

Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, February 26, 2026

Day 27

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature
Second Session

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

Al-Guneid, Nagwan, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)
Amery, Hon. Mickey K., ECA, KC, Calgary-Cross (UC), Deputy Government House Leader
Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
Ellingson, Court, Calgary-Foothills (NDP)
Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC), Deputy Premier
Elmeligi, Sarah, Banff-Kananaskis (NDP)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP), Official Opposition Whip
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP), Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Hon. Peter F., ECA, Airdrie-Cochrane (PTP)
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hoyle, Rhiannon, Edmonton-South (NDP)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Ip, Nathan, Edmonton-South West (NDP)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP), Official Opposition Assistant Whip
Jean, Hon. Brian Michael, ECA, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UC)
Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kasawski, Kyle, Sherwood Park (NDP)
Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP)
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Hon. Todd, ECA, Central Peace-Notley (UC)
Long, Hon. Martin M., ECA, West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)
McDougall, Hon. Myles, ECA, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Metz, Luanne, Calgary-Varsity (NDP)
Miyashiro, Rob, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Nally, Hon. Dale, ECA, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Nenshi, Naheed K., Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP), Leader of the Official Opposition
Neudorf, Hon. Nathan T., ECA, Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaides, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Petrovic, Chelsae, Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, ECA, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawyer, Tara, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, ECA, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Hon. Joseph R., ECA, Cardston-Siksika (UC), Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, ECA, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. R.J., ECA, Highwood (UC)
Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (Ind)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC), Premier
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)
Turton, Hon. Searle, ECA, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
Wiebe, Ron, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Williams, Hon. Dan D.A., ECA, Peace River (UC), Deputy Government House Leader
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UC) Government Whip
Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC), Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:
United Conservative: 47 New Democrat: 38 Progressive Tory: 1 Independent: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, KC, Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Law Clerk
Vani Govindarajan, Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and Executive Director of Parliamentary Services
Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and Committees
Aaron Roth, Committee Clerk
Amanda LeBlanc, Managing Editor of *Alberta Hansard*
Terry Langley, Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Gareth Scott, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Lang Bawn, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

Danielle Smith	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental and International Relations
Mike Ellis	Deputy Premier, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services
Mickey Amery	Minister of Justice
Andrew Boitchenko	Minister of Tourism and Sport
Devin Dreeshen	Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors
Tanya Fir	Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
Nate Glubish	Minister of Technology and Innovation
Nate Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Grant Hunter	Minister of Environment and Protected Areas
Brian Jean	Minister of Energy and Minerals
Matt Jones	Minister of Hospital and Surgical Health Services
Adriana LaGrange	Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services
Todd Loewen	Minister of Forestry and Parks
Martin Long	Minister of Infrastructure
Myles McDougall	Minister of Advanced Education
Dale Nally	Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
Nathan Neudorf	Minister of Affordability and Utilities
Demetrios Nicolaides	Minister of Education and Childcare
Jason Nixon	Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services
Rajan Sawhney	Minister of Indigenous Relations
Joseph Schow	Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration
R.J. Sigurdson	Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
Searle Turton	Minister of Children and Family Services
Dan Williams	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Rick Wilson	Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
Muhammad Yaseen	Associate Minister of Multiculturalism

Parliamentary Secretaries

Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk	Parliamentary Secretary for Settlement Services and Ukrainian Evacuees
Chantelle de Jonge	Parliamentary Secretary for Affordability and Utilities
Nolan Dyck	Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous and Rural Policing
Shane Getson	Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridor Development
Chelsae Petrovic	Parliamentary Secretary for Health Workforce Engagement
Jason Stephan	Parliamentary Secretary for Constitutional Affairs
Ron Wiebe	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (North)
Justin Wright	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (South)
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Yao
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Johnson

Ellingson
Kasawski
Kayande
Rowswell
Stephan
Wiebe
Wright, J.

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Wiebe
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Boparai
Bouchard
de Jonge
Elmeligi
Hoyle
Stephan
van Dijken
Wright, J.

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Batten
Getson
Haji
Johnson
Lunty
Sawyer
Singh
Tejada

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Lunty
Deputy Chair: Mr. Wright

Chapman
Cyr
Dyck
Miyashiro
Petrovic
Sawyer
Shepherd
Wright, P.

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. McIver
Deputy Chair: Mr. Yao

Eggen
Getson
Gray
Metz
Petrovic
Rowswell
Sabir
Singh

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mrs. Johnson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Cyr

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Bouchard
Ceci
Deol
Dyck
Hayter
Lovely
Sigurdson, L.
Vacant

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deputy Chair: Mr. Wiebe

Arcand-Paul
Bouchard
Brar, Gurinder
Brar, Gurtej
Getson
Gray
Sinclair
Singh
Stephan

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Sabir
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lunty

Cyr
de Jonge
Eremenko
Lovely
Renaud
Sawyer
Schmidt
van Dijken

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Dyck
Deputy Chair: Ms Sweet

Al-Guneid
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Calahoo Stonehouse
Cyr
Ip
Petrovic
Rowswell
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m. Thursday, February 26, 2026

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of *God Save the King* by Anika Stork, and I would invite all to take part.

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious King,
Long live our noble King,
God save the King!
Send him victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the King!

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Joining us today in my gallery are two former members of the Legislative Assembly, from Calgary-Currie, hon. Christine Cusanelli and from Grande Prairie-Wapiti, hon. Wayne Drysdale, the birthday boy. Wayne is joined by his wife, Sherry, and colleague Tamara.

I'm also pleased to introduce Chief Aaron Young from the Chiniki First Nation. I ask that they all stand and accept the warm welcome of this House.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, first of all, St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you 78 students from the amazing school of Leo Nickerson in St. Albert. They're here with their teacher Elise Calvert Stelmaschuk. I ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a number of guests in the Speaker's gallery, but quickly before that I see we have former Member Dave Rodney here. Please stand and accept the . . . [some applause]

It is also my honour to welcome members of the Minister of Finance's family to the Chamber today: his wife, Jennifer Horner, and his children Avery, Luke, and Kase, who I am pleased to report is celebrating his sixth birthday today. Well done, Kase. With them, the minister's parents, Brent and Kate Horner, mother-in-law, Penny, sister-in-law Heidi, and nephew Jet. I ask that they all please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also seated in my gallery are members of the Calgary-Hays constituency board: Mirela, Viljko, Kent, Greg, Tyler, Anna Marie, and President Brian van Vliet. Joining these guests, I would like to recognize Fouad El Kardy, Wilford Jimmy, Ryan Robb also Trevor Marr and Alexia Garcia. I would invite all of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Other guests, starting with Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you three guests who are joining us today. Bill and Linda Hall have served as my constituency association president and secretary for the last 10 years. With them is my incredible wife, Barb. I ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Member Tejada: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Eve Aboka-Griess from Immigrant Champions of Canada. She and her organization are doing important work guiding immigrants by providing skills, resources, networking, and mentorship. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very dear constituent of mine, a very proud Albertan who is very happy to be here for his first visit to the Alberta Legislature ever. I introduce to you Rob Beier. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce members of the Terry Fox humanitarian award program. I have their executive director and some past scholarship recipients: Paulina, Toni, Carolyn, Aiman, Larissa, Kayla, Jaskirran, Sarah, and Atea. Atea is just a baby. She can't stand, but the rest of you can.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Chamber the president and CEO of Keyano College of Fort McMurray, Dr. Scott MacPherson, and also the president and CEO of Portage College in Lac La Biche, Dr. Stephen Price. Please stand up and let us give you the traditional warm welcome of the Chamber.

The Speaker: Calgary-Beddington.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce two amazing educators, Sarah Zagoda and Katherine Clark, and an incredible student, Evan Li, a high school student and powerful advocate for public education. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: We've added a little time to the clock for introductions, so I'll ask everybody to move it along if you don't mind as you go.

Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you Jon Tupper and his son Sullivan, who has just recently tied for the highest score in the provincial mathematics aptitude test. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Chamber two very special

guests, Josh Bilyk and Duane Monea. Gentlemen, please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Chamber.

The Speaker: Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all the members two special guests joining us in the gallery today, Mr. Sarresh Jeet, a practising lawyer, and Dr. Annie Gupta Jeet, an internal medicine specialist. I ask all members to extend a warm welcome to them, and I invite our guests to please rise and receive the recognition of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce doctors Lin, Graham, Tran, and Lewis. I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly. They're essential health care workers, hospitalists. Thank you very much for being here.

The Speaker: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce three amazing constituents of mine: Della, Dillon, and Brianne Burkitt. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Lunty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce two outstanding mayors, first from Beaumont, Mayor Lisa Vanderkwaak, and from Leduc, Mayor Lars Hansen. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to introduce Mike McMann, the superintendent of Fort Vermilion school division, and Laura Hack, chair of Calgary public schools. I ask them to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to the Assembly Yuliia Marcinkoski, a member of the Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations, and a NAIT student and my constituent, Tyler Paterson. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and through you to the entire Assembly Jeff Keddie, an area businessman, Rotarian, and huge advocate for our entire city and area. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you the president of the Airdrie-East New Democrat constituency association, Sarah Zagoda.

The Speaker: Are there any more? Calgary-Buffalo. There you go.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Behind me – probably, I don't see them up here – are Pat Gwynn* and Rob Perry, two guys who are up from Calgary, my dear friends. They were there at the very beginning in 1995 when I ran for election.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, through you I'd like to introduce to the House disability advocate Zachary Weeks. I'd like everybody here to give a warm welcome to Mr. Weeks.

The Speaker: Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce Sheila Pockett, deputy mayor of Onoway, and she's out from God's country. Please rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: Okay. This has got to be the last one. Go ahead.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you Alan Nursall, who is a former director of the Telus World of Science and was also at Fort Edmonton Park and is now with the Art Gallery of Alberta, a dear friend and constituent.

Members' Statements

Racism

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, on Monday I spoke with a friend of mine, Mr. Jon Cornish, who had a very troubling experience last week. Now, Jon is well known in Calgary. He's a former running back for the Calgary Stampeders, founded the Calgary Black Chambers to support Black professionals, wears a suit, works a corporate job. But last Friday in downtown Calgary he was subjected to an unprovoked, violent verbal attack: a man, sober, decently dressed, yelling at Jon to go back to his country, back to where he came from, and not stopping until a passing police officer intervened. Jon was shaken, especially because just a week before when he and his wife were at their favourite Calgary bar, she was intimidated by a group of people telling her that they should call ICE to have her deported.

You know, Mr. Speaker, just over four years ago Jon stood just outside these doors in our rotunda giving the keynote speech for a celebration of Black History Month, and now this February he and his wife find themselves under attack for the colour of their skin.

It's not a coincidence, Mr. Speaker. This comes as we see the rise and return of voices of hatred and discrimination, its weaponization and amplification by politicians, social media grifters, and actors of bad faith, both around the world and uncomfortably close to home, people who in the pursuit of power and profit are callously working to pit neighbours against neighbours, communities against communities, with no care for who that hurts. It's hurting people right here in our streets.

Far too many racialized Albertans have a story just like Jon's, and those numbers are growing. They should be able to trust that their elected leaders are working to make that better, not worse. Sadly, with this government it's increasingly clear they can't. Flowery words and photo ops don't make up for dangerous dog whistles. But I do know that those Albertans are watching. They'll remember who brought them help and who caused them harm. And I know which side of that line I want to be on.

The Speaker: Calgary-East.

Education Funding

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's classrooms are growing and becoming more complex, and Alberta's government is responding with strong, responsible investments that put students and learning conditions first. Budget 2026, if passed, delivers a record $10.8 billion operational funding for education, an increase of $722 million over last year. That represents $54 million per day in investment into Alberta's education system. This investment is part of our continued recognition of the realities facing today's classrooms and ensures schools have the resources they need to support students and teachers.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

A key focus of this budget is addressing classroom complexity. Budget 2026, if passed, will provide funding to hire more than 1,600 teachers and 800 support staff in the 2026-2027 school year. These new hires build on the $143 million announced earlier this month to address class size and complexity in the current school year, including complexity teams made up of 476 teachers and 952 education assistants deployed to the classrooms that need them most.

Looking ahead, education funding is expected to grow by $1.5 billion over the next three years, reaching to $11.5 billion by 2028-2029. This growth is expected to support hiring over 5,000 teachers, education assistants, and support staff. This will also strengthen supports for students who need it most, with more than $1.8 billion dedicated to specialized learning needs and increased enrolment funding for school boards. Alberta's government is investing more for reading and math support for young learners, student transportation, and continued curriculum renewal. This investment demonstrates our government's commitment to strong classrooms, meaningful support, and student success. Budget 2026 investments . . .

The Speaker: Calgary-Elbow.

Alberta Separatism

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, life in Alberta in the 1990s was hard. While the U.S. was booming, many of my engineering classmates worked on both sides of the border. The free labour mobility offered to engineers by the Canada-U.S.A. free trade meant that I could work and get paid, which for a 22-year-old is a very big deal.

In nearly six years working as an engineer, I spent time in U.S. cities big and small. My home base was Calgary, but I was lucky to get a lot of on-the-ground experience all over the lower 48. That labour mobility still exists despite Donald Trump, and it makes lives and businesses for Albertans better. Fifty dollars, a job offer, the right degree, and a passport is all it takes for some Canadians to work in the United States and for Americans to work here. Engineers, economists, scientists, nurses, and many other professions can cross the border pretty much seamlessly now.

That would be gone if Alberta separated from Canada. Businesses count on those NAFTA visas to balance their workforce, to fill in gaps, and to grow quickly when they need to. How can a business possibly invest when they don't know where their people will come from? The separatists say, "That's not true; we could renegotiate with the U.S; we keep everything we have; no big deal," to which I say: balderdash. Poppycock. Malarkey. Prove it.

Donald Trump is threatening our nation and started a trade war. His current trade negotiator wants even more tariffs on our economy. Against this threat, Stephen Harper said: we have to stick together. I agree. I denounce separatism. I'm a proud Canadian. The Alberta separatists might as well be working with Donald Trump to weaken us, and that's not okay. I believe in a strong Alberta. I love this province. I was born here. It's my home. I love Canada, and I denounce separatism. Why won't any UCP member do the same?

The Speaker: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Pacific NorthWest Economic Region

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A strong community isn't just created by accident. They're built by creating opportunities for people to work, innovate, and build futures here in Alberta. That's why Alberta is a member of the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region and why it matters for hard-working constituents in Cypress-Medicine Hat.

PNWER brings together five Canadian and five U.S. jurisdictions to focus on shared economic opportunities for regions like Cypress-Medicine Hat. It showcases what we do well and ensures our voice as part of the conversation that shapes investment and growth. PNWER connects Alberta directly with key decision-makers, investors, and industry leaders across North America. We are proud to be a founding member of PNWER because economic outcomes matter, especially for rural and regional communities.

Mr. Speaker, I've seen these benefits first-hand. The Medicine Hat region is home to an innovative aerospace, aviation, and defence cohort that is working on advancing aerial systems and collaborating with both Canadian and American defence partners. These high-value projects generate hundreds of highly skilled jobs in Medicine Hat.

Our involvement in PNWER allows us to actively champion local businesses and introduce them to investors, industry partners, and senior decision-makers who influence where new opportunities, operations, and future growth are directed. By putting Cypress-Medicine Hat on the radar, we're creating a real pathway to expand these opportunities within the region and the province. Economic development like this is essential for the prosperity of our province. These are the industries that allow young people to build modern careers close to home right here in Alberta. By building relationships and promoting what Alberta has to offer, we're making sure communities remain competitive, resilient, and well positioned for long-term prosperity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50 Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Today's first question belongs to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Government Spending and Provincial Debt

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At 6 last night via order in council the UCP government revealed that the Finance minister is now going to borrow up to $40 billion in new debt. Forty billion. That's over $2,000 of new debt for every single Albertan, and the Premier signed off on it without even so much as a news release. Why has the Premier authorized $40 billion in new debt?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year as we go through the budget process, the Minister of Finance has to go through all of the numbers according to our budget and make sure that he's refinancing so we have the funds available to fund all of our great programs to make sure we have continuity of government. This refinancing at different rates is something that is his responsibility to make sure the province has the best rates for the best borrowing and to make sure that we handle all of our debts and obligations to the accordance of the law.

Ms Ganley: This government wastes tax dollars like no other: $70 million to buy Turkish Tylenol, $1.2 million to store it and then dispose of it, $109 million on a failed health lab privatization, and over $1 billion on private surgical centres run by UCP friends. Now a staggering $40 billion in new debt. Why did the Premier approve this record level of new debt without telling Albertans her plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll go back a few years to the time when the NDP was in government and they rose the debt of this province to over $90 billion. Many of those debts are coming

due now, so our Finance minister, as according to his job, has to refinance and make sure that we have the funds . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
Go ahead.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
. . . available to run the operations of the ministries that we are required to run and make sure we have continuity of government service and make sure we continue to work to recategorize our debt in the best means possible to serve all the needs of Albertans for now into the future.

Ms Ganley: With the stroke of a pen the Premier has authorized borrowing that will increase Alberta's net debt by almost 50 per cent. It's unprecedented, regardless of the revisionist history, and she didn't even tell Albertans it was happening or what this catastrophic level of borrowed money is for. This isn't a government investing in people. This isn't money for health care or education. It's a government wasting hundreds of millions of dollars on failed privatization plans and Turkish Tylenol. Will this government stop with the terrible financial mismanagement and start addressing the actual priorities of Albertans?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to be part of a government that does put the interests of Albertans first. That's why we continue to invest more than any other government in the past history of Alberta into our heritage fund, so that we can get off the revenue roller coaster so that we can put aside money for the future of Albertans. We're very proud to take it from $16 billion, where the NDP added nothing in there except for debt, and we've added a further $16 billion so that we are over $33 billion within that fund, growing to a point where in the future, hopefully by 2050, it can serve the needs of future Albertans for years and years to come.

The Speaker: This time let's hear the question and the answer.
Calgary-Mountain View.

Alberta Separatism and Economic Development

Ms Ganley: Every day that the Premier refuses to denounce separatism is a bad day for Alberta. A separatist party in government scares away investments, hurts jobs, and ruins Alberta's reputation as a place to invest, yet this Premier refuses to say three simple words: I oppose separatism. Why is this so hard? Everyone on this side of the House has said it, so why won't the Premier? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can explain it to the members, but I cannot understand it for them. Why is it so hard? On this side of the House we believe that Albertans should have a say when it comes to what happens in this province. Unfortunately, the members of the NDP believe that direct democracy is somehow a bad thing. On this side of the House we believe important issues should be put to the people. That's why we introduced the citizens' initiative legislation and made sure the threshold was reasonable. [interjections]

The Speaker: Only one person at the time has the floor, and right now that's Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: On this side of the House we believe that the Premier should have a say, and we'd love to hear from her.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce says that all this separatist talk is damaging business investment certainty. Quebec learned the hard way in advance of their separatist referendums that jobs and investment leave in unstable political climates. With record borrowing, with Albertans struggling, Albertans can't afford to lose investment. Why won't the Premier stand today and save these jobs and investment by clearly saying that she opposes separatism? [interjections]

The Speaker: Let's actually hear the answer from the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a bit rich coming from the NDP talking about investment. On this side of the House we have taken real measures by reducing red tape to attract investment and having the lowest taxes of any jurisdiction in Canada, unlike the members opposite, who, when they were in government, literally asked members of the population to leave Alberta to other places while bringing in employees from other parts of the country to change light bulbs and change shower heads. Year over year we've created over 100,000 new jobs in this province. That is what winning looks like. [interjection]

The Speaker: Minister.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Ms Ganley: The vast majority of Albertans are proud Canadians. They want to continue to build our country, not tear it apart. They want to end the talk about separating that is hurting investment, scaring away jobs, and ruining Alberta's international reputation. The only ones cheering for separatism are those who want Alberta to end up controlled by the U.S. We know the Premier is all smiles when she visits Mar-a-Lago. Will she finally say it clearly? Does she oppose Alberta separating from Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Member Ceci: What does the Premier say?

The Speaker: Order. Calgary-Buffalo, I just recognized a different member.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I do find it a bit odd that the members opposite would talk about our international reputation. As a government we spend a lot of time overseas building relationships with investors who want to come to Alberta and put money in. While the members opposite were in government, they couldn't be bothered to go to Ottawa to defend us against Bill C-69. We have attracted billions of investment and billions more coming, including Lufthansa Technik, CAE, De Havilland. The list goes on and on. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
Take an extra 10 seconds to finish your answer.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the 10 seconds. What I can tell you is that Alberta is a leader around the world in attracting investment. People want to come here because there's opportunity, and we welcome it, unlike them, who drove it away.

The Speaker: The third set of questions to Calgary-Mountain View.

Health Care System Capacity

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, our emergency rooms are bursting at the seams. Hospitals are far beyond capacity, leaving patients in hallways and even closets. Where are the emergency triage doctors this government promised? They were announced with great fanfare, but three weeks later we don't have a single one. When is this government going to step up, stop with the pretty words, and actually do something about the crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the fall I met with the ED section of the AMA, and one of the proposed solutions to alleviate pressures in our emergency rooms was the triage liaison physician role, which we implemented. I approved up to $20 million for these roles at nine sites over the next two years. The AMA then responded with a counterproposal requesting five or six items of additional compensation. We did immediately approve another one of those, an after-hours modifier. We're still working through the other five. It's my hope that we can find a collaborative solution for what's best for patients. [interjections]

The Speaker: You know, there are times when we bicker in here, but when a question gets asked and you're getting a clear answer, maybe you should listen to it.

Go ahead.

Ms Ganley: Last night the Misericordia ER had an 11-hour wait time at 7 p.m. That means that patients who rushed there at dinner last night didn't get seen until breakfast this morning. This is not acceptable, especially with record borrowing, but instead of fixing wait times, the UCP tinker away with new management models and CEOs, creating organizational chaos instead of fixing problems. Albertans are literally dying waiting for care. When will the UCP stop their endless comms exercise and actually do something to save lives?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the member opposite knows that patients are seen in order of urgency and that that is not accurate. I would ask the members opposite not to undermine confidence in our public health care system because there are people who really need to utilize it, and if they don't go, it could be tragic. I'm also glad, though, that the member opposite raised the Misericordia hospital, where we've announced an in-patient bed tower expansion which will double the in-patient capacity of that hospital and speed up those wait times, which, frankly, are unacceptable. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. You know, that was twice. You got a straight answer to a straight question, and you couldn't listen to it.

Go ahead.

Ms Ganley: Minister, those numbers are from your own website.

Many patients end up in the ER because they can't get preventative care. Nearly 1 million Albertans can't find a family doctor. It's not for lack of a website; it's lack of doctors, because the UCP drove them away, and lack of any real plan. [interjections] In Lethbridge there are no physicians.

The Speaker: Order. That applies to both sides. When somebody is talking, let's hear it.

Stand up, please.

Ms Ganley: In Lethbridge there are still no physicians taking new patients. None. Why is it acceptable to this government to leave Lethbridge families without a doctor, forcing them into overcrowded ERs?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite's numbers are way off. In fact, by CIHI data, and that is the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Alberta has 84 per cent of the population that have a family practitioner. In fact, a new study by the *Globe and Mail* has shown that it's 87.2 per cent, so we see an increase. We've added 3,000 doctors to the province, gone from 10,600 to 13,700. We are continuing to work with municipalities that have issues, and we will continue to work with Lethbridge. Obviously, they have problems attracting doctors. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Physician Services Agreement

Ms Hoffman: Health care is in crisis, and the UCP is pushing forward a privatized, American, two-tier health care scheme. Family physician hospitalist contracts across Alberta, including surgical hospitalist services in Edmonton, will terminate on April 1. These physicians are essential to maintaining in-patient flow, supporting surgical capacity, and preventing emergency department congestion. Front-line physicians are raising serious concerns about continuity of care, so what concrete steps is the government putting in place to ensure there's no disruption to patient services when these contracts end on April 1?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite would know that the contract that was signed collaboratively with the Alberta Medical Association in 2022 is ending at the end of March of this year, but there has been work to continue that on and make sure that we go into negotiations and make sure that our physicians are well compensated. The fact that we were able to sign a primary care compensation model off the negotiating cycle shows our commitment to family doctors in this province and all doctors.

Ms Hoffman: The question is about hospitalists.

Doctors want to maintain patient care. It really feels like this government is intentionally causing chaos in Edmonton's public hospitals and pushing patients into private surgical centres. The patients who need surgeries in hospitals are far more complex, and their lives shouldn't be put at risk because the UCP is pushing American-style health care on us all. What assurances can the minister for hospitals offer patients that their surgeries will proceed beyond April 1 in public hospitals as scheduled when it's clear that the plan in place is going to cause chaos?

The Speaker: We've got two standing ministers. Let's go with the minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, we performed a record number of surgeries last year, 318,000. What the member opposite may not be aware of is where those surgeries were performed: 80 per cent in our public hospitals. The other 20 per cent were performed in chartered surgical facilities but publicly paid by the same medical professionals that work in both environments. Let's increase surgeries for all Albertans, and let's increase flexibility for our talented health care professionals. That's what's going to help with attraction and retention and better patient outcomes.

Ms Hoffman: Some of the impacted doctors are sitting in the gallery today. They helped me write these questions. These questions are about operational readiness. They are fair, they are serious, and they deserve honest answers about what's happening in our public hospitals. Will the minister agree to meet with these doctors? They're here today. There's a little break between question period and the budget. I'll get us a table in the basement, and he can learn about what's actually happening when he ends their contract on April 1.

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite, having been a former minister of health, should know that, first of all, it's not a contract; it's an agreement that is in place and will continue on beyond the time period. When we negotiated the PCPCM, the family practitioner, we also did work on the hospitalist contract as well, the negotiation through that agreement. We don't negotiate in the public. We negotiate with the Alberta Medical Association, who is the representative for the physicians in the province, and we will continue to do so.

Alberta Separatism and Economic Development *(continued)*

Member Hoyle: University of Calgary economist Trevor Tombe warns that even the uncertainty created by separatist talk will put tens of thousands of Alberta jobs at risk when investor confidence weakens. The UCP's decision to cheerlead separatists will make companies hesitate before committing long-term investment here in Alberta. At a time when families are worried about affordability, jobs, and economic stability, why is this government willing to risk Alberta jobs by constantly flirting with separatism?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the only risk to Alberta jobs is electing an NDP government. I can tell you right now that investor confidence in Alberta is high as we continue to see companies expanding or setting up shop right here. Now, I already mentioned a couple, but I'll also talk about the Coca-Cola bottling facility in Calgary that just invested another $75 million in their warehouse expansion, or let's talk about the good people at Parrish and Heimbecker, P&H Milling company, who are spending $241 million on a flour-milling facility near Springbrook. I can tell you . . .

The Speaker: Order. Time.

Member Hoyle: Given that Trevor Tombe also pointed out that the political instability of separatism will raise borrowing costs and reduce investment, directly impacting provincial revenues, and given that Alberta's budget relies heavily on investment, job growth, and stable capital markets, has the Minister of Finance calculated just how big of a hole promoting separatism will blow in our provincial budget? If not, why is this government willing to risk higher borrowing costs, reduced investment, and lost revenue instead of just protecting Alberta's economy?

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, this shouldn't come as a surprise, but all budgets rely upon stable investment, particularly in our province but provinces across the country. We've talked a lot about Alberta being part of Canada but asking to be respected within Canada. It's why we have all the flags of the provinces in this Legislature. Understand that we respect them, but we ask for respect for us here. That's why we're taking steps to make sure we're getting what we need from the federal government, and under the Premier's leadership we have seen significant movement in repealing the nine bad laws to make sure that we can continue to do what we do best, which is create jobs and wealth in Alberta.

Member Hoyle: Given that Alberta businesses say they need certainty and stability to grow and given that the Alberta Chambers of Commerce has already put out an RFP for a strategic comms firm precisely to fight separatism and given that headlines about separatism signal major financial risk at exactly the wrong time in our economy, to the minister: why risk jobs, investment, and economic diversification just to pander to separatists when families are struggling with affordability?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I encourage the members opposite to look at *Hansard* for the last several sessions, and they'll see – it's very clear – the only ones talking about separatism in this Chamber are the members opposite. It's in black and white on *Hansard*. I encourage them. They could even use an AI tool to scan through and look for it.

Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we understand very fully that investment in the future success of our province depends upon a stable, reliable Alberta economy. That's why we've cut regulation across Alberta and saved $3 billion for businesses since 2019.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

2:10 Education Funding

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's classrooms are growing at an unprecedented pace. In just three years more than 80,000 new students have entered our education system, placing real pressure on classrooms, teachers, and supports. Our education system must keep pace with this rapid growth to ensure every child receives the support they need to succeed. To the Minister of Education and Childcare: can he explain how Budget 2026 is responding to these challenges and strengthening supports for Alberta's classrooms today?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Childcare.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to announce that as part of Budget '26 our government is making a historic investment in our education system. Year over year we will see over a 7 per cent increase in operating expenses equating to $722 million. This will help us hire over 1,600 teachers and hundreds of EAs and other specialists that will help support our students. This government will ensure that our school divisions have the funding that they need to support our students.

Mrs. Sawyer: Given that classrooms have become increasingly complex in recent years and given that the minister announced $143 million to hire more teachers and education assistants through classroom complexity teams targeted to the schools that need them most and given that those complexity teams were only the first step to addressing classroom complexity, to the same minister: can he update Albertans on the specific investments in Budget 2026, if passed, that will further address classroom complexity across Alberta?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, Budget '26 includes $355 million that'll be targeted to support classroom complexity challenges specifically. In addition to that, we're increasing the literacy and numeracy support grant by 63 per cent to ensure students who are identified by our screeners as needing additional support are able to receive it. As well, we are also providing increases to PUF, to

students who require English language support, and to a range of other areas to ensure that students have the targeted support that they need.

The Speaker: The member.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that more is being done to address increasingly complex classrooms and given that schools also require investments in other areas to ensure students continue to receive a world-class education and further given that this budget makes a record investment in Alberta's education system, can the minister highlight the other key investments in Budget 2026, if passed, that are strengthening Alberta's education system for students, families, and educators?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I have to comment that, of course, as the member noted, this is indeed a historic investment in our education system, so much so that even the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association commented, quote: in my seven years as president I have not witnessed such a significant investment into our schools. I know as well that our investment in our education system far exceeds anything the NDP ever did to support our education system. Our government will make sure students have the supports that they need to succeed. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Affordability Measures

Member Gurinder Brar: In a town hall in northeast Calgary the room was full of parents, seniors, and working families who are simply tired of how expensive everything has become. One constituent came to me and said, and I quote: "I work full-time, but after rent and groceries I have nothing left. I feel like I'm running, but the finish line keeps moving." What does the minister have to say directly to that Albertan, who is working hard, doing everything right, and still falling behind because grocery prices keep rising?

The Speaker: The Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for bringing such an important question forward from his constituent. What I would say is that he has a government that is spending every single moment of every single day working to make his life better. We continue to work with that. That's why, when you look at the root cause of food affordability, it has to do with federal taxes on farmers who create food. It has to go back to the carbon tax that failed under the NDP, that set the precedent for the federal government to put that carbon tax in. You continue to look where those costs go up, and you will find the federal government and their taxes at the root of that cause.

Member Gurinder Brar: Given that Alberta has the highest youth unemployment rate, record-high food bank usage, and the lowest minimum wage in the country and given that last weekend alone thousands of people from Calgary-North East stood in chilling cold for hours to get groceries from Guru Nanak Free Kitchen and given that net earnings of grocers are still in the billions, with millions in executive compensation, why is the minister doing nothing to stop price gouging and help Albertans afford the food to feed their families?

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, again, we are part of a government that works through every ministry to make sure that we have jobs and opportunity for all of our young people. That's why we put forward the youth employment grant to make sure that they would have access to more employment, more jobs, and more opportunity. It's why we continue to work to cut red tape so businesses have the pathway to create those job opportunities for youth. It's why we invest in our schools and our postsecondary to make sure they have a pathway all the way through the educational system to find the future that they want, they deserve, and that we as a government are fighting for.

Member Gurinder Brar: Given that insurance premiums are up, utility bills are among the highest in the country, and rent and mortgage payments are eating the paycheques alive and given that grocery prices are still rapidly climbing while corporate chains reap record profits, families are cutting every corner they can just to make ends meet, so what does the minister have to say to that senior in my constituency who is worried about his Canada pension plan being gambled with when he is faced with skyrocketing grocery prices?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite all of that, the fact is that Alberta is the most affordable province in the entire country of Canada to live, work, and raise a family. That's why people are moving here in droves, because they believe in what this government is doing. They believe that they can find affordable housing from Edmonton to Calgary and every city and town in between. They can find a job, they can send their kids to school, and they see a government working for them on every single front, every single ministry. It's why we're driving down the price of utilities, we're driving down the price of insurance, we're driving down the price of food, and we're working for the people of our province.

School Class Size and Complexity

Ms Chapman: Let's talk about averages. If the minister of education was teaching 15 students and I was teaching 35, we would average out to 25 students each, except he would actually be managing 15 kids while I stuffed 35 into my classroom. Therein lies the absurd nature of averages. They obscure high inequality in data. To the minister: why is this government so pleased to present class size data that does not accurately portray the state of Alberta's classrooms?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, our class size data is the most accurate picture and reflection that we've ever had in our province's history regarding classroom size and composition. Not only did we collect data regarding class sizes but we've also collected robust data regarding complexity and composition of students, occurrence of those complexity rates, and we've been able to use that information to make evidence-based decisions to dispatch over 475 classroom complexity teams to support those schools that need it most.

Ms Chapman: Given that the minister proclaimed that, quote, overall class size in Alberta appears to be in relatively good shape, but given that when I looked at just two schools in my riding, I found that class sizes of 30 are the norm at the junior high, 31 at the high school, with classes ranging as high as 49 students – given those are both well above the minister's class size average, does the

minister consider a class size of 49 to be acceptable, and if not, why isn't he doing something about it today?

2:20

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to provide Albertans with more information regarding the state of class sizes and complexity in our schools. The provincial average today is 25 students per classroom, and in fact approximately 80 per cent of all K to 3 classrooms have less than 25 students. Less than 1 per cent of classrooms have a class size of over 40, and half of those are classes in gym or arts or other elective programs. Of course, there's more work that we need to continue to do, and we absolutely will.

Ms Chapman: Given that, class size aside, complexity is the biggest challenge facing teachers and given that Diefenbaker, the high school in my riding, reports high complexity in half its classrooms and that SJAM, the junior high, reports high complexity in 94 per cent of its classrooms and given that neither school will receive a single extra teacher, a single extra educational assistant, a single extra dollar to address complexity from the new complexity teams, why does the minister find it acceptable to leave these schools with no support?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, the NDP left our schools with absolutely zero support to address classroom complexity. It was our government that established the classroom complexity grant in 2023. It was our government that established the complexity teams a few weeks ago; 289 complexity teams will be dispatched to Calgary metro area . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. I can almost reach the minister, but I can't hear him.

Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: And 143 complexity teams will be dispatched to the Edmonton region, again, equating to a total of 476 complexity teams, which is 476 more than the NDP established.

Alberta Separatism

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, strong governments deliver stability, competence, and predictability. The UCP has delivered the opposite: controversy and uncertainty, stoking fear instead of building trust, Charter violations, 51st state rhetoric, scandal after scandal. This government creates confusion and distraction instead of providing direction. Investors are nervous because no one can predict what this administration will do next. To the Premier: will you help restore stability and clearly rule out separation as an option? Yes or no?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, it wasn't that long ago that same member said on this side of the House when we would continue to repeat the important line that all members of this Chamber have heard time and again: we believe in a sovereign Alberta within a united Canada. I'm not sure why it's that difficult for the member opposite to understand, but what I can tell you is that it is this province that is laser focused on making relationships with other nations and other jurisdictions to bring that investment here, and we're seeing the results. We're seeing expansion in aerospace and aeronautics. Defence is on the docket. There's a bright future ahead here in Alberta.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given that a sovereign Alberta in a united Canada is just a clever slogan and given that affordability and health care are front and centre for Alberta families and given that this government is distracted, catering to special interests, negotiating exit terms with the United States, and given that every refusal to clearly reject separation fuels uncertainty, scares off investment, and costs jobs, to the Premier: clarity is needed here; why have your MLAs signed an independence petition but refused to sign one supporting Canada? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have no idea who that member has been talking to, but I would encourage him to probably pick some new friends. On this side of the House we believe strongly that having a citizens' initiative referendum process is part of direct democracy, something that has been championed by this government. We believe in listening to the people of Alberta. The members opposite hate it because every time they go to the people, the people reject them and their ideas. They have never won the majority vote in this province ever, and they never will . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, given that this government's first instinct is to blame someone else – when health care struggles, blame doctors; when classrooms overflow, blame teachers; when courts push back, blame judges; and when budgets fail, blame immigrants – and given that instead of fixing problems they've created, they fuel division, even appointing a separatist sympathizer to represent Alberta in Washington, to the Premier: are you defending Alberta within a united Canada or promoting separation on the world stage? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, first, I would say that is incredibly poor form to start taking potshots at Alberta's representative in Washington, DC, who spends his time every day looking for new ways to attract investment to our province. But let's talk about the blame game because when you talk about the failure of that member to represent his constituents properly, he blames Jason Kenney, he blames the current government, he blames everybody else in the front bench and on the private members' side. The only person who he fails to blame is himself.

Immigrants to Alberta

Member Tejada: Albertans are proud of our country's rich history inviting the world to live, work, and contribute to this province. That includes people who come here to escape persecution, war, and violence, but the Premier has said, without any evidence, that newcomers from refugees to asylum seekers to temporary foreign workers are the cause of a giant burden on the books. Will the minister of immigration tell Albertans today: what precise cost has there been to Alberta for refugees from war-torn countries like Ukraine and others on the health care system, you know, the folks the UCP blames for their own policy failures?

The Speaker: Order.

The hon . . . [interjections] Order. The hon. Government House Leader has the call.

Mr. Schow: I guess the member didn't read the desi regs. I am the Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration. It's pretty clear, Mr. Speaker. JETI: it's actually even a pretty cool acronym.

But what I would say is that the only people in this Chamber stoking fear are the members opposite. You hear it particularly from

the Member for Edmonton-City Centre suggesting that inflamed rhetoric is causing there to be outbursts and problems in the streets. I can tell you the reason why we have lawlessness is because the members failed . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Schow: . . . to address crime when they were in government. They failed to address the issues of addiction, and we're cleaning up their mess seven years later.

The Speaker: There is a point of order called at 2:27.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Given that that was a deflection and given that newcomers have built Alberta businesses, become leading academic researchers, and have made this province home and given that the Premier and the UCP government decided to blame these newcomers to distract from their own failures and mismanagement, why can't the government tell Albertans precisely which newcomers they believe shouldn't have answered the multimillion-dollar Alberta Is Calling campaign call, especially after the Premier mused about doubling our population to 10 million in just 25 years?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, one of the problems of having so many wins in a province like we're seeing is that we don't have enough employees in the province to fill those new job requirements. That's why we do need to bring in people from out of province and out of country to fill those job vacancies. But I can tell you that over the past several years we have seen immigration at a rate that is unprecedented in this province. It has put strain on the health care system, education, and across the board, and that's why we have to find a way to make sure that we get the kind of employees in this province to fill those labour gaps so we continue to build investment . . .

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Given that we've seen a net migration decrease and given that the Premier herself called for Alberta's population to grow at an even faster rate than it already has and given that she called for Red Deer to grow to 1 million people, 10 times its size, and given that she even asked Justin Trudeau to double the numbers on programs with thousands of new immigrants, when will the UCP government take responsibility for their obvious failure to manage health care and education and apologize for their irresponsible scapegoating of immigrants and newcomers?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the member is right. An apology is owed but to the public for the calibre, the poor calibre, of opposition that His Majesty has in this Chamber. This is the level of questions that come across here. The members know that we cannot sustain immigration at the rates it's been coming in, over 600,000 newcomers in the past five years. You can't build schools fast enough, you can't build hospitals fast enough. It is so difficult for members to understand. I don't understand why, but I can tell you this. We are going to use every legal means possible to get control of immigration in this province to make sure that we can continue to support Albertans.

2:30

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

Highway 28 Capital Plan

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret that one of the top priorities for the good people of Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul is the condition of highway 28. This highway is one of the most important corridors for the region as it provides access between many communities in the lakeland and the rest of the province. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: can you please provide an update on the upgrades and on all of the wonderful things that you're doing to highway 28 in my constituency?

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for his advocacy of highway 28 as well as to the mayors and reeves of Bonnyville, Cold Lake, St. Paul, and the 27 other municipalities and the nine First Nations that have been advocating for this important road. We have invested on highway 28 intersection upgrades, signal replacements, curve reconstruction, and additional passing lanes. We have more engineering to do on the twinning between Bonnyville and Cold Lake, but we know this is an important region of the province, and we will get this job done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the response. Given that the twinning of a section of highway 28 from Bonnyville to Cold Lake, one of the busiest corridors in the region, is a commitment made by this very government and further given that twinned highways are an investment to increase safety for the drivers of my region, to the same minister: can you please provide an update on when my constituents can expect construction work to be done on this section of highway?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Engineering is now under way for the three twinning sections, including between Bonnyville to Cold Lake, Edmonton to Bon Accord as well as highway 28A through to highway 63 near Grassland. These designs are critical steps to ensure the work is done right and delivers real safety improvements for the residents in that area. Alberta has invested $66 million to upgrade this highway. That momentum continues, and residents can expect to see further progress on the twinning this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to that minister for the response. Given that the lakeland region is a growing hub for many industries, including oil and gas, national defence, agriculture, tourism, and many more, and further given that the population in the region will increase significantly in the next decade with the pathways project and the F-35 program at the Canadian air force base in Cold Lake, to the same minister: what are the long-term plans for improving driving conditions on my highway? My constituents really need to know.

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, highway 28, whether it's oil sands, the important economic corridor that it's in as well as the national defence operations for the rest of this province, is very important. Today is budget day, so I can't go any further than that.

But I can tell you what's not in the budget, an 81 per cent tax hike. That's the legacy of the NDP leader when he did the budgets in Calgary, and why? Just to pay for his vanity art projects. You can

see it every time you drive into Calgary from the north, that big, giant blue ring. That's why on this side we're going to make sure he's not in charge of any taxpayer-funded budgets ever again. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

AISH Client Benefits

Ms Renaud: Edmonton, Lethbridge, Camrose, and Claresholm councils have all called for the UCP government to immediately pause the changes to AISH and ADAP until meaningful consultation is undertaken. Elected representatives from Lethbridge, Edmonton, Camrose, and Claresholm represent about 1.4 million Albertans, and they know that upending the lives of 80,000 severely disabled Albertans by cutting another $200 a month and telling them they can work will cause widespread harm to their constituents. Will this government listen to Albertans from around the province who are asking for an immediate pause until consultation can happen?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, to be clear to the House, AISH, including – I'll even foreshadow it now even though the Finance minister won't like me doing it. We're making $1,940. It will not be cut by $200. You know how I can say that with such confidence? Because it's legislated by this Chamber and we're going to continue to honour it. We're also going to honour the fact that this Chamber, underneath the leadership of the Conservative government, was the first government to index AISH payments. Unfortunately, that member and her party did not do that when they had an opportunity when they were here. We're going to continue to finance our disability programs fully.

Ms Renaud: Given 19 previous members of the government's own Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities wrote an open letter to this government waving a red flag of warning about the plan destabilizing changes to AISH and ADAP and given all of these people know that cutting even $200 from severely disabled Albertans who rely on AISH will cause evictions, unsafe living conditions, more food insecurity, and worse health outcomes, why is this government slashing AISH benefits under the guise of self-improvement and employment?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, we're not removing anything from AISH payments; $1,940 will remain the AISH payments in this province of Alberta, the highest in the country by far, $400 or $500 more than most other provinces. We will also be investing this year over $3.6 billion to help the disability community in this province because we're committed to this work. You know what else we're doing, and that hon. member unfortunately continues to call for it to go away? We're investing $185 million in economic employment supports for the disability community.

Ms Renaud: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the fact is that everybody on AISH will be transferred in July and their benefits will be reduced $200 until they're reassessed by this government's own panel, given that we don't have any other information because this government is keeping it secret and given they've already clawed back the Canada disability benefit, that puts them at minus $400, severely disabled Albertans, when will this government listen to councils from Claresholm, Edmonton, Lethbridge, and Camrose who are saying: please stop?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're not going to listen to anybody who's going to ask us to actually cut support for the disability community. Asking us to stop the work that we're doing on both ADAP and on AISH would mean stop having the highest payments in the country. It would mean stop investing in employment supports for the disability community. It would mean stop investing $3.6 billion to support the disability community, something the NDP voted against in the last budget. Are they going to vote against the disabled Albertans again in this budget? Yes or no? That's the real question, and we'll find out shortly, won't we?

Health Care System

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, Fiona wrote to say she hasn't forgotten the Premier's promise to protect public health care, but now she sees privatization and the dismantling of our public system. Susan wrote to say, quote: recent deaths in emergency rooms leave my family uneasy about getting sick. She's worried a two-tier model will leave low-income families behind. Why, instead of committing to public health care, are more patients and services being pushed toward private delivery, and how does government justify policies that risk creating a system where a person's income determines their care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In actual fact, we're making record investments in public health care, which we will hear more about today. We have the highest number of doctors in our province's history. We have the highest number of nurses, LPNs, health care aides. We're doing the most publicly funded surgeries in history. It is true that we are looking at flexibilities to augment our public system with private delivery, still publicly paid, where it makes sense to both patients and medical professionals.

Ms Wright: Given that Gail wrote to let me know her 63-year-old husband waited 16 hours in the Grey Nuns emergency room after he suffered sudden memory loss, given she knows doctors, nurses, and paramedics did the best they could but Gail feels like she was left with little clarity or communication, given that same week a man died after waiting for care, does the government believe 16 hours is acceptable for a senior in neurological distress? What immediate, concrete steps will it take to ensure Albertans are not left sitting in dangerous conditions while their health deteriorates?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, our hearts and thoughts and prayers go out to the family and friends of Mr. Sreekumar, and as the members opposite are aware, there was an internal review done by Covenant Health. There was a review done by Acute Care Alberta which had findings that were released under the quality assurance review, and I also took the unprecedented step to request a fatality inquiry in this case because after reviewing the facts I still had concerns, and the Minister of Justice did implement that on January 15. A judge was selected on January 20, and I'm looking forward to getting to the bottom of everything that occurred that day because we owe that to the family, and we will learn from all adverse events in our system.

Thank you.

Ms Wright: So no concrete steps, then.

Given that Heather, recently placed on oxygen, is terrified about rising prescription and diagnostic costs and is worried that seniors are being left behind, given a health care worker reached out to tell me she's eight years from retirement but now sees morale that's shattered, staff who feel unsafe, and rampant burnout, given seniors

face soaring costs while front-line workers sound alarms, where is the urgent plan to stabilize staffing, lower costs for essential medication, and rebuild the public system Albertans depend on? Where is the political will to fix this crisis?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite also highlighted the Grey Nuns hospital, which is one of the hospitals that we're going to be adding a bed tower to. That will be an additional 350 in-patient spaces which will help to address the unacceptable wait times that we see at that hospital site from time to time. We're also working on a number of initiatives to expedite patient flow, and I'm pleased to report that we've cleared 25 per cent of the alternate level of care patients from hospitals like the Grey Nuns, which means that we can get patients through faster and there are acute-care beds for the patients that need them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds we will continue with the daily Routine.

Members' Statements
(continued)

Chinese Immigrants to Alberta

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, Lunar New Year is a time of renewal, gratitude, and family. It is also a time to remember that Alberta was built on the courage and sacrifice of immigrants. In the early years of this province Chinese Albertans helped lay the rails that connected this country, opened businesses that sustained prairie towns, and built communities even when they were denied basic rights and formal supports. When governments excluded them, they organized mutual aid societies such as the Chinese Freemasons and clan associations and provided housing, translation, employment connections, and financial assistance to those shut out of public systems. They fought the Chinese head tax and discriminatory exclusion laws. Generations later they stood together again in the face of anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Edmonton and Calgary Chinatown stands as a living testament to that resilience. Today Chinese Albertans are leaders across every sector of our province – in business, medicine, academia, public service, the arts, entrepreneurship – shaping Alberta's future at the highest levels. Consider Dr. Jacqueline Shan, who arrived in Canada as a student, earned her PhD at the University of Alberta and cofounded COLD-FX, a homegrown success story that created jobs and positioned Alberta as a leader in health innovation. She is one of many examples of what immigrants contribute when given opportunity.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, this UCP government is sending a chilling message to doctors, scientists, and skilled professionals on work visas: you may live here, you may pay taxes here, but you do not fully belong. That was the wrong message a century ago, and it is the wrong message today. An Alberta New Democrat government will ensure Alberta remains a province that welcomes newcomers as partners . . .

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

UCP Government Record

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, this UCP government is running a master class in the three Ds: distraction, division, and deflection. When they fail, they point fingers. When they fall short, they scapegoat. All blame and no accountability. Lately their favourite target has been the very people who work in our hospitals and schools, who build small businesses and create jobs: hard-working newcomers, immigrants, and their families. They came here looking for a government that has their back, not one that blames them like this UCP government.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot invite the world to dinner and then complain that you forgot to buy groceries. That's not leadership; that's incompetence. Nobody stood up in line in 2023 asking this government to take away their CPP or raise their costs and freeze their wages. Albertans are asking for lower insurance rates, yet premiums are soaring; stronger health care, yet families can't find a doctor; quality education, yet classrooms are more crowded than ever.

To the youth of this province: look closely. This government didn't invest in your future. They sold out. They don't build the schools and hospitals we need nor encourage the investments that will lead to good jobs for the future. They have traded the Alberta advantage for the UCP disadvantage, where if you aren't a well-connected insider, you are simply in the way. They will rack up deficits and blow the budget, leaving you with the bill and the blame.

Albertans across the province are struggling. They deserve a competent and ethical government, one that works as hard as they do. If they can't deliver, the Alberta New Democrats will. Call the election.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there any tablings? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(3) to table the requisite number of copies of the 2026-27 main estimates schedule.

The Speaker: Any other tablings? Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings today. I rise with the five requisite copies of a February 26th letter from the *Edmonton Journal*, where it highlights that what is urgently needed is more police boots on the ground and more police tires on the road in rural Alberta.

The Speaker: Just the tabling, please, not the speech.

Mr. Wright: The second one is in reference to my PNWER member's statement earlier today, talking about a new House resolution in Alaska to connect Alaska to the lower 48 through Alberta.

The Speaker: Any other tablings? Seeing none.

That takes us to points of order. We have one, which occurred at 2:27, by the Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order
Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to 23(h), (i), and (j). In response to a question from my colleague about recent rhetoric around immigration, the Government House Leader got up to answer that question and said that "the only [members] in this Chamber stoking fear are the members opposite." He used as a collective. Then he went on to say, "You hear it particularly from

the Member for Edmonton-City Centre suggesting that inflamed rhetoric is causing there to be outbursts and problems in the streets." I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but that's roughly what the Government House Leader said.

The context to that is that earlier today the Member for Edmonton-City Centre rose to make a member's statement about Jon Cornish, a well-known Calgarian, former running back for the Calgary Stampeders, and the founder of the Calgary Chamber of commerce, who was the target of a racist verbal attack. When they were in the bar with their wife, there were people telling them: we should call ICE to have them deported. That was the context of that statement.

The Government House Leader suggesting that we are here to stoke fear – I understand that he referred to us as a collective. He might be able to get away with it, but right after that he cannot revert and single out a member of this Chamber and tell them that they are stoking fears. That's widely inappropriate and offside the rules of this House.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I didn't know when the NDP grew such thin skin. This is a ridiculous point of order. It's a matter of debate. What I can say in the instance that's being referenced here is that I talked about the Member for Edmonton-City Centre bringing in the instance about Jon Cornish and his wife. Jon Cornish, I will say, as a bit of a digression, is a legend. Wherever he is, shout-out to Jon Cornish. But anything that was said to his wife or him: I reject those kinds of comments. It's abhorrent that they were accosted like that, and those people should be ashamed, but blaming the government for something that someone said to someone else in public, I think, is a stretch, certainly a bridge too far.

I referenced that specific instance to suggest that the members opposite as a collective are stoking fear. It's happened, the same thing, from the Member for St. Albert today, suggesting that government policy . . .

The Speaker: Don't. Stick to the point of order, please.

Mr. Schow: I'm not extending debate, Mr. Speaker, but I do have a right to defend myself here because I think this is inappropriate. The members opposite have raised this point of order, suggesting that I cannot single out comments made by another member. Our job in this Chamber is to debate – that is it – and if my finger begins to make a pointing wave in indication somewhere and it may offend another member and they're going to call a point of privilege like the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane did once, then why are we even here?

2:50

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. members, this is what the Blues say: "But what I would say is that the only people in this Chamber stoking fear are the members opposite," accurately that the Opposition House Leader said. Also accurately that the Opposition House Leader said, the next sentence was: "You hear it particularly from the Member for Edmonton-City Centre suggesting that inflamed rhetoric is causing there to be outbursts and problems in the streets."

Where we are with the rules of this House, which we've gone over many times: you cannot suggest what somebody else is thinking. But that's not what happened here. It was a comment by the Government House Leader on what the member opposite actually said, not what he was thinking. That's fair game for debate. There's no point of order here. That concludes this matter.

Now the House is adjourned until 3:15.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:51 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise, please.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I've received certain messages from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise, please.

The Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the 2026-2027 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2026-2027 government estimates. In addition, I also wish to table the 2026 through 2029 government of Alberta strategic plan and the Budget 2026 ministry plans.

Government Motions

Budget Address

30. Mr. Horner moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Mr. Horner: I now wish to table the government's 2026 through 2029 fiscal plan and move Government Motion 30.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise in the Assembly and present Budget 2026. While I wish I could stand before you under better circumstances, I am still honoured to rise and present my third budget on behalf of Alberta's government. With all that said, let's cut to the chase. If this budget is passed, Alberta will face a deficit of $9.4 billion this fiscal year. That's the reality in front of us. Albertans deserve to hear that first, not last, not softened or buried under tactical language. Budget 2026 carries a substantial deficit, one that is significantly higher than projected last year. With this shift it's clear this year will require tough choices. Some of them won't be popular, but all of them will be necessary to face the challenges ahead.

I also want to be very clear that, yes, Alberta is running a considerable deficit this year, but we're not making massive program cuts and we're not raising personal income taxes. Yes, that personal income tax cut you received last year stays, and Albertans will see those savings reflected on their paycheques again this year because we are choosing to take the hit on our books rather than put that strain on Alberta's households.

Budget 2026 secures the promises we made to Albertans despite the challenges. We know many provinces are facing deep deficits and will have to make hard choices. Alberta is choosing discipline,

responsible spending decisions, and hard work over the long haul to get back on track. Here in Alberta we don't just hope for another boom. We don't panic in the downturns. We are steadfast in our resolve to protect Alberta's future.

3:20

With Budget 2026 we're choosing to focus on health care, classrooms, and the economy. We're choosing to protect the services families rely on every day, and we are choosing to protect Alberta's long-term financial strength so the next generation will have more options to deal with their tough choices.

Costs are higher, global markets are unstable, and our population has grown faster than any other province in Canada. Global pressures are testing every energy-producing economy, and ours is no exception. Albertans already know this. They see costs go up everywhere. They live this reality every day, but Albertans expect their government to stand firm when times are tough, and that's exactly what we intend to do. We all know the geopolitical landscape is shifting, trade tensions are rising, oil prices are weak, and competition for investment is getting tougher.

Despite these challenges Alberta remains the best place to live, work, and raise a family. Record numbers of people have moved here to build better lives, but that record growth has put real pressure on our housing, schools, hospitals, roads, and public services. Unlike population booms in the past where economic growth in Alberta drew people in, this time cost-of-living pressures in other provinces are pushing people out to come here. The practical effect is that the demand for service is rising faster than government revenue is growing.

Resource revenue is volatile. Federal policies have led to lost investment opportunity. Global market shifts add uncertainty, and inflation and trade roadblocks have driven up the cost of delivering critical infrastructure and services. These are all major factors behind the deficit we are facing today, but they're not the only factors. Alberta continues to make record investments in core services to meet the challenges of today because ignoring the real pressures in health care, education, and infrastructure would cost Albertans far more than just dollars and cents. It would cost us opportunity, stability, and our collective confidence in the future.

That's why with Budget 2026 we are focused on what matters. We are putting Albertans' priorities first and shaping a brighter, more secure future. We took a hard look at where our efforts could make the biggest difference, and we made the tough calls where needed. We focused on maintaining the projects and programs that truly serve Albertans. We set a reasonable WTI projection at $60.50 per barrel. We limited program spending increases with clear, reasonable targets, and we cut red tape and streamlined government processes so every dollar spent counts.

In fact, Alberta continues to be the best province in Canada at cutting red tape, slashing more than 220,000 government inefficiencies since 2019. This has saved Alberta businesses, job creators, and industry more than $3 billion, allowing them to provide more for our communities while driving economic growth and opportunity.

It's our responsibility to protect what matters most, not by undermining our competitive advantage but by growing our economy, expanding markets, attracting investment, and creating wealth. Alberta's low-tax environment is something to be proud of. It reflects who we are as Albertans and our entrepreneurial spirit. It lets Albertans keep more of what they earn, take risks, and build opportunity for themselves and their communities. We will protect the Alberta advantage, make smart choices, and spend where it matters for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes the hardest decisions are not where to cut but where to invest. That's why Budget 2026 focuses on investing in what matters. In Alberta we know health care, education, and our vital services should always come first. Through Budget 2026 Alberta's government is making one of the most significant health care investments in our history. In Budget 2026 total health care investment is $34.4 billion. This includes $13.8 billion in '26-27 to operate and expand hospitals, surgeries, emergency services, and diagnostics.

Budget 2026 provides the following: almost $2.5 billion over three years for emergency health services, a record total $7.7 billion commitment to our physicians, $525 million over three years to complete 50,000 additional surgeries through the Alberta surgical initiative, and $223 million over three years to expand cancer care capacity, hire specialists, and upgrade treatment facilities.

In Alberta people expect care to be there when they need it without uncertainty or delay. Health care enables Albertans to work, raise their families, and plan for their futures. When something is that foundational to our lives and livelihoods, we protect it with everything we've got.

But caring for Albertans isn't just about hospitals; it's about classrooms, educators, and giving every child their best shot at success. Alberta is seeing record student enrolment, and that growth is putting real pressure on classrooms, teachers, and families across the province. Budget 2026 commits a record $10.8 billion in 2026-2027 in education focused on the best outcomes for our students and classrooms. Budget 2026 provides funding for school boards to hire more than 3,000 new teachers and 1,500 new educational assistants over the next three years and $1.4 billion over three years to address class size and complexity because a growing population without adding classrooms is unsustainable, and Alberta kids deserve nothing but our best.

Of course, none of these services exist without the people who deliver them. Budget 2026 puts money in the workforce that keeps Alberta running, and the more than 250,000 public servants, including nurses, teachers, and paramedics, on the front line. Competitive wages aren't just about labour relations; they are about service delivery. That's why Budget 2026 commits almost $38 billion in public-sector compensation. For context that's 54 per cent of the operating budget of government. Strong services require a strong public sector, and we are choosing to strengthen our public service through Budget 2026.

But it's not just the public sector we're investing in. Budget 2026 continues to prioritize workforce development, trades training, and youth employment across Alberta in industries big and small. This includes a $20 million commitment over three years for the youth employment incentive, connecting young Albertans to real job opportunities. We're also investing in economic diversification and investment attraction such as data centres, investment incentives, and expanding pathways to get more of our products to market because economic growth means more people working, more businesses hiring, and more opportunity for families to move forward without higher taxes. Alberta does not grow by standing still. We grow by building, by producing, and by competing on the global stage.

Budget 2026 doesn't just invest in our services, our people, and our world-class resources; it invests in the physical foundation we build our success on. That's why this budget is also focused on building what matters. Budget 2026 commits $28.3 billion in capital investment, strengthening the foundation that Alberta families, workers, and communities depend on. We're not just building projects; we're building the backbone of our province. That means investing in modern hospitals and health facilities so families can access care when and where they need it, including

investments in diagnostic imaging services across the province, schools and postsecondary spaces that prepare the next generation for real opportunity, including our $600 million investment in modular classrooms to address immediate enrolment needs and the $384 million investment in the NAIT Advanced Skills Centre and continued progress through the schools now program, fast-tracking planning, design, construction, and renovation of 161 schools across Alberta, including funding for planning and design of 40 new school projects in communities across the province, including Calgary and Edmonton.

The capital plan also includes transportation corridors that move goods, connect communities, and drive economic growth; water systems and municipal infrastructure that support growing cities and rural communities, rural connectivity, and essential maintenance that keeps communities strong and competitive; and critical projects that support long-term growth across the province. Infrastructure is not optional. It's our economic capacity, it's our ability to grow, and it's the bedrock that supports every Albertan's quality of life.

It is not lost on us that all of this spending is significant spending. Albertans expect discipline from their government, and these are large dollar figures on the table. However, our government is committed to making every dollar count. This includes program review and efficiency measures, debt management and responsible borrowing, and protecting the heritage fund so our kids and grandkids inherit security, not the unpredictability of Alberta's boom-and-bust cycles. This will maintain Alberta's fiscal advantage compared to the other provinces.

3:30

Protecting the heritage fund isn't just about savings. It's part of our clear three-point plan to secure Alberta's future in the short, medium, and long term. As mentioned, for our long-term plan our government is growing the Alberta heritage savings trust fund to more than $250 billion by 2050. Since 2019 the heritage fund has almost doubled. By directing a share of our surplus cash into the fund and, most importantly, by reinvesting our earnings, we've strengthened the heritage fund significantly.

The good news is that simply by continuing to reinvest those earnings over the next 24 years, the fund is on track to reach our 2050 target without requiring additional deposits. By staying the course, we will create a permanent source of annual investment income capable of stabilizing Alberta's finances through future downturns.

The medium term is just as important. Our goal is for Alberta to double oil production and exports by 2035. We are advancing agreements to add 1.3 million barrels per day of new pipeline capacity to the west coast, expanding export capacity south and increasing shipments to Canadian refineries. More customers mean stronger and more predictable resource revenues even when global prices soften.

Finally, the third pillar reflects our short-term plan. Albertans are feeling immediate pressure on housing, health care, schools, and infrastructure. That's why on October 19, 2026, our government will ask Albertans directly through a provincial referendum how they would like us to manage population growth to ensure our services remain sustainable and can keep pace.

Save for the future, grow our exports by acting decisively today: that is Alberta's path forward, practical, disciplined, and built for long-term strength. This will ensure we're prepared for what comes next no matter how global markets or political winds shift beyond our borders.

Even as we make these careful choices, Alberta's foundation remains strong. Our economy continues to generate opportunity, and our people continue to drive growth. Even in deficit years Alberta remains in the strongest fiscal position in Canada. Alberta's economy continues to lead the country. We maintain the lowest overall tax burden for Albertans, the strongest GDP per capita, and high weekly earnings. Last month alone Alberta generated more jobs than every other province combined. That's not luck. That's discipline. When a tough season hits, Albertans never throw in the towel. We dig in. We make adjustments. We look after our people, work even harder, and prepare for the next season. That's what this budget does. It doesn't pretend things are easy. It doesn't ignore the pressures Albertans are under. It keeps our province steady and moving forward.

Albertans are not afraid of hard years. They understand that some seasons are about building, some seasons are about protecting, and some seasons are about preparing for what comes next. This is a time for discipline, for frank, honest discussion, for steady leadership. We're protecting the services families depend on, we're investing in the people who make this province work, and we're protecting Alberta's long-term strength.

The road ahead will be challenging to navigate, but Albertans have never needed easy to succeed. This province was built by people who faced the hard trail ahead and never backed down. They broke ground, laid the path, and left it better for the next generation. The same strength that built Alberta will carry us through whatever comes next. If we stay focused on what matters, if we stay disciplined, and if we face these challenges together, Alberta's best days are still ahead. That's the future we're building, and it's worth the work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition Deputy House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is lots to unpack in this budget, but for today I move that we adjourn debate on the budget.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board for delivering those remarks. At this time I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 9, 2026.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:35 p.m. to Monday, March 9, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 31st Legislature - 2nd Session (2025-2026)

Activity to Thursday, February 26, 2026

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, ($) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — International Agreements Act (Smith)
First Reading — 6 *(Oct. 23, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 77-85 *(Oct. 28, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 109-18 *(Oct. 29, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 133-35 *(Oct. 30, 2025 aft., passed)*
Committee of the Whole — 184-87 *(Nov. 4, 2025 aft., passed)*
Third Reading — 250-52 *(Nov. 6, 2025 aft., passed)*
Royal Assent — *(Nov. 26, 2025 outside of House sitting)* [Comes into force November 26, 2025; SA 2025, cI-3.8]

Bill 2 — Back to School Act (Horner)
First Reading — 26 *(Oct. 27, 2025 aft., passed on division)*
Second Reading — 27-28 *(Oct. 27, 2025 eve.)*, 29-35 *(Oct. 27, 2025 eve., passed on division)*
Committee of the Whole — 35-36 *(Oct. 27, 2025 eve.)*, 37-45 *(Oct. 27, 2025 eve., passed on division)*
Third Reading — 45-46 *(Oct. 27, 2025 eve.)*, 47-54 *(Oct. 27, 2025 eve., passed on division)*
Royal Assent — *(Oct. 28, 2025 outside of House sitting)* [Comes into force on October 28, 2025; SA 2025 cB-0.5]

Bill 3 — Private Vocational Training Amendment Act, 2025 (McDougall)
First Reading — 65 *(Oct. 28, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 135-37 *(Oct. 30, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 187-93 *(Nov. 4, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 215-16 *(Nov. 5, 2025 aft., passed)*
Committee of the Whole — 334-37 *(Nov. 18, 2025 aft., passed)*
Third Reading — 371-73 *(Nov. 19, 2025 aft., passed)*
Royal Assent — *(Nov. 26, 2025 outside of House sitting)* [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2025 c17]

Bill 4 — Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2) (Ellis)
First Reading — 121 *(Oct. 30, 2025 , passed)*
Second Reading — 193-201 *(Nov. 4, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 216-24 *(Nov. 5, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 289 *(Nov. 17, 2025 eve., adjourned)*, 323-34 *(Nov. 18, 2025 aft., passed on division)*
Committee of the Whole — 408-13 *(Nov. 20, 2025 aft., passed)*
Third Reading — 447-55 *(Nov. 24, 2025 eve., passed on division)*
Royal Assent — *(Nov. 26, 2025 outside of House sitting)* [Comes into force November 26, 2025, with exceptions; SA 2025 c18]

Bill 5 — Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (Schow)
First Reading — 271 *(Nov. 17, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 322-23 *(Nov. 18, 2025 aft., passed)*
Committee of the Whole — 407-08 *(Nov. 20, 2025 aft., passed)*
Third Reading — 589-90 *(Nov. 27, 2025 aft., passed)*
Royal Assent — *(Dec. 11, 2025 outside of House sitting)* [Comes into force December 11, 2025; SA 2025 c23]

Bill 6 — Education (Prioritizing Literacy and Numeracy) Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2) (Nicolaides)

First Reading — 150 *(Nov. 3, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 252-60 *(Nov. 6, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 289-98 *(Nov. 17, 2025 eve., adjourned)*, 337-39 *(Nov. 18, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 341-51 *(Nov. 18, 2025 eve., adjourned; amendments introduced)*, 455-65 *(Nov. 24, 2025 eve., adjourned; amendments introduced)*, 504-14 *(Nov. 25, 2025 eve., passed on division)*
Committee of the Whole — 681-86 *(Dec. 2, 2025 eve., passed)*
Third Reading — 713-21 *(Dec. 3, 2025 aft., passed)*
Royal Assent — *(Dec. 11, 2025 outside of House sitting)* [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2025 c19]

Bill 7 — Water Amendment Act, 2025 (Schulz)

First Reading — 121 *(Oct. 30, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 224-35 *(Nov. 5, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 298-307 *(Nov. 17, 2025 eve., adjourned)*, 351-55 *(Nov. 18, 2025 eve., passed)*
Committee of the Whole — 480-93 *(Nov. 25, 2025 aft., passed)*
Third Reading — 536-43 *(Nov. 26, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 661-63 *(Dec. 2, 2025 aft., passed)*
Royal Assent — *(Dec. 11, 2025 outside of House sitting)* [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2025 c27]

Bill 8 — Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (Neudorf)

First Reading — 478 *(Nov. 25, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 663-70 *(Dec. 2, 2025 aft., passed)*
Committee of the Whole — 737-44 *(Dec. 3, 2025 eve., passed with amendments)*
Third Reading — 766-71 *(Dec. 4, 2025 aft., passed)*
Royal Assent — *(Dec. 11, 2025 outside of House sitting)* [Comes into force December 11, 2025, with exceptions; SA 2025 c26]

Bill 9 — Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (Amery)

First Reading — 319-20 *(Nov. 18, 2025 aft., passed on division)*
Second Reading — 378-91 *(Nov. 19, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 493-501 *(Nov. 25, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 549-54 *(Nov. 26, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 676-79 *(Dec. 2, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 815-22 *(Dec. 8, 2025 eve., passed on division)*
Committee of the Whole — 855 *(Dec. 9, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 873-80 *(Dec. 9, 2025 eve., passed on division)*
Third Reading — 891 *(Dec. 9, 2025 eve., adjourned on division)*, 892-900 *(Dec. 9, 2025 eve., passed on division)*
Royal Assent — *(Dec. 11, 2025 outside of House sitting)* [Comes into force December 11, 2025; SA 2025 c24]

Bill 10 — Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2) (Nally)

First Reading — 271 *(Nov. 17, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 374-78 *(Nov. 19, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 514-21 *(Nov. 25, 2025 eve., adjourned)*, 543-49 *(Nov. 26, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 670-76 *(Dec. 2, 2025 aft., passed)*
Committee of the Whole — 728-29 *(Dec. 3, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 744-45 *(Dec. 3, 2025 eve., passed)*
Third Reading — 789-94 *(Dec. 8, 2025 eve., passed)*
Royal Assent — *(Dec. 11, 2025 outside of House sitting)* [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2025 c25]

Bill 11 — Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2) (LaGrange)

First Reading — 426 *(Nov. 24, 2025 , passed)*
Second Reading — 555-64 *(Nov. 26, 2025 eve., adjourned)*, 590-96 *(Nov. 27, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 637-46 *(Dec. 1, 2025 eve., adjourned)*, 808-15 *(Dec. 8, 2025 eve., passed on division)*
Committee of the Whole — 856 *(Dec. 9, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 867-73 *(Dec. 9, 2025 eve., passed on division with amendments)*
Third Reading — 913-14 *(Dec. 10, 2025 aft., adjourned on division)*, 916-22 *(Dec. 10, 2025 aft., passed on division)*
Royal Assent — *(Dec. 11, 2025 outside of House sitting)* [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2025 c21]

Bill 12 — Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2) ($) (Horner)

First Reading — 478 *(Nov. 25, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 693-98 *(Dec. 2, 2025 eve., adjourned)*, 731-37 *(Dec. 3, 2025 eve., passed)*
Committee of the Whole — 745-50 *(Dec. 3, 2025 eve., adjourned)*, 850-55 *(Dec. 9, 2025 aft., passed with amendments)*
Third Reading — 860-67 *(Dec. 9, 2025 eve., passed on division)*
Royal Assent — *(Dec. 11, 2025)* [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2025 c20]

Bill 13 — Regulated Professions Neutrality Act (Amery)

First Reading — 404 *(Nov. 20, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 564-73 *(Nov. 26, 2025 eve., adjourned)*, 629-37 *(Dec. 1, 2025 eve., passed)*
Committee of the Whole — 686-92 *(Dec. 2, 2025 eve., adjourned)*, 801-08 *(Dec. 8, 2025 eve., passed)*
Third Reading — *(Dec. 9, 2025 eve., passed on division)*
Royal Assent — *(Dec. 11, 2025)* [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2025 cR-13.3]

Bill 14 — Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (Amery)

First Reading — 763 *(Dec. 4, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 794-801 *(Dec. 8, 2025 eve., adjourned)*, 844-50 *(Dec. 9, 2025 aft., passed on division)*
Committee of the Whole — 856 *(Dec. 9, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 880-87 *(Dec. 9, 2025 eve., passed on division with amendments)*
Third Reading — 922-23 *(Dec. 10, 2025 aft., adjourned on division)*, 924-31 *(Dec. 10, 2025 aft., passed on division)*
Royal Assent — *(Dec. 11, 2025 outside of House sitting)* [Comes into force December 11, 2025, with exceptions; SA 2025 c22]

Bill 15 — Public Safety and Emergency Services Statutes Amendment Act, 2026 (Ellis)

First Reading — 943 *(Feb. 24, 2026 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 972-83 *(Feb. 25, 2026 aft., passed)*

Bill 16 — Traveller Protection and Destination Development Act (Boitchenko)

First Reading — 963 *(Feb. 25, 2026 aft., passed)*

Bill 201 — Employment Standards (Protecting Workers' Pay) Amendment Act, 2025 (Ganley)

First Reading — 121 *(Oct. 30, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 154-65 *(Nov. 3, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 274-76 *(Nov. 17, 2025 aft., defeated on division)*

Bill 202 — Conflicts of Interest (Ethical Governance) Amendment Act, 2025 (Kasawski)

First Reading — 248 *(Nov. 6, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 276-84 *(Nov. 17, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 427-31 *(Nov. 24, 2025 aft., defeated on division)*

Bill 203 — Energy Storage Planning for Investment Act (Al-Guneid)

First Reading — 319 *(Nov. 18, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 431-39 *(Nov. 24, 2025 aft., adjourned)*, 608-13 *(Dec. 1, 2025 aft., defeated on division)*

Bill 204 — Public Interest Disclosure (Publicly Funded Health Entity Whistleblower Protection) Act (Sweet)

First Reading — 534 *(Nov. 26, 2025 aft., passed)*
Second Reading — 613-20 *(Dec. 1, 2025 aft., adjourned)*

Table of Contents

Prayers 985

Introduction of Visitors 985

Introduction of Guests 985

Members' Statements
- Racism 986
- Education Funding 986
- Alberta Separatism 987
- Pacific NorthWest Economic Region 987
- Chinese Immigrants to Alberta 995
- UCP Government Record 995

Oral Question Period
- Government Spending and Provincial Debt 987
- Alberta Separatism and Economic Development 988, 990
- Health Care System Capacity 989
- Physician Services Agreement 989
- Education Funding 990
- Affordability Measures 991
- School Class Size and Complexity 991
- Alberta Separatism 992
- Immigrants to Alberta 992
- Highway 28 Capital Plan 993
- AISH Client Benefits 994
- Health Care System 994

Tabling Returns and Reports 995

Orders of the Day 996

Transmittal of Estimates 996

Government Motions
- Budget Address 996

Published under the Authority of the Speaker
of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta