for the question.

Mr. Wright: No worries, Minister. Those are great answers as to why we need to continue to focus on cutting the red tape and investing in ways to have Albertans live out the dream of business ownership and seeing great massive projects.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

We will now go to the Official Opposition side. We have a change of members, so I have to ask the question again. Member and Minister, do you wish to share block time or to share your time?

Member Kayande: I'm happy to share if the minister is willing.

Mr. Nally: I prefer block if that's okay. We'll go with block.

The Chair: Okay. Block time it is.

Member Kayande, it's your floor.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I really appreciate it. This is a question specifically about alcohol. Of course, AGLC is under service Alberta; for those listening, the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis Commission, $772 million of revenue associated with it. Now, every province in Canada has restricted or banned importation of American alcohol. American bourbon producers in particular are hard hit, seeing massive layoffs and plant closures. While I mourn for the job losses amongst my American friends, I would consider it a very real success story in our elbows-up and Canada-is-not-for-sale approach to U.S. relations with Trump in the White House. Premier Doug Ford has said that it's obviously working. Jim Beam had to shut down their Clermont, Kentucky, bourbon facility. I should say almost every province because one still allows U.S. bourbon imports, and that is Alberta. So my question is . . .

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Member Kayande: I'm pleased that the members are so pleased about that. I find it unpatriotic, frankly, that Donald Trump is threatening to annex us, and we are happy to take the money when Doug Ford clearly is not.

How much of the $772 million coming from AGLC is related to imports of American liquor? How much is associated with liquor that is imported into Alberta and then freight forwarded on to other provinces? What does this government have to say to, say, Canadian clothing manufacturers, fashion houses, machine tool exporters, software providers, or any other Alberta goods and services providers to U.S. customers when they ask why a few million dollars of bourbon taxes are more important than the survival of Canadian businesses in the face of Donald Trump's tariffs? What do we say to Albertans who are getting thrown out of work because of these tariffs and because of the uncertainty that Donald Trump is creating? Did the Premier in her conversations with Donald Trump commit to keeping that amount of bourbon import when she talked to him at Mar-a-Lago and some of the other places?

Finally, switching to the short-lived ad valorem wine tax, how much revenue will be raised by the ad valorem wine tax this year? That's fiscal year ending 2025, because I believe that was active for a full year. What has the impact of that tax increase been on wine importers, on fine dining restaurants? How many people have been thrown out of work because of those massive, massive wine tax increases, which, by the way, disproportionately impacted Calgary-Elbow, my own constituency that I am so privileged to represent, which is why it's such an important question for me to be asking the minister?

As well, are there any plans to get on Team Canada with respect to imports of bourbon and California wines in order to ensure that we're all rowing together and that we are actually increasing our negotiating position with Donald Trump, to ensure that we are standing together as Canadians shoulder to shoulder and doing our absolute best to make sure that Trump doesn't destroy our economy the way that he has said that he wants to?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to the minister for his answer.

Mr. Nally: How disappointing. Just when I think the NDP cannot possibly surprise me anymore, they then come here and they celebrate the closing of the Jim Beam distillery. Let me tell you that I take no celebration of anyone losing a job. Whether you're Canadian or American, there are no victory laps in job losses, and my response to that is shame on you. I think that's just deplorable.

Member Kayande: Point of order.

The Chair: Point of order, Minister.

Member Kayande: I'm sorry. That's 23(h), (i), and (j). "Shame on you" has often been regarded as a point of order. It is language that is intended to cause disorder, and it's a personal insult.

The Chair: Any response from the government side?

Mr. Nally: I would be happy to apologize for the fact that that member is celebrating job losses in the Jim Beam distillery, and I'll withdraw my comments.

5:40

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. You may proceed.

Mr. Nally: Again, like I said, the shock certainly doesn't go away, though. As I said, I take no victory lap from job losses in any country, whether it's the States or anywhere else.

I'm going to pivot to the auto industry because it's a great example of how our economies are intertwined. You know, we know that to get a car built, it crosses the border with Canada, the United States, Mexico, and I hear it crosses the border more than once.

The liquor industry is no different than that. We know that there are American companies that own distilleries in Alberta. We know they produce product here, and they ship it there. We have Canadian companies that have locations in the States that produce liquor there or spirits, and they ship it back across the border. Our liquor economy with the States is so intertwined that it's not as simple as just saying: we're not going to import American booze because we want to punish Americans and cause further job losses.

It actually punishes Albertans as well. It punishes those Albertans that rely on the cross-border trade with the States to bring in whether it's booze, aluminum, anything else. Oh, and distributors and agents. Because we have the only fully open and full market for liquor in the country, there are Albertans that make their living from importing this booze. It could be that as much as 20 per cent of their economic activity comes from bringing in American booze. So you want to impact Albertans' income by 20 per cent. You know, I'm gobsmacked that you think that's appropriate.

Our position is that we will always stand up for Albertans. So, yeah, I stand with the Premier in putting our elbows down and taking an approach of diplomacy. In fact, you could argue that the Premier's approach of diplomacy has actually translated into Alberta being relatively unimpacted compared to other jurisdictions. We don't see tariffs on energy and on agricultural products largely because of the diplomacy of our Premier.

Now, in terms of – you asked specifically on some revenue numbers. I'm going to phone a friend on that one. We've got the CEO of the AGLC here. She can tell us how much our imports from the U.S. are, how much gets sent to other provinces from here, and how much money we generated from the ad valorem tax. If I could ask Kandice Machado to come up.

The Chair: Hello. May you introduce yourself for the record.

Ms Machado: Yes. Thank you, Minister. Kandice Machado, CEO of AGLC.

Thank you for the question. Certainly aligned with the minister's comments about the job loss that not importing American liquor would cause to Alberta companies. I don't have the exact revenue projection for U.S. liquor that would have been built into our budget. What I can highlight is that Alberta has the most open and free market for alcohol in the country, and when we import alcohol, it's imported based on a consignment model. What that means is that there's no revenue generated on the importation. It's only generated when alcohol is sold. Ultimately, it's up to retailers and Albertans to decide what they're going to buy, and it allows them free choice. Certainly, since we've seen changes in the political environment, I would say that sales of U.S. alcohol are down. It ranges from 40 to 60 per cent based on the type of product that Albertans decide that they want to purchase, at the end of the day. I think that addresses the first question.

Certainly, on ad valorem, the amount that was expected from ad valorem is $10.8 million. That has now changed, and we're anticipating additional markup revenues of about $20 million to be received on wine ad valorem as part of Budget '26-27. Sorry. Of wine markup, or additional markup.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go back to the government caucus, and Member de Jonge is up. Again I have to ask the question: would you like to share your time with the minister or block time?

Ms de Jonge: Well, we have five minutes. We might only get through one question.

Minister, block or shared time?

Mr. Nally: Let's do shared. I'll try to keep my answers brief, and maybe we can have a little back and forth. We'll see.

The Chair: Member, go ahead.

Ms de Jonge: Sounds excellent. Thank you so much, Minister, for being here tonight and to your officials as well. I want to talk and ask a bit about the Condominium Dispute Resolution Tribunal. You know, I've certainly heard that more and more Albertans are choosing condo living. We're seeing an increase in Albertans making this choice – it's a good choice for first-time homeowners and also good for downsizing later in life as well – so the need to have fair and accessible mechanisms to resolve disputes is becoming increasingly important. For many condo owners and for boards navigating these disagreements under the current system, it's costly, it's time consuming, and I've been told by condo owners that it's actually intimidating to navigate through the court process, and that's really the only formal avenue for resolution.

These matters, you know, can be addressed more efficiently, and that's important for homeowners and Albertans and I think also for the confidence of the broader condo market, so I was very encouraged to see in your business plan the commitment in advancing the dispute resolution tribunal. I think that's a very meaningful step forward for Albertans in showing that we can have a more moderate and transparent process to resolve issues common with shared ownership.

I see on page 150 that the business plan allocates $3.7 million in '26-27 to support the implementation of the tribunal. Now, I really have two questions about this. First, can you outline how that investment, the $3.7 million, is going to improve access to timely and affordable dispute resolutions for condo owners and boards and what benefits Albertans are going to experience once this tribunal is fully operational? Then, secondly, how is the introduction of this tribunal going to reduce pressures on the court systems? I'm also interested to hear what kind of disputes the ministry is anticipating the tribunal will be best positioned to resolve based on the needs that have been identified in the business plan.

Mr. Nally: Okay. Thank you. I appreciate the questions. I touched on this briefly before. When we had a cabinet shuffle and I was moving into this role, Minister Glubish came to me and he said that this was something that he wanted to get over the finish line and wasn't able to just because of other events. He really wanted to impress upon me how important an initiative this was.

You know, over a million Albertans live in condos, and they don't have access to affordable, timely justice because the only avenue for them if they have any issues with their corporation is through the courts. Again, it's costly and it's time consuming. It's expensive. For that reason, we committed to creating a condo dispute tribunal. Let's be clear. This wasn't Minister Glubish's initiative; this is what we heard from Albertans. Albertans were telling us that they wanted this and they wanted this for years, so I made sure that it was a priority of our team so that we could stand this up.

We have set aside $3.7 million. This, essentially, will be to hire staff and it'll be to stand up the tribunal. These are essentially focused on start-up costs. After it's up and running, the expectation is that the tribunal will be self-funding. There is going to be a charge of 75 cents per door per month, so a condo owner will pay $9 a year for access to this. I can tell you that the feedback I have received from condo owners is that this is a small price to pay for access to timely and affordable justice.

The types of matters that they will address – we don't know how many people we're going to get initially that come to this. We don't want to create a stampede, if you will, so we're going to start slow and we're going to focus on monetary sanctions that are imposed by a corporation, access to documents as well as general meetings and special general meetings of a corporation. Now, this is what we're going to do for the first year, and then we're going to assess it, and if we need to add additional things to that, if we need to hire up and staff up more, then we'll be prepared to do that. But those will be the initial items that we go after when we start it up.

5:50

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Minister.

I also want to chat a bit about registry systems. I was having a conversation with a small-business owner in my constituency recently, and she was sharing with me that it's really frustrating when the systems you use, especially government systems, don't really reflect the time that we're living in. You know, she told me that when technology works well, it saves her time. It gives her the confidence that records are accurate and that they're secure. And that's a really important service that government should be providing when possible – right? – to give small-business owners this confidence and the security.

On page 147 of your business plan it states that your department is working to upgrade the registry systems to more modern technologies with the intent to improve service delivery and offer that stability, that reliability, the accuracy, and assurance in registry systems. I can share from feedback I've received from business owners and users of registry systems that this is really important, but you know, I'm hoping you can expand on how updating these systems with modern technology is going to – like, how the modern technology piece is going to deliver on the outcomes you're hoping for that are stated in your business plan.

Mr. Nally: Sure. Thank you for the question. You know, we have these systems – and, by the way, the constituent that you spoke to is spot-on. We built many of these systems in the '80s, so that means that the people that worked on these systems that we're relying on today: I don't know if we could find any of them still in the workforce, and if there are, hats off to them. I'd be pretty impressed.

I mentioned that our motor vehicles is end of life. We had one customized licence plate left, and we gave it to Forestry and Parks, so that's it. We can't do any more. And the day will come when we can no longer process a new driver's licence. It'll literally grind to a halt.

We know that Albertans rely on these services. You know, we brag about having the lowest fees in the country, but it doesn't matter how low your fees are if you can't produce a driver's licence or a licence plate. These are important services that Albertans rely on, so it's important that we modernize and bring them into the 21st century, and that's what this is all about. We're modernizing the systems. It's critical to maintain public confidence in our registries and ensuring Albertans continue to receive modern and reliable government services. As I mentioned before, the full functionality of land titles will be almost completely rolled out by the end of 2026, and for motor vehicles we are looking at – I will consult with my deputy minister – the end of '28 is when we're going to be completely rolled out for motor vehicles. So it's a big modernization.

We decided not to do what I refer to as the big bang theory of modernization. You may recall the feds' Phoenix pay scale scandal, where the feds couldn't pay their employees for a year. We're not going to do that. What we're doing is that we're going to be implementing our modernization using different modules. That way if we have a problem, it will be a small problem. It will be easy to scale it back and to resolve. That's why we're doing it. We're being slow, we're being methodical, but we're going to get it right.

There are other jurisdictions. I won't name them, but you can google them. They're doing similar initiatives, and it's becoming a billion-dollar boondoggle. I get regular e-mails, text messages from the Premier asking me if this is going to happen to Alberta, and I'm proud to say that we continue to be on time and on budget in the work that we're doing on registry modernization. We're not going to have a Phoenix pay-style boondoggle, and we're not going to let this thing cost us a billion dollars and run out of control.

Ms de Jonge: That's great to hear, Minister.

You know, what I'm reading through your business plan and from your comments here today is that in Alberta we'll continue to set the national standard for regulatory efficiency under your leadership. You mentioned earlier today that you've already surpassed the original 33 per cent red tape reduction. Also, happy to see that we were recently awarded a grade A from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the prestigious golden scissors award. That's really a reflection on the exceptional work that you're doing in your ministry. Yeah. Really appreciate the work, Minister.

Well, we're out of time.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go back to the members of the Official Opposition with Member Gurtej Brar. Would you like block time?

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Yeah. Sure. I would be okay with that.

Mr. Nally: Block time works. Yeah.

The Chair: You may go ahead.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Across Alberta, from Calgary and Edmonton to rural areas, families are struggling to find a family doctor. Getting basic primary care has become very hard. We often talk about the shortage of doctors by counting numbers, but we rarely talk about how much paperwork steals doctors' time away from patients. Research from the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business shows that Alberta doctors spend about 10 to 11 hours every week on forms, insurance paperwork, billing, and reports. That is more than a full day each week that they cannot see patients.

The Alberta College of Family Physicians and the Alberta Medical Association say that some clinics face even higher burdens, up to 15 to 20 hours every week. Experts believe that up to 40 per cent of this work could be given to office staff or removed completely with a better system. When hundreds of thousands of Albertans need a family doctor, we cannot keep wasting doctors' time on paperwork.

Research from the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business shows that physicians in Alberta spend roughly 10 to 11 hours every week on administrative work, which includes paperwork, documentation requests, insurance forms, billing tasks, and navigating various reporting requirements within the health care system. This is effectively more than one full working day every week that physicians are unable to spend seeing patients.

Given the current challenges Albertans are facing in accessing primary care, can the minister outline what specific steps this budget includes to reduce administrative burden on physicians? Can the minister provide detail about any initiative, working group, pilot project, or funding allocation aimed specifically at reducing paperwork and increasing the amount of time doctors can spend with patients?

Mr. Wright: Point of order. Mr. Chair, I would just like to say that I very much appreciate the question that the member opposite has brought forward. I think it's a very important question that should be asked in the appropriate estimates, and that would be with either the Ministry of Hospital and Surgical Health Services or with primary and preventative care services. They are the ones that will handle any billing, any contractual requirements for what paperwork must be required through the contracts or negotiations with the Alberta Medical Association. This is a point of order under 23(b).

The Chair: Would you like to respond?

Member Kayande: Yes, please. The member is talking about performance metric 2(a) in the ministry business plan, which discusses the amount of red tape reduction in percentages, and clearly this is an item of potential red tape reduction. I think the member's question is very well intentioned because this is the ministry of red tape reduction. "Is it possible that the ministry of red tape reduction has a role in reducing red tape that physicians have to face?" is, I think, a reasonable question for debate and that the minister can choose to answer or not. I think that posing the question to the minister is important.

Thank you.

6:00

The Chair: Thank you, Member Wright, and thank you, Member Kayande.

I would caution the member. I'm hoping that this question is relevant to the minister's portfolio, and I would just caution you to get to the question and then move on. This is not a point of order at this time.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Yes. I was referring to metric 2(a). The other thing is that family doctors spend 15 to 20 hours a week on admin tasks. Experts say that up to 40 per cent of that work could be handed to other staff or removed from the system. Has the ministry done its own study on how much admin work family doctors face? If yes, what did it find? How many hours per week do doctors currently spend on paperwork? How much of that time does the government think can be cut or given to support staff? It's related to red tape reduction. Even the CFIB advocated for this.

The other thing, Minister. Paperwork comes from many places: government programs, AHS rules, regulations, and other systems. What is the ministry doing to work with all parts of the health system to finally remove unnecessary repeated paperwork? Has the ministry set any clear target or timeline for lowering doctors' admin workload in the next few years?

Finally, Minister, many Albertans cannot find a family doctor. Extra paperwork directly means doctors see fewer patients each week. How does cutting admin work fit into the government's plan to reduce red tape and improve access to primary care? Has the ministry set any clear, measurable goal for giving doctors more time with patients?

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

On to the minister for his response.

Mr. Nally: Yeah. Thank you. It has been pointed out – I mean, these are great questions. In fact, I feel like you have my speaking notes because these are the questions that I asked Minister LaGrange, you know, so I know some of the answers. I can give you the answers as best I can, but then I will have to refer you to primary and preventative health care.

In 2024 primary and preventative health care worked with the Alberta Medical Association on how to increase time with patients and reduce paperwork. That was the work that they did with the Alberta Medical Association. That work is not done; it's ongoing. Minister LaGrange with primary and preventative health care is also doing round-tables with doctors as well.

To your point, you know, you said that 10 to 11 hours per week is how much time doctors spend doing paperwork. I don't dispute that at all. The CFIB says that it's about 20 per cent of their week, which if you consider there's a health care crisis right across the country, we could go a long way in reducing that health care crisis and providing everybody with access to a doctor just by reducing all the red tape and the administration that they deal with. Those are the very questions that I'm asking Minister LaGrange, and I would encourage you to take those questions to her as well. I've answered the things that I know that she's doing. I know that she's taking steps to reduce red tape through those round-tables and the work with the Alberta Medical Association.

Our target is a 33 per cent reduction across government, and that doesn't change for Alberta health care. They are also expected to achieve a 33 per cent reduction. The government is right now at 35 per cent. I know that primary and preventative health care is not there, but they are working towards it. If you want even more specific information than that, you're going to have to take that to Minister LaGrange.

The Chair: Thank you. We cannot cede time.

Mr. Nally: Yeah. I mean, it's really not my question.

The Chair: Okay.

We will now go to the government side. Member van Dijken, do you want to share time with the minister or block?

Mr. van Dijken: Yes. That would be helpful if it works for the minister, shared time.

Mr. Nally: Yeah. I'm good with that. Let's do that.

The Chair: You may proceed.

Mr. van Dijken: Perfect. Minister, thank you for being here. Thank you for your passion, for the work that you do in your department, all the members here that help to ensure that Alberta continues to be a leader in both red tape reduction but also in the service industry that government helps for Albertans.

I am going to focus in a little bit on a rural economic support program that is identified in budget estimates, Alberta's horse racing and breeding program. The breeding industry is deeply rooted in rural communities but not isolated to just rural communities. The industry supports agricultural producers, small businesses, and local employment across the province. Through a stable revenue-sharing model tied to gaming revenues, our government has provided predictability and long-term sustainability to this important sector.

On page 212 of the budget estimates, the government estimates, the horse racing and breeding renewal program is identified at $48.5 million. Per the grant agreement with Horse Racing Alberta, a fixed percentage of slot revenues generated at racing entertainment centres is granted to Horse Racing Alberta to support operating and capital cost of race track facilities, breed improvement initiatives, and purse enhancements. Through the chair: Minister, can you explain how this program supports rural communities in Alberta's horse racing industry?

Mr. Nally: Thank you for the question. I will confess this was not an area that I was an expert on when I got this file. We have a three-generation family farm in southern Saskatchewan, a grain farm, no cattle and certainly no horses, and so I was not an expert by any means. My first introduction to this industry was to go to one of the races just outside by the airport at Century Downs. That was sort of my first foray into this. I confess that I knew little about what this meant, so I also did a little more research.

There is a family ranch between Edmonton and Calgary where they train and race quarter horses, and so we actually went down there. I needed to see it first-hand, and I needed to speak to the owners to understand this industry. It is an industry that is driven by passion. They don't do it because they crave, you know, attention or money or celebrity; they do it because they love the industry. They love to race horses. We had a chance to learn about that. I can tell you that Alberta's horse racing industry is a vibrant part of our economy, but they need to be able to rely on these revenues from racing entertainment centres, and so 50 per cent of slot proceeds located at these racetracks goes to support these programs.

Horse Racing Alberta will maximize purses, they'll maintain a breeding improvement program, and they'll enhance the value of horse racing in Alberta. It doesn't sound like a lot, but I can tell you that the purses that they have are not very big, and so they need to be supplemented. They come under grants from government, but to be clear, this is funded by the players at the casinos, the 50 per cent proceeds from slot machines. This helps with the purses, which gives them, of course, the financial incentive to keep going and to help with their breeding and whatnot. This is a program that is important to the fabric of rural Alberta, and I don't want to refer to it as a sacred cow, but it could be a sacred cow because this is that important to the fabric of rural Alberta. It's a program that we put a lot of emphasis on and appreciation for the work that they do in this industry.

Mr. van Dijken: Through you, Chair, to the minister. He is so right that the passion that comes from the individuals in this industry is largely driven by the love of the animal but the love of the industry as well. I believe that it creates a lot of jobs throughout our province, and that this revenue-sharing model is important for both economic development but also responsible gaming oversight. If the minister could comment a little bit on that partnership that enhances both economic development and responsible gaming and his focus on ensuring that continues going forward?

6:10

Mr. Nally: Absolutely. We have a charitable gaming model in this province that is very unique to other jurisdictions. In this case it's been massaged a little bit because the beneficiary, of course, is the horse racing industry and the 50 per cent proceeds. So it's important that, in my opinion, we need to maintain this 50 per cent split on slot machine proceeds because the damage that would happen to this industry if we didn't have these grants, I mean, I can't imagine. The industry would probably collapse in the province, quite frankly.

I can tell you that when I was down at that farm that was training and racing these quarter horses, I mean, it was a family affair, right? I mean, like, the kids were in on it. The parents were in on it. It was paying for their oldest son to go to university. It's an incredible industry, and, as you mentioned, it's driven by passion. I think we found the sweet spot on this one because by doing the 50 per cent grant on proceeds from slots, it helps maintain and keep that industry alive. I think we found the sweet spot because we have a very successful and vibrant horse racing industry as a result of this program. You know what? I was told that Century Downs and much of the racing would probably close in this province but for the grants that come from the slot machines.

Mr. van Dijken: It benefits many communities right throughout the province.

I am going to switch gears to the Access to Information Act. Ensuring that Albertans have timely, reliable, and meaningful access to government information is essential to maintaining public trust and strengthening democratic accountability. As expectations continue to evolve, Albertans increasingly want a system that is transparent, user friendly, and proactive, one that provides clear access to records without unnecessary delay or administrative burden. Robust access to information services are a critical component of that system, supporting not only individual rights but also better governance, stronger public engagement, and improved confidence in government decision-making.

I am encouraged to see that the business plan prioritizes these goals through outcome 4, which commits to enhancing openness and accountability across ministries. The allocation of $10.8 million to access to information services reflects an important investment in improving compliance, expanding proactive disclosure, and modernizing the tools that support Albertans in accessing these public records. These enhancements will help ensure the new access to information and accountability act is implemented effectively and that the government of Alberta continues to make progress in transparency and accessibility. Outcome 4 of the business plan on page 152 highlights $10.8 million allocated to access to information services to foster an open, accessible, and accountable government of Alberta.

Minister, what was the ministry's access to information compliance rates over the past year? How many public records are now available online through Transparency Alberta, and how does this compare to the compliance rates and public records available since the Access to Information Act came into force?

Mr. Nally: Thank you for that question. I'm going to speak very quickly because there's lots of great stuff here, but our compliance rates are at 99.94 per cent on time. That's important because we heard loud and clear when we got elected in 2019 that Albertans valued open and transparent governments, and they weren't getting that.

The previous NDP minister was actually criticized because they tried to find out who was submitting the FOIP requests. I mean, that is so unacceptable and inappropriate. They were criticized by the IPC for that behaviour, and we heard from Albertans that they wanted better than that. They want it open, they want it transparent, so we committed to being the most open and transparent government not just in our province's history but the country. We came out with proactive disclosure because it was a big part of being the most open and transparent government.

As of February 11, 2026, almost 33,000 public records are available through the Transparency Alberta website. This represents steady growth since the website launched in June 2025.

The Chair: Okay. We will now go back to the Official Opposition with Member Gurinder Brar asking the question. Do you wish to share or block time with the minister?

Member Gurinder Brar: I think block.

Mr. Nally: I like block. Do you like block?

The Chair: Block time is good.
Go ahead.

Member Gurinder Brar: Mr. Chair, I would like to raise an issue that exposes one of the most troubling contradictions in this government's fiscal priorities, Alberta's growing reliance on digital gambling revenue while failing to address the public health responsibilities that must accompany it. Let's be clear. Gambling itself is not new to Alberta. For decades the province has regulated casinos, lotteries, and other forms of gaming through the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis commission. But what has fundamentally changed in recent years is the government's role in directly operating and promoting digital gambling through platforms such as playalberta.ca. The government is no longer merely a regulator. It is now a participant in the marketplace, actively generating revenue from online gambling activities.

On page 62 of the fiscal plan the ministry highlights the growth and performance of its iGaming platform, emphasizing revenue generation and user engagement. The tone is celebratory, presenting digital gambling primarily as a fiscal opportunity for the province, but what is missing from that section is striking. There is no reference to responsible gambling initiatives, addiction prevention strategies, or public health safeguards tied to digital gambling growth. The absence is particularly notable when compared with earlier planning documents. The previous 2025 to '28 business plan at least acknowledged responsible gambling as part of the ministry's mandate. In the latest version that pillar appears to have quietly disappeared from the narrative altogether.

Meanwhile the government is planning for substantial revenue growth from digital gambling. According to the ministry's own projection iGaming revenue is expected to reach approximately $75 million in this year, increasing to about $109 million by '28-29. These figures demonstrate that online gambling is quickly becoming a meaningful revenue stream within the province's fiscal framework, yet when we turn to 2026-27 estimates, the financial commitments tied to protecting Albertans from gambling-related harm are difficult to find. The estimates on page 210 outline ministry spending and program allocations, but they do not identify a dedicated line item specifically tied to digital gambling addiction prevention, public awareness campaigns, or technology designed to mitigate gambling harms.

This concern becomes even more pronounced when we examine the ministry's investment in digital infrastructure. On page 132 of the business plan the government outlines approximately $60.7 million in digital infrastructure investments intended to modernize government systems, yet there is no indication that any sort of that funding is being directed towards responsible gambling technologies such as real-time monitoring tools, enhanced self-exclusion systems, behavioural risk detection, or targeted user safeguards. Mr. Chair, that raises a fundamental question. If the government is willing to invest tens of millions of dollars in expanding digital platforms that generate gambling revenue, why is there no equal visible investment in protecting Albertans from harms associated with those platforms?

Online gambling carries unique risks compared to traditional forms of gambling. It is accessible 24 hours a day, available on smart phones, personal devices, and designed with fast-paced digital interfaces that encourage prolonged engagement. These features can make it easier for individuals, particularly younger users or those already facing financial stress, to develop problematic gambling habits. This is not merely a theoretical concern. Across jurisdictions where digital gambling has expanded rapidly, public health experts have documented increased risks of addiction, financial harm, and mental health challenges associated with online betting environments, yet the provincial budget documents remain largely silent on those risks. There are no publicly stated metrics for monitoring problematic gambling behaviour on provincial platforms.

The 2026-27 budget plan highlights the growth and revenue potential of iGaming platforms such as Play Alberta. Can the minister explain what funding is directly being allocated to responsible gambling platforms associated specifically with online gaming and where those expenditures appear within the government's budget? Can the minister also explain: how does the ministry track user demographics, frequency of play, time spent on platforms, or indicators of problematic gambling behaviour? And how is the data used to prevent addiction or financial . . .

6:20

The Chair: We will now go to the minister for his response.

Mr. Nally: Okay. Thank you for that. First, let me just say that we are not bringing iGaming to the province. It's already here. It's alive and well. Every single one of us could pull out our iPhones, download an app, grab a credit card, and we'd be making bets within four or five minutes. That's how easy it is. But we're hearing that there are some – quite frankly, I call them repugnant operators because they don't have any player safety controls in place and they do things like market to vulnerable Albertans that they know are struggling with gambling behavioural problems. They market to them. They offer them reload bonuses. So we are looking at what Ontario has done. They've come up with a regulated format that puts player safety first.

I'm going to, first, ask the CEO of AGLC if she could come up and talk about the responsibility piece with Play Alberta, the self-exclusion, the GameSense, and just talk briefly about, you know, what we're doing to put player safety and responsibility first. And then I'm going to invite Dan Keene from the Alberta iGaming Corporation to talk about our partnership with Responsible Gambling.

The Chair: Could you introduce yourself again for the record?

Ms Machado: Yes. Thank you, Minister. Kandice Machado, CEO of AGLC. Certainly, we take responsible gambling very seriously at AGLC and want to educate Albertans on how to participate in the way that makes sense for them. As the minister highlighted, online gambling has been in Alberta for quite some time, and one of the best ways to manage it is to regulate it and offer safe choices. We have done that through Play Alberta. We have a world-class site, from a social responsibility perspective, that includes setting time limits, dollar limits, and having cooling-off periods.

In addition to that, we also have a very robust self-exclusion process in Alberta, which has been enhanced with the opening of the iGaming market. Our challenge was to create a process where it's one click of a button to self-exclude not only from iGaming sites but from land-based gaming in the province. We launched that new site or new system on February 28, and in the first 10 days of operation there were 106 sign-ups from Albertans, one click of a button that could exclude them from iGaming, land based, or both. That's something we're really proud of, that we've worked with the minister on, and we know he's passionate. He challenged us, and we delivered in partnership. Certainly, we see a lot of benefit there.

AGLC also does have a budget allocated for our GameSense program, which is a world-class program, and it is relatively aligned across Canada. So we do have GameSense advisers in facilities. Those advisers are also available to those who are online. And we do a lot of educational campaigns for Albertans. The dollars: you know, I'm going to say maybe in the $6 million to $7 million range from an AGLC perspective, but it's not about the dollars. It's about making sure we are where Albertans need us to be, and that's where we focus our time and effort.

We also have partnerships with the four major sports teams across Alberta, and they are also promoting GameSense. I think that really resonates from a sports betting perspective and is something else that we're very proud of.

Perhaps I'll end my comments there and turn it back to the minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you.

While Dan Keene is coming up to the microphone, I just want to say that I heard from a constituent who self-excluded on PlayAlberta. They got an e-mail immediately congratulating them for the decision they made and a follow-up phone call from a counsellor asking them if they needed any counselling. I couldn't have been more proud, so great job.

I'm going to hand it over to Dan Keene to talk about the partnership with Responsible Gambling. You have 55 seconds.

Mr. Keene: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Chair. Dan Keene, interim CEO, Alberta iGaming Corporation. On February 20 the Alberta iGaming Corporation announced a partnership with the Responsible Gambling Council, RGC, to make RG check accreditation a mandatory requirement for all Internet providers that are registered and approved in the province going forward. This isn't just a rubber stamp. This is an integrity program that's a global responsible gambling program that will ensure that this Canadian-made accreditation, which has been developed over a decade, evaluates operators against rigorous, evidence-based standards covering governance, player safeguards, staff training, marketing practices. It's part of the DNA and the mandate under Bill 48 and the Alberta iGaming Corporation to ensure that social responsibility is in the forefront of what we do. This partnership with RG check will provide assessments based on internationally recognized responsible gambling standards.

I will conclude my comments there. Thank you.

Mr. Nally: Thanks, Dan.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go back to the government side. Who's up? Mr. Bouchard. Go ahead.

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Let's talk about registries, I guess. They're not always – we'll go back, yeah – on the minds of all Albertans, but when they're necessary, they're either really smooth or . . .

Mr. Nally: It's always on my mind.

Mr. Bouchard: Always on your mind? Yeah. Not necessarily on mine, but when you need to get . . .

The Chair: Member Bouchard, are you going back and forth?

Mr. Nally: I think we are.

Mr. Bouchard: I think we are. Sorry about that. We didn't go through you. With your permission we'll continue back and forth.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. You can continue.

Mr. Bouchard: Okay. Sounds good. I guess, regardless of which way your luck falls at the registry, they're still an essential part of Alberta's lives. I see in outcome 1, page 149 of the business plan, you're working to ensure that Albertans have access to affordable and user-friendly registry services in a timely and effective manner. Minister, through the chair, can you please let us know how you'll be working to achieve that this year?

Mr. Nally: Yeah. Thank you for that question. The registries remain a major point of contact between Albertans and our government. That's why we are modernizing our aging registry systems to provide Albertans with better, faster, and smarter services while accommodating the increased demands of a growing population.

Some of the successes that we have achieved in this past year and the one that you've heard me brag about – and I will continue to shout it from the rooftops because our realtors will tell you that we were in the dark ages several months ago, and now we're not – is the release of the new Alberta registries for land online, or ARLO, our new land title system, which improves land title services by enabling Albertans to search for land titles 24/7. I still, like, can't believe that it took this long to get 24/7 access to land titles. Realtors do their business evenings and weekends. We need to respond to what business is doing. That is incredibly user friendly, and realtors will tell you that they absolutely love it. I still meet the occasional realtor that doesn't know about ARLO. If you do find that, please tell them about ARLO. Stop using SPIN; go to ARLO. It's world class. It's user friendly. Yeah, I'll stop the infomercial.

The second phase of the electronic medical death information system launched in January 2026. It enabled physicians and nurse practitioners to digitally submit death certificates to government, reducing paper processes and alleviating wait time for family members and loved ones during a difficult time. You can just appreciate, you know, a difficult time like that and making it easier, user friendly. Everybody benefits.

The court certificates portal released in November 2025 for law enforcement agencies and Crown prosecutors to digitally request and track court certificates related to vehicle and plate registration, licence expiry, and suspensions.

This upcoming fiscal year we will focus on the remaining work to implement the functionality of ARLO to allow lawyers to digitally submit and register their land titles, which will help significantly reduce the backlog and long wait times currently being experienced by Albertans.

Motor vehicle modernization will be ramping up next fiscal following the completion of a competitive procurement process for a contract to implement the Arizona motor vehicle solution in Alberta.

The last one that I'll talk about, and I had mentioned this before, but it's just so important, is putting registries online. I mean, this was about making a user-friendly interface. It was about making life better for Albertans, cutting red tape. But, yeah, we put registries online. You know, I will say it time and again. Rather than having to get up on a Saturday and go down to the registry and wait in line – and especially if you're in rural Alberta, it might be a 40-minute drive to the nearest registry – this allows you to go to the registry online in your space at your pace and renew whatever licence it is that you're renewing. It's done online. It's fast, it's convenient, and it's, I mean, where Albertans already are. We're just catching up.

The best part is we were able to integrate this online registry with registry sustainability. This is important because I always talk about registry sustainability, particularly in rural Alberta, and integrating the online portal with our land based was just a win-win for everybody, but ultimately the biggest winner was Albertans.

The Chair: Well, thank you. I apologize for this interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for consideration of the ministry estimates has concluded. Thank you, all, for your participation.

I would like to also remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet this evening at 7, in about half an hour, to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Advanced Education.

Thank you. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 6:30 p.m.]

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