


Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 17, 2026

Day 33

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)
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Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)
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Kayande, Samir, Calgary-Elbow (NDP)
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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)
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Neudorf, Hon. Nathan T., ECA, Lethbridge-East (UC)
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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)
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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)
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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

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Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and Executive Director of Parliamentary Services
Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and Committees
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| Andrew Boitchenko | Minister of Tourism and Sport |
| Devin Dreeshen | Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors |
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| Grant Hunter | Minister of Environment and Protected Areas |
| Brian Jean | Minister of Energy and Minerals |
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| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Multiculturalism |

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| Tany Yao | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development |

## STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

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Kasawski
Kayande
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Stephan
Wiebe
Wright, J.

**Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

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

**Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee**

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**Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Chair: Ms Lovely
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Haji
Johnson
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Sawyer
Singh
Tejada

**Standing Committee on Legislative Offices**

Chair: Mr. Lunty
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Chapman
Cyr
Dyck
Miyashiro
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Sawyer
Shepherd
Wright, P.

**Special Standing Committee on Members' Services**

Chair: Mr. McIver
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**Standing Committee on Private Bills**

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Hayter
Lovely
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Vacant

**Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing**

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Brar, Gurtej
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**Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Lunty

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de Jonge
Eremenko
Lovely
Renaud
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Schmidt
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**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. Tuesday, March 17, 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 to his government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

## Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, it is a pleasure to welcome hon. Don Scott back to the Legislature today. Mr. Scott served Albertans as the member for Fort McMurray-Conklin and served as a cabinet minister. Mr. Scott has brought his leadership to various roles, including mayor of Fort McMurray and volunteering with the Royal Canadian Legion. He continues his commitment to public service today as the executive director of the McMurray Métis. He is joined by colleague Jennifer Vardy. I ask that they both please rise to receive the warm welcome.

## Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Let's start with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Looks like you've got two in a row, yes? Go ahead.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce – we have 26 students from Parkview school in my riding along with their teacher, Alison Palmer, and parent helpers. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

We also have students from St. Paul Catholic elementary school, the grade 6ers again, 35 in total, with their teacher, Chiara Cimino, and also any parent helpers. They're here for the School at the Leg. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Ms Pancholi:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you, through you, and to all members of the Assembly I'm thrilled to introduce my oldest and dearest friend, Alison Palmer. Ali and I have been friends for 42 years. We first met at the age of 6, when we bunked next to each other at Brownie camp. Ali is here with her grade 6 class from Parkview school. As a proud public school teacher she has followed in the footsteps of her incredible mother, Celia Palmer, who was also my grade 1 teacher. Ali, please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jody and Dan Layden from Sundre, Alberta. Jody is my long-suffering constituency assistant, and Dan is the groundskeeper at the Coyote golf course in Sundre, which many of you know very well. He knows more about grass – not the kind you smoke but the grass that makes it smooth to golf on. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

## Members' Statements

### Grocery Prices

**Mr. Schmidt:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans have noticed something strange about grocery prices. They go up overnight, and they never seem to come back down. Meanwhile Canada's grocery giants keep reporting record profits, and families are forced to make impossible choices at the checkout. The explanation we keep hearing from this government is that grocery prices are someone else's problem. Blame Ottawa. Blame inflation. Blame the immigrants. Blame anyone except those who dominate our food system.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't rocket science. When a handful of companies control the grocery supply chain, from production to distribution to shelves on the store, the system stops behaving like a free market. One could say that these grocery chains function like a cartel. Albertans can see it. We saw it when major grocery companies were caught fixing the price of bread for more than a decade, we see it when corporations use restrictive covenants to block competitors from opening grocery stores even after those corporate stores close their doors, and we see it when the same companies face lawsuits and investigations for allegedly rigging prices and squeezing both consumers and producers.

The people have had it with everyday trips to the grocery store that hit their wallet harder every time with unending higher prices. They see these companies report record profits, and they know that as customers they are the ones paying for it.

They've had it with a government that lets these companies get away with it. Instead of stoking division, flirting with separatism, or blaming newcomers for problems that they didn't create, this government could be taking real action to make groceries more affordable. They could ban restrictive covenants that block competition. They could investigate price-fixing and collusion in concentrated food industries. They could regulate essential grocery prices where markets are failing and look at ways to make the sting of these big grocery prices hurt less.

Albertans don't need excuses. They need a government . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

### Official Opposition Leader

**Ms Schulz:** Eleven years in office, 81 per cent tax increases, decaying infrastructure, and zero leadership: Mr. Speaker, that is the record of the former Calgary mayor who now sits in this House as the leader of the NDP. For the second time in two years Calgarians are facing water rationing due to his failure to provide the most basic service, safe, reliable water. Under his watch he chose to deprioritize water main repairs while lowering safety standards and ignoring experts' calls for inspections. These standards were not reversed for years, meaning the city operated under weakened oversight for almost his entire time as mayor. While Calgary's infrastructure showed signs of collapse, he was busy dreaming up property tax increases which later doubled, funded expensive blue ring highway art that nobody asked for, completely bungled the green line project, campaigned for his federal Liberal friends while their policies cratered the Alberta economy and our major industries, and he handed out thousands of Calgarians' dollars to eco-activist groups like the Pembina Institute for advice.

As a Calgarian here's some free advice. Safe and reliable water should have been the former mayor's top priority, but he failed at the very basics. The accountability report on the Bearspaw south feeder main proves the risk was identified during his tenure. This pipe was labelled high risk longer than the NDP leader's friendship with Justin Trudeau, Mr. Speaker. He claims he didn't know, then pivots in PR stunts, saying that he should have asked more questions. It's the dog-ate-my-homework excuse, but the report tells a story of systemic failure.

This is not leadership. It's the federal Liberal playbook of the last 10 years, focused on elitist and activist policies while ignoring the basic needs of citizens. You can't claim to be ready to lead a province's future when you failed to maintain a city's very foundation, Mr. Speaker. Leadership is not Senate dreams and blue rings. It's about pipes in the ground, water in the taps, and providing the most basic essential services to the citizens you are elected to serve. He may want a promotion, but Calgarians have already delivered his performance review, and it is one of failure. [some applause]

**The Speaker:** Order.

### Seniors' Benefits

**Mr. Shepherd:** Mr. Speaker, recently I heard from one of my constituents, Ron, a senior just over 70 years old. He was raising concerns about how the UCP's new budget attacks seniors like him. He wrote: as if life in Alberta was not stressful enough, we find out today the UCP government is lowering the eligible annual income for seniors' benefits. This will throw folks off the benefit.

It may also take away Alberta dental and eye coverage. He noted that thanks to the UCP he already has to pay out of pocket for eye tests that used to be covered, and his copay on medications has gone up by $10 per prescription, costing him hundreds more per year. Now they're going to make his life harder by cutting him off from seniors' benefits. According to Ron the resulting loss of dental and eye benefits will cost him an additional $1,000 a year. In his words: with the rising cost of food and accommodations and now an increase in health expenses, this makes living unaffordable for me and many others. He notes the new limit means seniors can't be earning more than minimum wage, and if they do, the UCP will claw it back.

Now, the Premier says that this is all necessary because the programs that have helped keep Albertans like Ron from falling into poverty are just overly generous. Seriously, the Premier who earns five times the earning limit that she's set for seniors' benefits is telling the people who helped build our province that they've had it too good. A government that's wasted hundreds of millions of dollars on sweetheart contracts for its friends and donors is accusing low-income seniors of expecting too much. A government doubling our debt despite near record resource revenues, who wasted a boom during the boom, says that seniors should be smarter with their money. Never has a government spent so much to deliver so little and still make Albertans' lives more expensive.

Ron and so many others deserve so much better. They deserve a government that cares. The UCP refuse to deliver that, but an Alberta NDP government will.

### *1:40* Mental Health Supports for Farmers

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Mr. Speaker, in the coming weeks farmers in my riding of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and across this great province will begin spring seeding. As we all know, farming comes with challenges, many of them beyond a producer's control. High input costs, limited moisture this winter, and increased pest pressures following federal regulatory changes are creating real uncertainties heading into the season. These pressures don't just affect the balance sheet; they lead to difficult conversations around the kitchen table and increased stress for farm families across Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I've received many phone calls and e-mails from constituents raising these very concerns. One e-mail from Triple H Land & Cattle shared that they have lost nearly $100,000 over the past few years due to the explosion in gopher populations. That is not a small loss and it is not an isolated case.

Spring can take a heavy toll on the mental health of those in rural communities, an issue that still does not receive the attention it deserves. More than 75 per cent of Alberta farmers report experiencing anxiety, and 67 per cent show signs of depression. Both are well above national averages. Even more concerning, roughly 1 in 4 farmers has reported having considered suicide, with true numbers likely higher due to the stigma that still surrounds this topic.

Mr. Speaker, rural mental health is a priority for this government. I want to highlight AgKnow, a digital resource through Counselling Alberta that connects farmers with mental health professionals and support services. I also want to highlight Do More Agriculture Foundation, which is working to break down the stigma and support producers from across Canada.

If our animals are sick, we treat them. If our equipment breaks down, we fix it. When the pressures of farming become overwhelming, we must also be willing to seek help, so to Alberta farmers, from one farmer to another: you are not alone. Your community and your government are here when you need us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Editorially, I'll say that anybody considering suicide should know they can dial 988 for assistance.

### Government Accountability

**Ms Ganley:** The UCP like to tell you they're all about democracy, that rights and the rule of law just get in the way of that, but in a free and democratic society we aren't free or democratic unless everyone, politicians included, must live by the same laws. If someone can get elected on one set of promises and then turn around and exempt themselves from the rules – pick who enforces the rules, divest anyone of their individual rights, run roughshod over the public's right to information, rewrite the rules so they apply to their enemies and not their friends – that's not democracy anymore. It's anarchy. It's might makes right. Think I'm being dramatic, talking in hyperbolic future hypotheticals? It's all already happened, Mr. Speaker.

Two hundred and ninety-three thousand, nine hundred and seventy-six: that's the number of the signatures that the Forever Canadian petition needed. One hundred and seventy-seven thousand, seven hundred and thirty-two: that's the number the UCP's separatist supporters needed for their petition. They changed the rules for their friends – twice, actually, because they had to get around that pesky Constitution as well.

Don't like what teachers have to say? Take their rights. Don't like judges enforcing the laws? Try to control them. Don't want the public to look too closely at the laws they pass? Ram them through the Legislature. Don't think your chief lawyer should be bothered with ethics or competence? Exempt him from the rules. Not so into justice, equality, or civil liberties? Appropriate the money that funds those organizations. The UCP have a majority, so they can take any rights they want, make the rules different for their friends. That's just democracy, right? But that argument, Mr. Speaker, that votes are more important than rights, that if you get the votes, you can take the rights: it misses one essential thing. The right to vote is just that. It's a right.

### Influenza Immunization

**Mr. Haji:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta has reached a record high for influenza-related deaths this year. According to the provincial respiratory virus dashboard more than 250 Albertans have died this flu season, making it the deadliest season in nearly two decades of available data. This is also the fourth consecutive year in which flu-related deaths have gone up in our province.

This tragic outcome reflects broader failure by this government to prioritize public health measures. Vaccination is a proven way to prevent severe illnesses and deaths from influenza, but Alberta's vaccination rate is just 20 per cent, one of the lowest in the country. Low vaccination coverage means more people become seriously ill, more people require emergency care, and greater pressure is placed on hospitals that are already struggling with capacity issues.

A strong public health system emphasizes prevention, clear and timely communication, and accessible, barrier-free vaccination programs to keep people healthy and reduce the strain on our health care system, Mr. Speaker. Yet, despite what the minister of health has described as the worst flu season, this government has chosen to move in an opposite direction. Budget 2026 includes more than $400 million in cuts to public health funding along with an additional $13 million in cuts to immunization programs. At a time when influenza deaths have reached record levels, reducing investment in vaccination and public health is deeply troubling.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's public health professionals have the knowledge and the dedication to prevent harm. What is missing is a political will, along with resources and leadership that truly value the essential role of public health. Albertans deserve a government that prioritizes prevention, protects public health capacity, and ensures that . . .

**The Speaker:** Order. You're out of time, I'm afraid.

## Presenting Petitions

**Mrs. Johnson:** Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I request leave to present, in accordance with Standing Order 98(2), two petitions that have been received for private bills, the petition of hon. Tyler Shandro, KC, member of the Committee of Management and legal counsel to the Ranchmen's Club for the Ranchmen's Club Ordinance Amendment Act, 2026, and the petition of Mark Maxwell, president of Prairie bible institute for the Prairie Bible Institute Amendment Act, 2026.

Thank you.

## Notices of Motions

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 18, the Safeguards for Last Resort Termination of Life Act, sponsored by the Minister of Justice.

Thank you.

## Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** Tablings? Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of an e-mail to the MLA for Leduc-Beaumont. This constituent is extremely concerned about the Premier's rhetoric around immigration and public services, and urges that MLA to read . . .

**The Speaker:** Sherwood Park.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table two reports, one written by Will Noel titled Path of Most Resistance: Can Alberta Build a Credible Alternate Plan to Reduce Electricity Emissions?

The other written by Lindsay Burchill: MNP Consumer Debt Index Shows Albertans Are Bracing for a Challenging 2026.

**The Speaker:** Calgary-Buffalo.

**Member Ceci:** Three tablings, Your Worship. Sorry; Mr. Speaker. Eleven letters from Albertans asking the government to restore funding to the three provincial heritage organizations whose funding was cut.

Second is a blog post February 28 from IATSE 212 president Damian Petti titled Alberta's budget: has it impacted the future of Alberta's screen industry?

The third is a March 3 *Hollywood Reporter* article with the title Alberta's Hollywood Film Tax Incentive May Be Trimmed Amid Oil Price Volatility.

**The Speaker:** Thank you for the promotion.

## *1:50* Oral Question Period

**The Speaker:** The first question belongs to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

### Provincial Fiscal Policies

**Mr. Nenshi:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In the words of the Government House Leader: this government's legacy is one of "debt, deficit, and dumb decisions." So much money, so little to show for it: $70 million on Turkish Tylenol, $100-plus million on the DynaLife debacle . . .

**Mr. Schow:** Point of order.

**Mr. Nenshi:** . . . a billion or more on bloated surgical contracts, endless deficits, no path to balance. The Finance minister tells us that new legislation is in the works to roll back the UCP's own fiscal framework but not until the fall. This is an illegal budget. Why not table that legislation now?

**The Speaker:** A point of order was called at 1:50.

The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't call record spending on health care a waste of money or record spending on education a waste of money or record spending on infrastructure, including supporting water infrastructure, which the member opposite was unlikely to do and unable to do when he was mayor of Calgary. I don't call that a waste of money. The fact of the matter is that we continue to have a reliance on volatile oil and gas revenues. We put forward a budget on the basis of $60, which is what the long-term average is for WTI, and we have a structural deficit.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, oil and gas revenue is booming. It's seven times what Rachel Notley had, yet this government cannot balance the budget. In fact, they're planning on doubling Alberta's entire debt in the lifetime of one government. This is astonishing, it is unprecedented, and there is no plan to get out of it, just a prayer for higher oil prices. When will we see from this government a path to a balanced budget and a plan for economic growth to get us there?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What was unprecedented is going from having zero debt to $90 billion worth of debt, which is what happened when the NDP were in power for four short years. In fact, this government has had three surplus budgets. We put $15 billion down on that NDP-acquired debt. We've also doubled the size of our heritage savings trust fund, something they didn't do.

When we came in, it was $16 billion in 2021. It's now $34 billion, and it's going to continue to grow. That is investment in the long-term prosperity, and the long-term stability of our finances is growing that fund to $250 billion.

**Mr. Nenshi:** We'll certainly get back to the heritage fund in a few minutes, Mr. Speaker.

For now let's talk about what's happening now with the debt. This is the first government since Peter Lougheed that has actually increased our reliance on oil and gas revenues to balance the budget. Seven times the revenue, still can't balance the budget, and shockingly this government has zero economic development strategy. Every town, every city has an economic development strategy. This government does not. Unemployment is the highest in western Canada. It's up significantly since the Premier took office. What is her jobs plan?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must tell you that we have more economic development and more diversification of our economy than we ever have before. We are now below the national average in unemployment at 6.3 per cent. We're the only province that is creating new jobs. When you look year over year from February 2025 until now, 85,000 jobs have been created in Alberta whereas the rest of the country has lost 33,200 jobs. We remain a powerful economy for job creation and wealth investment, and we're going to continue to.

**The Speaker:** The second set of questions belongs to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Yet unemployment has only gone up under this Premier. Youth unemployment is at record highs; we remain the highest in western Canada.

### Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

**Mr. Nenshi:** The Premier just now talked about getting off the resource roller coaster by increasing the heritage trust fund, but under this government's endless deficit plan there are no new donations to the heritage trust fund for many, many years. So what's the Premier's new plan? When can we expect to see it given that her plan that she just talked about won't work anymore and isn't worth the paper it's written on?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the member opposite will support us in encouraging businesses not to rely so heavily on guest workers and temporary foreign workers so that youth employment can go up. That's why we've also put the youth employment credit in place to encourage employers to hire young people at $10 an hour subsidy. We're seeing the youth unemployment rate go down as a result, and that's a positive move.

When I look at where we have been, the debt we inherited from the members opposite, the fact that we continued for the past three years to run surpluses, pay down debt, and invest in the heritage savings trust fund: that's what we're going to work on.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Yet again: let's blame the immigrants, Mr. Speaker.

This overwhelmed government couldn't deal with two years of higher than average immigration growth because the Premier asked for it, yet they're increasing the debt in this budget by more than the entire assets of the heritage trust fund in only four years. We also know that the Premier wants to use that heritage trust fund as a personal piggy bank to gamble on things that the market won't invest in. Why is the Premier so comfortable gambling with the savings and the future of Albertans while she's running endless deficits?

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, none of us can see the future, which is part of the reason why we've taken the approach of prudent, conservative estimates. When we looked forward, when the budget was released, we were looking at $60 WTI. Within a week we've now seen that WTI has gone up to anywhere between $90 and $100. We don't know if that's going to end up continuing or whether or not it's going to decline, but that's one of the things we have to deal with as a government. We want to make sure that there is an understanding on the part of the public that when we have $60 WTI, it creates huge pressure on our budget, and we want to make sure that the important things are supported.

**Mr. Nenshi:** I thank the Premier for admitting that there is no budget here. There's just a prayer for windfalls and for higher oil prices, which is what she just said. This government is bad with money, and their fiscal ineptitude is hurting Albertans. With the same breath, the Premier says, "We'll balance the budget on the backs of seniors, poor people, people with disabilities because we are overly generous to them," a Premier who has five times the income of someone on AISH. Will the Premier at least commit today to maintain the political independence of the heritage trust fund?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The heritage savings trust fund is independent. Joe Lougheed is at the helm of that, and he has put together an independent board. It gives advice on the investment strategy for the fund, and they work in conjunction with AIMCo, which is also another independent entity, in order to make the investment decisions on behalf of public-sector workers. So yes, it is an independent entity.

**The Speaker:** The third set of questions belongs to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Nenshi:** The independent entity AIMCo, that this government fired the entire management and board of and put their own people in: very independent.

### Investigation of Health Services Procurement

**Mr. Nenshi:** Listen, I was surprised yesterday to see the Minister of Justice stand up yet again in the never-ending corrupt care scandal to defend his bro, his travel buddy, his best friend, and his relative Sam Mraiche. The more we know about the corrupt care scandal, the more Mr. Mraiche is implicated. Surely the Premier sees that this looks bad at the very least. Will she ask her Justice minister to recuse himself from all corrupt care inquiries?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Judge Wyant took a look at the practices for procurement at AHS and found that they needed to be changed. There are 18 recommendations that he gave to us, and we're implementing them. We're putting a new procurement secretariat in place to make sure that there is oversight on every contract so that some of the deficiencies in the AHS contracts do not happen again. Also, we look forward to the results of the Auditor General's report. I'm sure that there'll be additional recommendations that they would make, and we will look forward to implementing those as well.

**Mr. Nenshi:** It's interesting that the Premier talks about the Wyant report, which I'm not sure she's read because here is what Justice Wyant did say in his own report. He said that he couldn't get to the bottom of the Turkish Tylenol scandal, that he couldn't figure out how much money Mr. Mraiche was still holding from this government. Maybe $50 million; maybe more. He said that he would write a supplemental report on this specific issue. It's been six months. We haven't seen the supplemental report. Has the government seen the supplemental report? What does it say, and when will they table it here?

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a DM that oversees that process, and they have not given us an indication that that report has been received yet, but we look forward to reading it when it is received. The Wyant report also said that there was no politician, no political staff, and no member of government who had made any error in the way that was handled. This was an AHS internal procurement problem, and now we're going to be ensuring that we've changed the processes so nothing like this happens again. We'll see if the Auditor General has anything more to add in improving those processes, and we look forward to that report as well.

**Mr. Nenshi:** So interesting that on this issue the Premier relies on a limited report that says that there is no political interference, but on other issues they are perfectly happy to call a public inquiry when they think it'll benefit them politically. Albertans don't have the answers they need. All we've done is move procurement further into political interference in the Premier's office, not further away from it, and it will make matters even worse. So, Premier, now that your members are happy with public inquiries when it benefits them, when are you calling a public inquiry on this?

***2:00***

**Ms Smith:** Maybe the member opposite is feeling a little bit worried about what an inquiry might find out about how oversight was mismanaged when it comes to water pipeline infrastructure in Calgary. We're interested in finding a lot more about that, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that the Auditor General has the ability to ask for people to give him testimony. He can compel testimony. He's had full opportunity in order to be able to do that work. Our understanding was that he is intending to issue his report soon, and we'll look forward to seeing what the results of that are.

**The Speaker:** The next set of questions belongs to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

## Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee

**Ms Pancholi:** Almost half a million Albertans signed the Forever Canadian petition to support Alberta remaining in Canada. That petition was tabled in this Assembly by the Chief Electoral Officer on December 1 of last year. The next step is for the petition to be reviewed by a committee of this Legislature to determine what steps the UCP will take to address this powerful expression of patriotism by Albertans. But instead of establishing that committee right away, the UCP delayed it for three months and waited until last week to do so. To the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, the chair of the committee: when will the first meeting of that committee be held?

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

**Mr. Williams:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point of order.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member noted, the Alberta forever citizen initiative policy proposal was received by the Chief Electoral Officer on June 5 of 2025 and tabled in the Assembly on December 2. The applicant, Thomas Lukaszuk, proposed his referendum on the following question: do you agree that Alberta should remain part of Canada? The government has 10 sitting days after the proposal is tabled to bring forward a motion to refer the proposal to that committee of the Assembly, and then the committee has 90 days to either table a report with respect to the policy proposal or to recommend something else, that I'll get to in the next answer.

**Ms Pancholi:** When the UCP changed the law twice and overturned a court decision to make it easier for their separatist friends to put separatism to a referendum, they revealed that once again they were listening to the wrong people. A huge majority of Albertans are proud Canadians, and the half-million people who signed the Forever Canadian petition deserve to be listened to by this government. I wrote to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont last week asking that the first meeting of the committee be held before March 24. He has not responded. Again to the chair of the committee, who I'm entitled to ask questions of in question period: will the first meeting of the committee be scheduled before March 24?

**Mr. Schow:** Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the motion passed without debate, the committee must table a report within 90 days with the Assembly, if it's sitting, which is June 8 of this year, or 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting anticipated for November 9 of this year. The member should know that the committee cannot convene during estimates. It's in the Standing Orders. It's a bit of a problem for the member opposite to read the Standing Orders and understand them, but I'm happy to let them know that the committee will be initiated in due course. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.
The hon. member.

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply ends tomorrow night, so it's not surprising the UCP wants to ignore the people who signed the Forever Canadian petition until after they see how their separatist friends do with theirs. After all, these half-million Albertans have proved that the UCP doesn't know Albertans that well. Albertans are proud Canadians. They know we can get more done when Alberta leads Canada, not leaves Canada. They know that the Premier's sovereign Alberta in a united Canada is just nonsense. They know the UCP will do everything to slow-roll things for the majority of Albertans but fast-track them for their friends. They know a separatist government when they see one. So to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont. The Official Opposition is ready to get to work. Why isn't the UCP?

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, it wasn't that long ago that the member said that I was selling. Now, I found that a bit interesting because if the member knew anything about selling, she wouldn't have dropped the leadership race to back the obvious frontrunner. I can tell you the NDP has – in the context, selling actually means to fail. The members opposite have no plan for the economy, no plan to balance the budget, no plan for health care, and certainly no plan for building roads. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Schow:** I ask you, Mr. Speaker . . .

**The Speaker:** Go on.

**Mr. Schow:** I ask you, Mr. Speaker: with no plan, like they have opposite, who's selling now?

**The Speaker:** The next set of questions belongs to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

## Government Contracts

**Member Eremenko:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar asked the Infrastructure minister to be transparent with Albertans and release documents about investigations into land deals involving – wait for it – Sam Mraiche. We know there was an internal audit by the department, but Albertans are still in the dark about Sam Mraiche's role in more than five years of bad UCP land deals. Let's try this again. Will the minister release the results of the internal review, table the documents, and come clean to Albertans, or do we have to wait for the Auditor General's report to get to the truth?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

**Mr. Long:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As most people are aware, we have very strict processes for all of our property deals. We have looked at this particular deal. We've also asked the Auditor General to look at our property transactions. The Auditor General has asked for a few more transactions so they can do their audits. These are all typical audit processes. We will fully comply with the audit processes as we move forward.

**Member Eremenko:** Given that in June 2023 UCP government officials and ROSC solutions group, or RSG, toured a building for detox treatment and just four months later Sam Mraiche bought the building, which is now being leased to the Métis Nation of Alberta, with services delivered by RSG; given that RSG has more than $70 million in UCP government contracts, some of which is now flowing to Mr. Mraiche; and given that the UCP would like nothing more than to have this issue in the rear-view mirror – Sam Mraiche profited $300,000 in 12 weeks as a result of selling – will the minister table the documents to show . . .

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, we've been over this many times inside the Legislature. The project the hon. member is referring to is with the Métis Nation. We do work closely with the Métis Nation on many projects. They made determinations on which property they want to buy and where they want to run the facility. Is the Official Opposition saying that the Métis Nation should not be able to make that decision? We're happy to continue to fund our First Nations partners. I think the hon. member should answer to the fact that she has received significantly more donations from Sam Mraiche than this side of the House, something the NDP continue to avoid.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** Oh, a point of order – how good is that? – at 2:07.

**Member Eremenko:** Given that in committee the minister confirmed that there is an active Auditor General investigation into these shady contracts with Sam Mraiche, that may include up to eight business deals, and given that the minister will not say which transactions are under investigation and given that taxpayers deserve to know exactly how much they paid for these deals while friends of the UCP lined their pockets, will the minister tell us how much money out of the UCP's $9.4 billion deficit was spent on corrupt land deals with Sam Mraiche?

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, one of the challenges when you can only ask questions by notes is that you can't pivot to be able to ask a follow-up question to the answer that you just received.

Again, the Métis Nation makes decisions on the property that they want to use. They go and rent a facility from a landlord, Mr. Speaker. No, the government doesn't step in and tell First Nation partners who they can rent from. Bringing forward a conspiracy . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. I heard the question just fine.

Minister, I'd like to hear your answer.

**Mr. Nixon:** Bringing forward a conspiracy in this place from people who can't defend themselves, who aren't members of it, is already appalling enough, but to do that to First Nation partners, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member should just apologize.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

## Mental Health and Addiction Services

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2026 is focused on what matters. That means making sure we continue investing in our health care system so that Albertans have the access to the services that they need. Mental health care is a vital part of our health system. When people can't get timely support, they can end up in a crisis, which constrain families, hospitals, and the entire health care system. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: how is Budget 2026 focused on ensuring acute mental health care needs are met for Albertans around the province?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister for Mental Health and Addiction.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Mental health and addiction care is a priority for this government. This is reflected in our budget this year. This budget, if passed, will be $2 billion, the largest investment in mental health and addiction services to date. Over $206 million is provided through Recovery Alberta to continue operating over 900 psychiatric beds in five stand-alone sites. These beds provide assessment, treatment, stabilization to people who have severe and continuing mental illness or who are experiencing an acute mental health crisis.

***2:10***

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given the importance of appropriate medical care when it comes to helping people facing acute mental health and addiction challenges and given that patients need a safe place to continue treatment and recovery when they no longer need acute-care but still need structured and ongoing rehabilitation and recovery supports with health care professionals, to the same minister: how does Budget 2026 invest in community care beds to help Albertans get the right care at the right time in the right place?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Wilson:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and what a great question. Budget 2026 is going to invest about $11 million to add 60 critically needed community-based mental health and addiction beds, 30 opening this year and 30 for next year. These beds will give people a safe, structured place to continue treatment and recovery once they no longer need hospital levels of care but still need professional support.

**The Speaker:** Airdrie-East.

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that recovery does not end when someone leaves a hospital or a community bed and given that long-term recovery helps reduce the need for repeated acute care and given that long-term recovery benefits individuals, families, and communities across the province, to the same minister: what supports are in place to help Albertans maintain long-term recovery and build stable, healthy lives in their communities?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recovery is a journey, and people need support every step of the way. Through the recovery model we're investing in a full continuum of mental health and addiction care. That includes prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery. For example, people who complete treatment at one of the 60 new beds I just mentioned will be connected to supports and services to build long-term stability and move forward with their lives. Over the long term a co-ordinated approach reduces repeat crises, eases pressure on acute care, and supports better outcomes across the health care system.

**The Speaker:** The next set of questions belongs to the hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Just before that, I'll note that the points of order for 1:50 and 2:01 have been withdrawn.

## Budget 2026

**Mr. Kasawski:** With the UCP Albertans pay more and get much less, except for debt. With the UCP's bad budget, Albertans get way more debt. When you add it all up, it's quite a lot: $9.4 billion this year, $7.6 billion next, $7 billion the year after that. That is the UCP's disastrous fiscal plan: big deficits and no plan to ever balance the provincial budget. When you add it all up, it'll be over $27,000 per Albertan in provincial debt. Why is the Finance minister's budget saddling every Albertan with over $27,000 each of debt?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, I'm actually glad that the other side has kind of woken up to understand that things cost money in this place. All I hear every day is: fund it more, fund it more, fund it more; we don't like the efforts you've taken to decrease expenses; we don't like what you've done to increase revenue; we don't like the deficit. You're talking out of both sides of your mouths. Surpluses, I understand, are theoretical for you folks, but Alberta should pay attention to what we've done with them: doubled the heritage fund, paid down $15 billion in debt. No other jurisdiction has.

**The Speaker:** Comments through the chair please, Minister.

Next question.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Given that we're talking for Albertans, given that the UCP wants seniors to pay more and get much less, given that the UCP is making seniors pay more out of pocket for prescription drugs, more for dental care, more for eye care, more for caregiver support, more for essential vaccines, why is the minister choosing to make Alberta seniors' lives more expensive with more fees to make up for this government's wasteful spending on pet projects leading to never-ending deficits?

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is getting ready to invest $6.7 billion this year to be able to stand with our seniors and be able to make sure that life can be affordable for them in the province. I could tell you that the biggest thing that we did to make life more affordable for seniors and for all Albertans was get rid of the NDP-Liberal carbon tax, which was driving up the cost of everything. We have the most generous thresholds when it comes to seniors' benefits anywhere in the country. We're proud of it. We encourage other provinces to try to keep up with Alberta. We can do that at the same time as making sure that we can meet our fiscal responsibilities here in the province.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Given that the UCP also wants drivers to pay more and get much less, given that the UCP are legislating an increase in auto insurance that will lead to even more costs for drivers, given that the UCP are going to be collecting more for speeding fees and even more for registration fees, why is this government saddling Alberta drivers with more fees for vehicle registration, more fees for driving infractions, more fees for insurance, but not investing in safe roads, pothole repair, and the infrastructure that helps Albertans get around this beautiful province?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, you've got to open up the book and go through a few pages. Look at what we're investing in transportation. You're talking about the investment in even capital maintenance and renewal: $4.2 billion. I think you'd all agree that you have to protect what you already have before you worry about the next thing that you're going to build, and we're doing both. We're going to take care of the infrastructure we have. We have a capital plan that is dominated by health care investments and school investments to meet the population charge of today. Albertans should be proud.

## Electricity System Regulation

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Mr. Speaker, ATCO just wrote off nearly half a billion dollars on its generation portfolio. Investors are warning about serious grid deficiency and transmission problems made worse by the UCP government's chaos and growing market redesign uncertainty. With this separatist government fuelling instability in our province, what specific steps is the Premier taking to restore investor confidence in the power sector instead of this self-inflicted damage?

**Mr. Neudorf:** Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to be part of a government that puts Albertans first. That is exactly why we're fixing the mess that the NDP left behind when they piled on with renewables on top of the $2 billion payout for coal and that whole debacle, on top of the lawsuits that we're still settling. We're protecting Albertans' bills. Power generation prices are the lowest in Alberta history, and we have made significant changes to control the costs on transmission. The highest costs on utility bills, transmission overbuild, provided to you by the NDP.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Given that thanks to Cascade and Base plant and renewables we have enough supply – it has nothing to do with this government, Mr. Speaker – and given that the UCP has hammered renewables with a ridiculous moratorium, costly new requirements, vague pristine viewscapes, and a 35-kilometre policy, it is death by a thousand cuts, turning viable, excellent projects into money losers, and given that when we add the UCP's separatist chaos, market redesign uncertainty, and looming investor lawsuits, how can the Premier claim this market is competitive when new energy supply cannot even enter the market?

**Mr. Neudorf:** Mr. Speaker, again, a great example of why we're so happy the NDP is not in government. They don't understand markets. We have a surplus of supply. That is why there's not new generation building; the price of generation is already nearly at zero dollars. The cost in the system is transmission caused by overbuild by renewables congesting lines that the NDP didn't foresee when they got out of coal. And you know what else? The cost of getting out of coal costs Albertans $100 million every year to 2030. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Given that ATCO is now threatening legal action against the government, warning the market mess is driving uncertainty and undermining investment made in good faith, given that this is the very sector that Alberta's future growth depends on yet investors are delivering a scathing indictment of the UCP's core electricity policy, given that the UCP is costing taxpayers over $300 million in coal lawsuit settlements from their reckless policy flip-flops, how is the Premier protecting Albertans from more lawsuits?

**Mr. Neudorf:** Again, we're doing the work of putting Albertans first every single day. That's why we're fixing the mess that the NDP left behind. They just opened the doors. They cost Albertans money through lawsuits, getting off coal: $2 billion and $100 million a year. We're fixing that. That's why real investment in Alberta has led the country in renewables for the last three years in a row. We are showing the example. All the rest of Canada is following us. They didn't follow the NDP. They fled Alberta.

**The Speaker:** An hon. member just said wise words: yelling doesn't help.

On that note, we have the next question belongs to Calgary-East.

### *2:20* School Construction in Calgary

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has made significant education investments across Calgary, including 48 new schools since 2023 in high-growth communities, helping address enrolment pressures. However, Calgary, especially Belvedere, is also growing rapidly, and families are eager to see similar progress. While a 2023 boundary adjustment supported local school designations, residents still look forward for future planning. To the Minister of Education and Childcare: how is the government evaluating future school needs in Calgary-East?

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Education and Childcare.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government . . .

**The Speaker:** Minister.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** No worries.

. . . that has a historic number of new approvals. There are currently 161 school projects under way across the province. We work very closely with our school boards – of course, in the member's riding that would be Calgary Catholic and Calgary public – to move forward their highest priority projects. At the moment I recognize there are no projects under way in the member's riding, but we do have a number of projects that are under way in east Calgary, 11 in northeast, five in southeast, and others in the neighbouring regions as well.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the response. Given that Calgary-East has gone over the past two decades without a single new school announcement while other fast-growing Calgary communities continue receiving capital investments and given that families in Calgary-East face long commutes and raising enrolment pressures, to the same minister: what steps will help ensure Calgary-East is prioritized in upcoming capital planning?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Mr. Speaker, of course I recognize that constituents in the member's riding are seeing and experiencing first-hand some of the challenges of a significant population increase. We added 80,000 students just in three years, but we are working aggressively to build more spaces to contend with that surge in demand. I know that at the moment Calgary Catholic schools does have a school in Belvedere in their current capital plan. I believe it's number 11 on their priority list. We will continue to work with the school division to achieve their priority projects.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that long-term planning is essential for fast-growing communities and further given that the residents in Belvedere and area have expressed strong interest in eventually seeing a school closer to home as the community matures, can the minister please provide an update on how potential future school sites, including a proposed Belvedere location, are being assessed and what steps our government is taking to support long-term educational infrastructure in the Calgary-East constituency?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, we use a very clear and evidence-based approach in determining school projects. Of course, we look primarily at safety considerations. Naturally, if there's a school that has a structural deficiency or other kind of problem and that needs to be expedited, that is a top priority. We look at enrolment pressure as well as other legal responsibilities, and then subsequently those projects are prioritized. All the projects move forward through this process. In addition, I know that there are currently 45 projects under way in the city of Calgary, and more, of course, will be coming.

**The Speaker:** The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont. Is there a change? It's not Calgary-Edgemont anymore, I guess.

Since no one is arguing and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is standing up, you go right ahead.

### Sport and Tourism Industry Support

**Ms Goehring:** Mr. Speaker, investment in sports infrastructure is integral to the success of Alberta's athletes, from community sports to professional athletes. Without proper investment we cannot grow or retain athletes in this province. When asked in budget estimates, the minister noted that the sports infrastructure that we have needs updates but failed to commit to any specific measures. What measures will this government be taking to ensure investment in Alberta's sports infrastructure?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Tourism and Sport.

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. We do have aging infrastructure in our province. Just last August I visited provincial, territorial, and federal ministers in Newfoundland, and we have struck a committee that I'll be chairing to promote both repairing and also attending to all the sport infrastructure in our province.

**Ms Goehring:** Given that the tourism industry is the fourth-largest revenue source for this province and given that the tourism levy increase is an increased tax that could dampen tourism in the province and given that the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta said, "I've yet to see a government prove that selective increased taxation efforts afford a path to improved economic output or productivity, yet this is exactly what this government has done with its decision to increase the Alberta tourism levy by 150 per cent," why is our tourism industry not seeing a return in investment despite their high revenue?

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Mr. Speaker, we still remain the lowest taxed province in the country, and when visitors come to Alberta, they benefit from provincial-funded infrastructure and services such as highways, heritage sites, public transportation, public safety, provincial parks, and other tourism infrastructure. When visitors come to Alberta, they need to pay a fair share of their fees and taxes in our province.

**Ms Goehring:** Given that the success of our tourism and sports industry is dependent upon this province remaining in Canada and given that from our national sports leagues, international sporting events, and federal airlines our tourism and sport landscape would simply not function in an independent Alberta, has the minister considered the broader impact if Alberta were to separate, and will he denounce separatism today?

**Mr. Boitchenko:** The United Conservative Party is committed to stay in a strong sovereign Alberta within a united Canada, Mr. Speaker. Our side will also have an ambitious plan of $25 billion of tourism spending by 2035. We have ambitious plans. We're working on our tourism and our sport, which is the highest return-on-investment industry in the world, and we are proud of the work we're doing.

**The Speaker:** The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

## Support for Cultural Heritage Celebrations

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. St. Patrick's Day allows us to recognize the long-standing contribution of Irish Canadians to Alberta's cultural landscape, including music, dance, and community heritage organizations that enrich our province. Irish cultural groups, like many ethnocultural organizations, rely on community programming grants and partnerships to celebrate traditions and share them with Albertans. To the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women: what is our government doing to support Irish cultural heritage and ensure communities have spaces where they can come together and celebrate events like St. Patrick's Day and preserve their traditions?

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

**Ms Fir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ensuring communities have spaces to gather and celebrate their heritage is key to building strong, vibrant communities through our government's investments in community grants for strengthening cross-cultural connections across Alberta. Since 2019 we've invested over $274,000 through our community facility enhancement program alone to support Irish organizations, including $125,000 for the Irish Cultural Society of Calgary community centre and $65,000 for the Calgary Canadian Irish Athletic Club facility.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given that cultural celebrations like St. Patrick's Day strengthen community identity and contribute to Alberta's multicultural landscape and further given that cultural organizations, including Irish heritage groups, rely on stable funding and accessible grants to host events and educational activities, to the same minister: can you please update this Assembly on how our government is supporting cultural groups, including Irish associations, through programs that promote cultural expression and community celebrations across the province?

**Ms Fir:** Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to champion Alberta's rich cultural fabric through initiatives like Alberta Culture Days, a province-wide celebration of arts, heritage, and community held each September. Through our Culture Days grants we help Albertans showcase their unique cultural backgrounds and traditions by awarding organizations up to $10,000 to host events. In 2025 alone our government provided $380,000 in grants to support over 110 free family-friendly celebrations that brought culture to life across the province. I'm looking forward to this September for another outstanding Culture Days.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that preserving cultural heritage requires long-term planning, strong community partnerships, and continued investment in arts and cultural programming and further given that Albertans value opportunities to learn about and celebrate the diverse traditions that enrich our province, to the minister: can you please update this Assembly on how our government is strengthening long-term cultural heritage initiatives, including supports that help Irish community organizations share traditions with Albertans?

***2:30***

**Ms Fir:** Mr. Speaker, the arts are essential for preserving culture and keeping history alive for generations. Since 2019 the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the AFA, has awarded nearly $43,000 to support Irish organizations sharing their story with Albertans through the arts, including $3,900 for the Irish Sports and Social Society and nearly $2,700 for the Grande Prairie Society of Irish Dance. If passed, Budget 2026 delivers a third consecutive year of record-breaking funding to the AFA, investing over $38 million in the creative future of our province.

Happy St. Patrick's Day.

## Domestic Violence Prevention

**Ms Hayter:** The University of Calgary has published a new report examining an economic cost brought on male perpetration of domestic violence in Calgary. It demonstrates how prevention can reduce repeat domestic violence by 40 per cent. Prevention of a reaction should be a priority. Domestic violence is a complex public safety issue. Survivors deserve safety, resources, and justice. To the minister of public safety. Investing in prevention would save millions of taxpayer dollars. Why does Budget 2026 fail to address domestic violence prevention? Why is it not a priority?

**Ms Fir:** Mr. Speaker, our government proudly released Building on Our Strengths: Alberta's 10-year Strategy to End Gender-based Violence last year, the most comprehensive plan of its kind in Canada. In its first year we invested over $188 million to strengthen prevention, expand services in rural and remote areas, support solutions, and improve programs for family, youth, and survivors. This is an all-of-government approach, with almost every ministry being involved in making sure that we are supporting survivors and creating an Alberta free of violence.

**Ms Hayter:** Given that it costs more to do nothing and domestic violence increased costs to policing, courts, and corrections service, costs time in hospitals, shelters, victims' services, and supports for transition at home, given that we could reduce the number of times police go to domestic violence through prevention actions – it would not only represent extensive cost savings, but it'd also have a significant impact on the women and children who are dealing with ongoing violence – can the minister of public safety commit to exploring promising practices from other jurisdictions to strengthen local response to domestic violence?

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, of course, law enforcement in the province of Alberta take domestic violence extremely seriously, which is why most police services within the province have their own domestic conflict units. We are taking it even more seriously because we're making sure that we have ankle monitoring for domestic violence cases. That's something that we're working on in this upcoming budget. I look forward to more reporting on that.

Thank you.

**Ms Hayter:** Given that red flags emerge before criminal acts of domestic violence happen, given that data suggests that earlier targeted intervention with offenders could significantly disrupt predictable and escalating patterns of violent and coercive behaviour and given that investing in targeted prevention strategies focused on men prior to criminal charges can reduce long-term taxpayer system costs, including pressures on health care and law enforcement and social services, can the minister of public safety commit today to investing in behaviour-changing programs like those that would allow the Calgary Police Service to connect with men in the community, that is evidence-based intervention?

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, we fund many groups to support victims of domestic violence. I can tell you that what has done the most damage to victims of domestic violence is a bill called C-75, supported by the NDP. That allowed violent repeat criminal offenders, including those who committed serious domestic violence offences, to be released into the community and revictimize those victims. We're on the side of the people that are going to stop that from happening.

**The Speaker:** The point of order from 2:07 has been withdrawn today.

## Hospital Emergency Services

**Member Boparai:** Health care, after seven years of the UCP government, is worse than ever. A father of three, Prashant Sreekumar, went to an Edmonton ER with chest pain and waited nearly eight hours before he suffered a fatal cardiac arrest. Acute Care Alberta has now issued 16 recommendations, including 24/7 cardiac technicians and increased permanent staffing. This government has known about these failures since the day he died. The answers are obvious, so why are these life-saving recommendations still under review instead of fully funded and implemented?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of hospitals.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again we extend our deepest condolences to the friends and family of Mr. Sreekumar. It's important to note that the quality assurance review is only one of many reviews that are ongoing, and I'm pleased to share that the fatality inquiry has now been booked for later this year. That is what will investigate the events surrounding the tragic death of Mr. Sreekumar. We're not waiting to address the situations in our emergency departments, including the Grey Nuns. There's already work on ALCs, which is a recommendation under the QAR. We're expanding nursing, and we're looking at more ECG tech time.

**Member Boparai:** Given that Prashant's family now describes their home as feeling like a cemetery waiting for accountability and given one key recommendation is the creation of a triage-licensed physician to catch critical cases before they worsen in waiting rooms and given reports show this role is stalled due to this government's inability to negotiate with physicians and put in place the triage physicians that would help save lives, why is this government failing to implement a triage system that could literally mean the difference between life and death for Albertans?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the other recommendations was to increase general internal medicine and medicine capacity at the Grey Nuns. I'm pleased to share that Acute Care Alberta is working with site administrators to expand both capacities. They already had a design kickoff meeting, and project managers are on-site. The member opposite referenced the physician triage liaison role, which, of course, was implemented, budgeted for $20 million over two years at nine sites. We're working with the AMA, who had some compensation-related requests when we implemented the position, and I hope that we have a solution soon.

**Member Boparai:** Given this was not an isolated tragedy, with two other Albertans dying in that same year on the same day, and given doctors have identified multiple preventable deaths linked to ER overcrowding and given that the Acute Care Alberta report calls for hospital occupancy to be lowered to 85 per cent to ensure safety for patients and staff, does the minister accept that his government's failure to manage capacity is creating a dangerous situation in our ERs, and will he commit to meet that 85 per cent occupancy target to fix the mess in public health care?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I acknowledge that we can always do better, and in fact we must. We are dealing with people's lives and in this case a husband and father. One of the other recommendations was to review and propose revisions to the updated chest pain nurse-initiated protocols to ensure that clinical decision support reflects that the protocol is a tool to risk stratify patients who have chest pain. It doesn't rule out that they might have serious issues that need to be addressed by a physician. I'm pleased to report that the revisions have been under way. Clinician review is happening right now. We expect it implemented in two months.

**The Speaker:** The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

## Rural Police Service Funding

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans rely on effective policing to keep communities safe and recognize that such protection carries necessary costs. As rural municipalities are now expected to assume a larger share of these expenses over the coming years, they are facing increased pressures in planning and budgeting. Can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services explain what mechanisms the government will implement to ensure these communities have meaningful influence on policing priorities and service levels?

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question, and thank you for the proper oversight that we will be doing, of course, for our municipalities. For example, we're empowering municipalities to form local policing committees within those communities in rural Alberta. We've established regional boards to ensure that smaller municipalities can pool their voices, which I think is extremely important, and we're also mandating more frequent and transparent reporting from police providers to the municipal councils to ensure more effective and responsible policing in rural Alberta.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that rural municipalities often face bigger challenges with costs because they have a lower population, resulting in a smaller tax base to help cover the increasing cost of policing, further given that this makes it much harder for municipalities to plan ahead and keep their budgets balanced each year, can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services tell this Assembly how the government will support rural municipalities as they manage these added costs?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and again I thank the member. Of course, the costs of policing have increased substantially, specifically with the RCMP. That's precisely why we froze and provided $27 million worth of support while we allowed municipalities to reflect on what is going to be the best service for their communities, and I can tell you that this government is still continuing to support folks within rural Alberta as we are subsidizing municipalities and the RCMP to the tune of $85 million over the next five years.

***2:40***

**The Speaker:** Livingstone-Macleod.

**Mrs. Petrovic:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that rural municipalities are raising concerns that higher policing costs may force them to increase property taxes on residents to balance their budgets and further given that with these added costs it's important to understand how this will affect rural taxpayers, can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services explain to this Assembly what steps the government is taking to make sure rural taxpayers are not left paying the full cost of these services?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you. That's part of the subsidy, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we're phasing this in over, again, a period of five years starting in '26-27. We're starting at a 22 per cent phase-in and then increasing by 2 per cent, all the way up until 2031. The cost increase by the RCMP alone has been a 57 per cent increase. Obviously, that is something that is unsustainable, so I'd like to give credit to my rural colleagues in this cabinet for making sure that they're supporting rural policing, specifically the RCMP, and municipalities in this province.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** In 30 seconds we'll continue with our daily Routine.

I hesitate, but it's been mentioned to me that I should give you a second shot at tablings if anybody has any more. Seeing none.

## Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** On behalf of hon. Mr. McDougall, Minister of Advanced Education, pursuant to the Regulated Forest Management Profession Act Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals 2024 annual report.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, my sincere gratitude. One accident-free day. Thank you for all the withdrawn potential points of order on both sides of the House. Teamwork makes the dream work.

The daily Routine is concluded. The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. This afternoon the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will continue consideration of the estimates for Treasury Board and Finance in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider estimates for Executive Council in the Rocky Mountain Room.

This evening the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Technology and Innovation in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services in the Rocky Mountain Room.

Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Hospital and Surgical Health Services in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Affordability and Utilities in the Grassland Room.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:44 p.m.]

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*Alberta Hansard* is available online at www.assembly.ab.ca

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

ISSN 0383-3623