



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 24, 2026

Day 37

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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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)
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(UC)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Progressive Tory: 1

Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 24, 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.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Members, seated in the Speaker's gallery today is hon. Denis Ducharme, who participated in the international Francophonie ceremony that I hosted in the rotunda earlier today. Mr. Ducharme was elected to represent the riding of Bonnyville-Cold Lake in 1997. He served three terms before retiring in 2008. Mr. Ducharme held several key positions, including government whip, chair of the Francophone Secretariat, and minister of community development. Please rise, Mr. Ducharme, and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members the fantastic students and their team from Greenview elementary school in my home neighbourhood. Welcome to the Alberta Legislature. I hope you've been having a great visit. Please rise and receive our warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the fabulous students as well as their teacher from St. Maria Goretti school. I must say that St. Maria Goretti has one of the best school libraries around. So happy to welcome you all here today. If you could please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Kayande: M. le Président, je vous présente des étudiants et des professeurs du Lycée international de Calgary, une bonne école de Calgary-Elbow. Levez-vous, s'il vous plaît et acceptez l'accueil traditionnel de cette Assemblée.

The Speaker: It is my pleasure to welcome several guests seated in the gallery today who either attended or participated in the International Francophonie Day ceremony earlier. Among them is Mr. Camille Bérubé, who, among his many distinguished roles, served as the mayor of Beaumont for 16 years. Mr. Bérubé is accompanied by his wife, Jo-Anne. With them are Ms Nathalie Lachance, president, Association Canadienne-française de l'Alberta, or ACFA; Ms Isabelle Laurin, executive director, ACFA; Ms Amy Vachon-Chabot, deputy executive director, ACFA. I welcome them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly

a great Albertan, my dad, Pat Nixon, a member of the Alberta Order of Excellence, a member of the Order of Canada, and a great champion of those who face poverty in our province. I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you members of the Kyrgyz Association in Canada, a wonderful group that supports the Central Asian community across Alberta. Please welcome executive director Naz Aitkulova and board association member Samara Jumadylova, Zurash Mustakova, Nargiza Mamyrbayeva, and Aisulu Abdykoolyrova. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Gurinder Brar: Mr. Speaker, people often ask me how I made it here, and I tell them it wasn't luck; it was Amanda Will. Managing my campaign was the easy part. Managing me was the real full-time job. Amanda is not only capable; she's one of the kindest human beings I know. I ask Amanda to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you one of my favourite Albertans, my amazing husband, Jesse Doherty. He's up in Edmonton meeting with Indigenous elders as part of his work as an Indigenous liaison, and of course he's here today to do his most important job, supporting his amazing wife to do her amazing job. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Merci, M. le Président. C'est la Journée Internationale de la Francophonie et je vous présente deux étudiants incroyables du Campus Saint-Jean, Joshua Blais et Sophia Sparks. Levez-vous, s'il vous plaît et acceptez les félicitations traditionnelles de cette Assemblée.

Members' Statements

Government Record

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, in the midst of scandal after scandal I want to offer some observations to the government caucus members. What took down 44 years of Conservative dynasty in 2015 was poorly managed budgets, public services eroding, and extraordinary entitlement and corruption. Every single MLA in this Chamber entered because we believe in serving the people we represent. I know UCP members did not run on massive deficits, doubling the debt, multiple credit downgrades, the biggest government spending and largest cabinet in history, wasting millions on crooked contracts and scandal, or even the separatist free Alberta strategy cooked up by their leader's close adviser Rob Anderson.

A number of them used to say that any plan for separation was wrong. Meanwhile the unemployment rate is up a full point since this Premier took power. Chambers of commerce across Alberta are warning investment is being scared away, and despite near record royalty revenues the government has no plan to balance the budget. People are dying in emergency rooms while this government fires boards and CEOs, and when you talk to anyone on the front lines, they'll tell you it's all getting worse.

On top of all this is extraordinary corruption. UCP caucus members hear about the Premier's private jets and luxury hotels in Saudi Arabia, but they didn't hear it from her first. It's clear she did not bother telling them. Conservatives in Alberta used to hold deep convictions. They would hold their leader to account, demand

apologies, and even leave their caucus. Back when they were in opposition, the Premier and her chief of staff did that twice. Today the RCMP is raiding the businesses and homes of those cozy with this government.

The term of office is closer to the end than the beginning. Have the members opposite really helped to deliver the kind of government they set out to deliver, and if not, what are they going to do about it?

Career and Employment Services

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta we believe in the dignity of work. It builds independence, supports families, and drives a strong, growing province. That belief is exactly why Budget 2026 takes decisive action. If passed, Budget 2026 delivers a record investment, nearly a quarter of a billion dollars into employment services, helping Albertans get jobs, earn a paycheque, and build a future they can count on. This is an increase of more than \$60 million, bringing the total funding to \$247 million. It means better access to career planning, skills training, job placement, and ongoing support. Finding a job is important, but keeping a job and building a career is what creates long-term stability. These services are not optional; they are essential. They are a lifeline for Albertans navigating job loss, career changes, or new opportunities in a rapidly evolving economy. They provide practical, hands-on support from workshops and resumé assistance to digital tools and on-the-job training through simulated work sites, and prepare people for meaningful employment.

1:40

Through the WorkFirst Alberta program they're going further than ever before. This is the most ambitious employment initiative in our province's history, working with more than 160 service providers across Alberta to connect people to opportunity: youth entering the workforce, persons with disabilities, single parents, Albertans starting over. Hundreds of thousands of Albertans have already accessed these supports, gaining skills, building confidence, and stepping into high-demand jobs. This is about real results: more Albertans working, more families supported, and strengthening Alberta's future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Disability Access Legislation

Ms Pancholi:

March 23, 2026, could be the most transformative Monday Albertans with disabilities have ever witnessed... Everything hangs on one fundamental pillar that drives our democracy forward. Elected officials must listen... When they listen, they unlock vital opportunities for people to thrive. When they ignore the call, that slamming door echoes across Canada like thunder.

Those were the words of disability advocate Cam Tait. Monday could have been the day the UCP listened to the Albertans who have advocated for decades, responded to the call from their own disability advocate, and recognized the value, dignity, and humanity of the 1 in 4 Albertans who live with disabilities. It could have been the day Alberta joined the rest of the country and finally passed accessibility legislation.

Brought forward by my extraordinary colleague from St. Albert, Bill 206 would have ensured that Albertans with disabilities would have access to public services, buildings, technology, and communications to ensure that they could live a barrier-free life. This was a nonpartisan bill that would make employment possible for more than 15,000 Albertans, would make life more fair, accessible, and hopeful for thousands of Alberta kids with disabilities. Instead, the UCP ignored the call, and that slamming door echoes across Alberta like thunder.

The UCP voted against Bill 206 unanimously. They didn't have one single valid reason why they couldn't support it. Not one. Most of them clearly didn't even bother reading it. The UCP simply couldn't put aside their partisanship and support accessibility legislation because it was an Alberta NDP MLA who introduced it. As Cam Tait wrote this morning,

the politicians who gleefully voted against this inclusion mandate need to hang their heads in absolute shame... Every single MLA who voted "no" should be forced to sit down and write a heartfelt, handwritten letter to all parents of kids with disabilities, explaining exactly why they decided to crush their hope.

So let me speak to all the Albertans with disabilities as well as their families, their neighbours, their caregivers, their friends. Let me be very clear. An Alberta NDP government will pass accessibility legislation. You have our word. Period.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Highway 21

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Highway 21 is a major transportation corridor that runs parallel to the Camrose constituency. It is a highway that intersects and serves a number of constituencies across central Alberta, and sadly there have been a number of accidents along this stretch of road. The nature of this highway has been raised repeatedly by the city of Camrose, Camrose county, and countless community members. I continue to hear from families who've been impacted as a direct result of serious accidents on this stretch of highway, and those stories weigh heavily on our community.

Our community remains steadfast in advocating for the highway 21 passing lane project to be prioritized in this upcoming budget cycle. We understand that Alberta is a large province with many competing priorities; however, as the provincial representative for this area I feel compelled to speak on behalf of my constituents and to advocate for their safety.

Statistics show that there were 592 collisions along this stretch of highway between 2014 and 2018. Additionally, as reported in the Camrose *Booster*, data collected from the Camrose fire department and other responding agencies record 73 collisions between 2019 and 2022 along the same section of road. Traffic counts data showed between 4,170 and 7,410 vehicles travel this corridor each day with an average of approximately 4,680 vehicles daily at the highway 13 intersection alone.

I want to thank the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors for his determined work, and I look forward to working with him to find solutions to make our roads safer. My community recognizes that the province is managing a deficit at this time; however, we are hopeful that priority can still be given to highway 21 because improving safety on this corridor is not just about infrastructure; it's about protecting lives.

Government Policies

Member Gurinder Brar: The forest was set on fire. Animals screamed. Birds scattered, their wings cut through panic. Flying above the burning forest was a small bird who saw flames engulfing its home, heard animals begging for help, and felt its duty to not flee and to do something. It flew to the nearby river, filled its beak with the trembling drops of water, and poured them on the flames. Someone asked the bird: what difference will your small drops make to this fire? The bird replied: I know these drops may not stop this fire, but when the history of this forest will be written, my name will be written with those who tried to stop the fire and not those who set this forest on fire. Later other birds joined, and they extinguished the fire.

Today Alberta feels the same fire, the fire of separatism burning our economy, the fire of corruption reducing Albertans' trust to embers, the fire of anti-immigrant hate turning our province's fabric to ashes. But on this side of the House, just like that little bird, Mr. Speaker, we will pour the drops of love, unity, and resilience on this fire of separatism. We will pour the drops of ethics, morals, and values on this fire of corruption, and we will pour the drops of diversity, equity, and inclusion on this fire of anti-immigrant hate.

With Albertans on our side we will extinguish this fire, and when the history of this province will be written, Alberta's NDP will be named on the right side of it. We can, we must, and we will do better. Better is possible.

Health Care System

Mr. Dach: I rise today to tell the story of an Edmonton senior with a serious long-term health condition and his health care horror story. After coughing up blood, he took an Uber to the Misericordia hospital emergency department, where he waited 10 hours overnight before he was finally seen at 7 a.m. Eventually he was released with medication, but getting worse at home, scared of the long wait, he had to go back to emergency a week later.

This time he went to the University of Alberta hospital, where after 8 hours he was admitted, but no beds were available. The first night he spent in a hallway, the second night in a room not designed for patients. The third night he was moved to a converted storage room, and for the subsequent eight nights he was treated in a hallway. He never got into a patient room. The overworked doctors and nurses did their best under terrible conditions. The nurses checked on him as often as they could but struggled to treat him in the hallway until his eventual release.

The UCP were handed some of the strongest economic conditions in a generation, yet they are doubling Alberta's debt in just four years. They are not spending their giant \$9.4 billion deficit on improving emergency health care. Never have I seen a government spend so much for so little. Albertans are rightly asking: where did the money go?

After seven years of the UCP our public health care system is worse than it's ever been. The real issues that most Albertans are concerned with are shunted aside while the Smith government burns billions dismantling our public health care system. Albertans want to know: where did the money go?

The Speaker: I will remind the hon. member that it's always inappropriate to mention another member's name at any time in here.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 99 I can advise the Assembly that the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions for the Ranchmen's Club Ordinance Amendment Act, 2026, and the Prairie Bible Institute Amendment Act, 2026, which were presented to the Assembly on March 17, 2026, and that the petitions do comply with Standing Orders 90 to 94.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Fuel Prices and Cost of Living

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the Finance minister: the price of gasoline is up 30 cents a litre in Calgary over the last three weeks, but on her radio show this weekend the Premier minimized the cost-of-living crisis that Albertans are facing, saying that saving seven bucks a tank won't help anybody. It's worth noting that that's more for most Albertans than the much-vaunted tax cut last year. Does the Finance minister believe that Albertans are not facing an affordability crisis if a jump of 30 cents per litre is no big deal?

1:50

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister believes that affordability is a great concern for Albertans and Canadians generally. That's what we're hearing most consistently. That's why Budget '26 was about prioritizing what matters: health care, education, and maintaining our great advantages over every other province. If you took the next closest province's taxation and laid it over top of Alberta, it'd be \$16.9 billion more paid out of the pockets of Albertans and Alberta businesses. Look at what's happening in B.C. You might want to get the kms from the mother ship: huge deficits, no plan, no help.

Mr. Nenshi: I think the minister accidentally read his own talking points there: huge deficits, no plan. If the plan is to pray for a war in the Middle East, it's no plan for Albertans. This is a windfall on the backs of Albertans.

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

Mr. Nenshi: Albertans are not getting tax relief because of a technicality. If the war had started three weeks earlier, we'd be paying 16 cents less per litre. But we're in the legislative session now. The Finance minister could easily table legislation to give Albertans that tax relief. Will he?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:51.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we're the only province that has legislated our fuel tax relief program so it's there permanently. It makes a pile of sense for both the province and for Albertans. As the price of oil rises and the price of gas rises with it, we take in larger royalties, and we provide that relief to the province. I've explained the monitoring period and how it works. You can only make the change on the quarters. That's how it works for the retailers. I find this whole line of questioning funny coming from the team that brought in the carbon tax to make fuel more expensive, because you told everyone: drive less.

Mr. Nenshi: Yet gas is much more expensive now than it was then. Albertans are struggling with the rising cost of everything, and this budget makes life more expensive for all Albertans: \$10 a pound for ground beef, \$6 for a jar of peanut butter, and moms having to put grapes back at the till because they can't afford them for their kids. These prices are only going to go up with the price of energy. The Premier said on her radio show that she'll do something else to deal with affordability. What something else?

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is rich coming from the NDP who literally ran the last election on raising taxes for Albertans. They phased out coal, passing on \$2 billion of cost to taxpayers. They brought in the renewable energy program that we still pay \$40 million, \$50 million, \$60 million, \$80 million a year for, their bad plans. They brought in the carbon tax, raising the cost of everything. These costs drive up the costs for every person in Alberta. We are the

government that stood up for Alberta, brought in an income tax cut, and got rid of the carbon tax, and thankfully . . .

The Speaker: Minister, when I stand up, you've got to stop talking. Minister.

Mr. Nenshi: Well, thank you to the minister for admitting . . .

The Speaker: Or Leader of the Opposition. Sorry.

Immigration Policies

Mr. Nenshi: Sorry. I took the promotion.

Thank you to the minister for admitting that this government has no plan to deal with affordability. Now, I will say that the Premier and her Minister of Finance don't appear to be on the same page. The Premier these days blames immigration for everything but for blowing a hole in the budget, but the budget shows that slowing down immigration stifles economic growth. That must have been a very interesting conversation at the cabinet table. Could the Minister of Finance please clarify what this government is doing to actually achieve economic growth and their plan to end their string of endless deficits?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition talking about immigration, something that's top of mind for us and all Albertans as we deal with the largest population growth this province has ever seen. Now, we want to make sure we're focusing on economic immigration because we have a booming economy, and we need to support the labour market as we go forward. In the last year we've created 85,000 new jobs. Without Alberta that's 35,000 in the hole for the whole entire country. We're leading the way. I have no idea what they're talking about. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Nenshi: It's a shame that the Government House Leader hasn't read the government's budget, which says clearly, "Strong population growth over the past few years has supported consumer spending, job creation, the supply of highly skilled workers, and [increasing] housing activity," yet the Premier says that her government was completely overwhelmed and unprepared for two years of above average population growth, something every Premier of Alberta has had to face, and she blames it all on immigrants. Does the Finance minister agree that this is the driver?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we've never assigned any blame for the challenges the province faces. The province will always need immigration. As the immigration minister said, we need targeted economic immigration. We have many gaps in our labour force that we need to fill because we're the only province that is creating jobs and investment, and we're draining from the entirety of the country. Canada's net job numbers would have been negative if it wasn't for Alberta in the last year. The big projects we've mentioned – Dow, De Havilland, Lufthansa – that is all happening here.

Mr. Nenshi: Of course, the Premier and the minister of immigration blame immigrants every day for their economic woes.

But this budget is unprecedented in so many ways. Never before has the government spent so much to achieve so little during good economic times with a giant deficit. They wasted the boom during the boom. We know about the new carpet in the Premier's office that costs more than a house. We know about hundreds of millions of dollars wasted with political meddling in health care. It's

extraordinary waste, fraud, and corruption. Simple question: where did the money go?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, look at our track record: doubling the heritage fund, paying off \$15 billion in debt. That hasn't happened in any jurisdiction that I'm aware of in the world. That's what has happened just recently here. When have we done this? During a population boom. The members are referencing an economic boom; that has not been the case. People have chosen to come here. They've moved and voted with their feet to come here because of our affordability advantages and because of the opportunities that we're creating. We're the fastest skater on a slow team. We'll continue. [interjections]

The Speaker: For the third set of questions, the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Nenshi: Well, if the government's plan to reduce the number of immigrants is by getting rid of the affordability advantage, they're doing a great job.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Mr. Nenshi: Mr. Speaker, corruption runs deep. We've just received news that Sam Jaber, whose offices were raided by the RCMP, has, quote, voluntarily, unquote, gone on leave from Invest Alberta. Why did this have to be voluntary? Why didn't the government cut ties with this person who's been under investigation for months and ask him to step aside from the board that they appointed him to?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As noted, the member of the IAC board has stepped down, but I'd also like to take this opportunity to express how important the Invest Alberta Corporation is to the province of Alberta and the incredible work that they do. As an onboarding partner they work with me and my department and other places around Alberta, municipalities, to find investment, to attract it here to Alberta, and to create jobs and to create wealth, something that was driven away after multiple years of the NDP in power. We're still cleaning up their mess.

Mr. Nenshi: Which, of course, speaks to the need for Invest Alberta to be absolutely above reproach and not filled with political cronies and friends on their board. I asked this question yesterday, and I was insulted and belittled. The minister defended Mr. Jaber, and now – surprise, surprise – Mr. Jaber is gone, a man that the Premier took on a trip to the Middle East, a man who hosted the Premier and her staff in a lavish suite in Vancouver, who is related to Mr. Mraiche. Why has this taken so long? Why does the government get wrapped up with these people in the first place?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the Leader of the Opposition understands the mandate of Invest Alberta, but their job is to help continue to attract investment to Alberta, and they've done that in the past. Yes, we have Invest Alberta representatives around the entire world who help create relationships and build connections for Alberta companies. It's what they do, and, yes, me and the Premier also meet with Invest Alberta to talk about those economic opportunities. It's good news. Over the last year the province has created 85,000 jobs, and there's more to talk about in the next answer.

2:00

Mr. Nenshi: The minister may not know the answer to that question, but here's what we know about Mr. Mraiche, the Justice minister's cousin. He's got a criminal record. He's got multiple bankruptcies.

He's the subject of many lawsuits. What he doesn't have is any experience in health care, yet this government, made up of his sons, nephews, and cousins, has handed him hundreds of millions of dollars of contracts in health care, and he's still sitting on \$50 million of taxpayer money that he's had for years that we can't get back. Why is this government so hesitant to cut ties with this guy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite raised the \$49 million that is outstanding for the procurement of 3 and a half million units of children's medication. As I've shared in this House, the expectation is that when our service providers like AHS order products and services, they are received. AHS is currently going through the steps to remedy this situation and is evaluating legal options. The other contracts that the members opposite have referenced, the south and central surgical procurements, were cancelled earlier this year by AHS, and we are implementing 18 of Judge Wyant's recommendations on procurement.

Children's Pain Medication Purchase

Ms Gray: Forty-nine million dollars, Mr. Speaker: that's how much extra this government prepaid Sam Mraiche and his company MHCare Medical for medicines Alberta never received in '22 and '23. That's \$49 million plus a lot of interest that could be used to help fix the crisis in our emergency rooms or build more schools. Instead, \$49 million of Alberta's money has been gone for years, and we have nothing to show for it. What is the Premier doing to get back the \$49 million from a deal she chose?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I share the member's concern over the way this procurement occurred. We agree with Justice Wyant that it did not meet the expectation of Albertans, which is why we've engaged RSM, a leader, to help us improve our contracting and procurement practices as they have been moved out of AHS into the Health Shared Services organization. To specifically answer the member opposite's question, again, we are working to remedy the situation. Rather, AHS is. They're going through a process through contract tools, arbitration, and ultimately are evaluating legal options to recover the \$49 million.

Ms Gray: The way the procurement occurred is that AHS brought the government options and the Premier chose the worst one, that they did not recommend. This was purely because of her choices. In her final weeks on the job former CEO Athana Mentzelopoulos had not only started looking into questions on procurement and shady contracts; a letter dated on December 20, 2024, shows that she was actively trying to get that \$49 million back from MHCare. Too bad the Premier and this team decided to fire that individual instead. Interesting timing. Why does the Premier still not have a plan?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of deficiencies in the contracting and procurement that occurred in this case. For example, conflicts of interest were not properly managed, alternatives for sourcing the products were not properly vetted, and supervisors signed off on recommendations without reviewing the materials. These are some of the reasons why Judge Wyant was brought in to investigate the situation and the things that informed his 18 recommendations. We are taking those, implementing all of them

across our health system, and we'll also be using RSM to align our practices with the best jurisdictions in the world so this doesn't happen again.

Ms Gray: The Premier told Albertans at a podium that this entire deal came from her office and she was driving it. No legal review. Conflicts of interest. The UCP paid millions for unusable Turkish Tylenol, then more to store it, then more to throw it away. Money was completely wasted at every single step of this story, and it all started from the Premier's office. Will the Premier apologize?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've already outlined that, of course, this instance of procurement was not executed to the standards that Albertans expect. We take accountability for that, and that's why we are implementing the recommendations of Justice Wyant. It's why we've hired RSM to make sure that our procurement practices, which have now been moved out of AHS into the Health Shared Services organization, are aligned with the best practices in the world, and we're going to move forward with public, transparent, and fair processes to procure products and services going forward. AHS is working through the process of recovering the \$49 million in funds.

Funding for Cancer Screening

Mr. Haji: Mr. Speaker, last year this government passed legislation allowing Albertans to self-refer and privately pay for diagnostic imaging, including MRI and CT scans. Cancer is the leading cause of death in Alberta. Evidence shows that early detection saves lives and reduces costs on hospitalization. Today Alberta women can self-refer for mammogram screening, and that service is publicly insured. Will the minister of health inform the House that self-referred cancer screening will remain insured?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we have been very clear on any dual practice. I think the member opposite is confusing legislation. Dual practice legislation passed in the fall. We have yet to pass any legislation or anything around the self-referrals or self-diagnostics. We're continuing to do that engagement. We'll be happy to bring forward more information in the near future.

Mr. Haji: Given that Budget 2026 cuts more than \$1 billion from diagnostic and therapeutic services, given that provincial data projects a 56 per cent increase in new cancer cases and almost a 50 per cent increase in cancer deaths by 2040, will the minister commit today that no publicly funded cancer screening, including mammograms, will be delisted, declassified, or shifted into a private pay model because of the current budget cuts?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I reiterated this over and over again in estimates. I'm happy to do it here. There are no budget cuts. Just because money has been transferred to Cancer Care Alberta or to Primary Care Alberta, it still exists. In fact, Cancer Care Alberta now has the largest budget it has ever had, over \$250 million more, at \$1.2 billion, and Primary Care Alberta has an additional \$360.5 million in the next budget.

Mr. Haji: Given that cancer care is not the question – the question is cancer prevention, screening, and cancer education – and given that the UCP budget cut \$1 billion from diagnostic services and given that funding for cancer prevention and screening is being reduced in Budget 2026 – the minister calls it reallocation; it's a reduction from the budget line – what concrete action will this government take to

ensure all Albertans have access to publicly funded cancer screening and early detection?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure why it's so difficult for the members opposite to understand when you move money from one budget line to another. We are in fact doing more cancer screening, whether it's breast cancer, whether it's lung cancer, whether it's prostate cancer, colorectal cancer, and also cervical cancer screening. We are increasing. In fact, we had a 104 per cent increase in the number of women receiving mammograms since 2020. We were the first province in Canada to introduce self-referral under the age of 50 for women's breast cancer.

Career and Employment Services

Mr. Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, with economic uncertainty on many Albertans' minds, having access to meaningful work has never been more important. Budget 2026 proposes a record \$247 million investment in employment services to help people build skills, connect with employers, and take advantage of new opportunities. This is a significant commitment to strengthen our workforce and support Alberta families. To the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services: how will this investment help more Albertans not only find work but keep it and build lasting and meaningful careers?

Mr. Nixon: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the NDP, when they were in government, made such a mess of it that they lost the most jobs in the history of the province, 183,000 jobs. They lost their way so much that they told Albertans who didn't have a job that they should just move to B.C. and have gone as far as to say to people with disabilities that they can't participate in the workforce. Our government believes in something very, very different. That's why last year I doubled our money for employment supports. This year I added another \$60 million to it for over a quarter billion dollars to stand with Albertans who want to enter the workforce. Our philosophy is the opposite of the NDP. We believe every Albertan deserves an opportunity to have a good job.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many Albertans are navigating job loss, career changes, and new training opportunities and given that this government is stepping up with a record investment to meet that challenge, can the same minister expand on how initiatives like WorkFirst Alberta are delivering real, measurable results by connecting Albertans to good jobs, improving access to training, and ensuring people across this province have the tools they need to succeed?

2:10

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, WorkFirst Alberta worked with 437,000 Albertans last year and has a success rate of almost 70 per cent of being able to help people get into the workforce, again, a sharp contrast from what we saw with the NDP when they were in government, who saw the largest job losses in history and also continue to advocate to be able to not bring in other programs that can help people who face barriers to employment like those with disabilities. We believe people with disabilities and others who have challenges entering the workforce deserve the same opportunity as every Albertan, and we continue to reject the NDP's philosophy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for his answer. Given that persons with disabilities, youth, and low-income Albertans often face the toughest barriers to entering the workforce and given that this government is making targeted investments to break down those barriers, can the same minister explain how these supports are opening doors and creating real opportunities so that every Albertan, regardless of their circumstances, has a fair shot to succeed in Alberta's growing economy?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the NDP and governments before them continued with the wrong approach under AISH, which said to everybody, whether they could work or not, that they must go under AISH or not receive any disability supports. That punished them for participating in the workforce. That took away their paycheques for participating in the workforce. This government has heard from the disability community, has changed that, is investing in employment supports because we are not ableist. We truly believe that all Albertans have an opportunity to participate in the workforce. When is the NDP going to stand with the disabled in this province for real?

Coal Development Policies

Dr. Elmeligi: The independence of the AER is essential in maintaining public trust. That independence is called into question when the minister's office directs the AER to create advanced projects and cancel public hearings and do whatever else. This conflict includes the AER's CEO and board, who met with Northback Holdings before public hearing commissioners had rendered a decision on Grassy Mountain mine exploration. In typical UCP style the Premier just fired the commissioner that raised these concerns. How can Albertans trust the UCP when they and the AER are blatantly undermining standard processes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The reality is that the AER is a fantastic organization that regulates for many parts of the work that we do here in Alberta. We have full confidence that they will make sure that they regulate for the safety, the well-being, the environmental standards that we have. The highest standards in the world are right here in Alberta. We believe that the AER will continue to do that for Albertans.

Dr. Elmeligi: Well, given that I'd love to believe that, too, Mr. Speaker, but it's the interference in the AER decision-making that's in question here, that's also just the tip of the blackened iceberg. Given that the UCP's incompetence has undermined certainty in the industry as they have yet to release their coal industry modernization initiative and their inconsistency has led to several lawsuits, including a new one from Northback Holdings for \$2 billion, did the minister know about these pending lawsuits when he defined Northback's plan for coal mining as an advanced project? Will Albertans be stuck with the bill for the UCP's flip-flopping and irreversible . . .

The Speaker: You've got to stop when I stand up, Member.
The minister.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Alberta's government has executed agreements with certain coal companies that resolved lawsuits against the government of Alberta. Two companies have publicly disclosed some details to comply with Australian law. We are unable to comment on these matters as the terms of these settlements . . .

Ms Hoffman: Kickbacks.

Mr. Hunter: . . . are confidential in accordance with the agreements.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

Mr. Hunter: Alberta's government has worked to conclude these matters fairly and in accordance with Alberta's desires and best interests, and it is committed to protecting the foothills and the Rocky Mountains, as we always have.

The Speaker: There's a point of order noted at 2:14.

Dr. Elmeligi: Given that the UCP government spent just under \$240 million settling lawsuits with foreign coal mining companies, given that the Mines and Minerals Act allows the minister to cancel a coal agreement if it is not in the public interest, given that between the Atrum and Montem lawsuits that should have amounted to about \$62 million but those suits were settled for \$175.8 million more and Albertans were stuck with the bill, to the Minister of Finance: how are Albertans' tax dollars being protected in these coal lawsuits when they're being settled for so much more?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that under the NDP in 2016 they invited those coal companies from Australia to come here and do this. The minister of environment has said this on many occasions, yet they continue to bring this up as if they are wrapped around this ability to be able to protect the eastern slopes. The reality is that we are not allowing any – any – new open-pit mine projects in the eastern slopes. That is the reality. It is almost funny to watch the No Development Party as they twist themselves into knots on this coal issue. We are going to protect Albertans, and we're going to protect the eastern slopes.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Member Hoyle: Albertans are focused on the basics: affordable living, access to health care, quality public education, and good jobs. They expect a government that budgets responsibly and delivers results. Instead, this budget spends more, delivers less, and makes life more expensive while failing to fix the high cost of living, overcrowded classrooms, and a failing health care system. Can the government explain why they have failed on affordability, are focused on the wrong priorities while everyday Albertans are left paying more and getting less?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, well, right in the member's question it highlights the priorities of this budget: 7.2 per cent increase in education, 6 per cent across the healths while keeping our spending below population plus inflation during a population boom. I agree with her in that sense. We're hearing the same thing. We believe it, too. Health care and education are the priorities right now for this government. They ask where the money went. That's where it went. It went to teachers. It went to nurses. It went to improving these systems that we all rely on.

Member Hoyle: Given that this government is on track to double Alberta's debt in just four years after squandering a resource boom during the boom and given that prosperity should mean that everybody in Alberta has a better quality of life, not just for this government's rich friends, where did the money go? Why are families still struggling to see improvements in the services they rely on every single day?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not really adapting with our notes there for the second question if you heard the first one; \$32 billion in health care. The province is expecting to take in about \$23 billion in corporate income tax and personal income tax. Just understand that for context. It's all going into health care. It's all going into education. Imagine what that does to every other ministry that has important stakeholders and people they care about. Whether it's agriculture, energy, Indigenous Relations, Municipal Affairs, transportation, that is the focus.

Member Hoyle: Given that while Albertans are struggling to keep up with rising costs and this Premier accepted private jets and luxury hotel stays from the Saudi government and given that during that trip this government used the notwithstanding clause against striking teachers, all while voting down stronger ethics rules like the No More Skyboxes Bill, how can this UCP government justify this level of entitlement while everyday Albertans are being asked to do more with less?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I've never seen someone put so much into one question that had nothing to do with the other issues. Without this government, without the leadership of the Premier we wouldn't have the record investment in Alberta that is creating thousands of jobs, investments similar to Lufthansa Technik; \$120 million aircraft engine maintenance and repair facility right in Calgary. I have a whole list of these investments that I'm happy to go on and table at some point. The reality is that what the member is saying is completely off base with reality. I'd encourage that member to do some research and fact-checking.

The Speaker: This would be a good time just to hear the question and the answer. Let's start with Grande Prairie.

Protection of Religious Freedom

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rights of churches, people of faith, and every cultural group are under attack in Canada. The federal Bill C-9 got rammed through the House of Commons in Ottawa, and the rumours of removing charitable status from houses of worship are leaving many churches and organizations worried, worried they may not be able to keep their doors open if they see a change such as this take place and worried that their community leaders might be going to jail if they follow their faith. Can the Minister of Justice please explain what he is doing to protect religious freedoms and freedom of speech in this province, regardless of faith?

2:20

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Grande Prairie for bringing up a very important issue, one that many Albertans and Canadians all across the country are very concerned about. Let me be absolutely clear. Our government will always defend religious freedom in this province. We'll consistently advocate to our federal counterparts. We will explore every single legal and constitutional avenue we have. We've heard from Albertans, and we're going to stand by them through and through.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the persistent rise in faith-based violence across Alberta and Canada and given that we encompass a wide range of people from many backgrounds of many faiths and cultures who don't feel as safe as they used to and that the federal Bill C-9 is a direct attack upon the freedom of religion

and freedom of speech that each Albertan loves about and cares about, that has been a cornerstone of Canadian culture, can the Minister of Justice please explain how we're working to stem the rise of hateful, faith-based violence and keep our rights for freedom and religion here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has and always will take decisive steps to make sure that we confront hate head-on and we keep Albertans safe. Every Albertan in this province deserves to be safe, regardless of who they worship or what they believe in. That's why we're putting boots on the ground. That's why we're increasing sheriffs on our streets. That's why we're shoring up our Alberta Crown prosecution service.

Here's what we're not going to do, Mr. Speaker. We're not going to propose motions and speak about defunding the police. We're not going to attack and disparage our policing agencies. That's not acceptable. Here on this side of the House we protect Albertans.

The Speaker: Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the federal Bill C-9 is not just an attack on freedom of religion and freedom of speech, but there has been a rise of arson and attacks on places of worship across Canada, including the burning down of St. Jean Baptiste Roman Catholic church in Morinville here in Alberta, can the Minister of Justice please explain what he is doing to protect places of worship from arsonists and other crimes targeting Albertans who practise their freedom of religion and freedom of speech in Alberta as they continue to build our communities and our social fabric?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer is simple. On this side of the House we're standing by our policing agencies. We're working with faith-based groups to fund security assessments, security infrastructure improvements, and immediate security responses. Alongside the minister of public safety we are supporting a whole suite of supports to make sure that people of faith and their religious institutions are well protected. In this world that we live in, places of worship should remain the safest places. That's what we're going to do here on this side of the House.

Health Care Spending

Member Ellingson: The budget banks more than \$13 billion in nonrenewable resource revenue, which is the fourth highest in Alberta's history, yet this government managed to dig themselves into a \$9.4 billion deficit. In just two years it's a negative \$18 billion swing. While the Premier enjoys private jets and luxury hotels, Albertans are asking: where has the money gone? We know that Sam Mraiche is collecting interest on the \$50 million that he was paid for Turkish Tylenol he never delivered. Will the Finance minister recover that money for Alberta taxpayers?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting hearing these debt and deficit questions coming from the NDP. How quickly they have forgotten the debt and deficit that they racked up on behalf of Albertans at a time when they were making life more expensive by bringing in things like the carbon tax, at a time that they were using the retained earnings in the heritage fund to make that deficit smaller. We've been saving for the future, managing surpluses while paying down \$15 billion in debt while addressing the priorities of the time: health care, education, social safety.

Member Ellingson: Given that last year the Finance minister wanted us to ask more questions about his deficit and given that the UCP government has wasted over \$100 million in their failed bid to privatize lab services in Calgary, given that this UCP government gave hundreds of millions of private surgical contracts to their friend Sam Mraiche and given that millions more have gone into severance packages to fired health executives and board members, how could Albertans trust this government to manage their taxes with a billion dollars wasted in this government's efforts to privatize health care?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the member is not wrong about one part of that. I did want them to ask more questions about the debt and deficit last year because every day we hear in this House why we need to spend more – spend more – across all of government – across all of government – every day – every day. And then the criticism that we hear is they don't like where we've decreased expense or limited spending. They don't like where we've increased revenue. They don't like that we have conservative forecasts that leave upside for the province. We will continue with that. We will manage in the good years.

Member Ellingson: Given that this UCP government has wasted more by blowing up AHS into at least 11 new top-heavy organizations, given that they have wasted at least \$53 million on AHS restructuring and the changes will likely cost Albertans hundreds of millions more in rebranding, relocating people, severance packages, legal fees, asset transfers, and lost synergies, how can Albertans trust this government to use their tax dollars efficiently and transparently when there's no accounting for the dismantling of AHS?

The Speaker: The minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, having AHS accountable is the whole reason for the restructuring. Those AHS contracts that the members opposite continue to tout are the very reason we need to take those contracts out of AHS. It's AHS individuals that have those contracts. They were approved at all levels of AHS. It is the reason why we are in fact improving the system. In primary care we now have 3,000 more doctors than we had just a couple of years ago, and we're going to continue to make it better.

Economic Development and Job Creation

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is simply the best, better than all the rest. Over the past year Alberta added 85,000 net jobs, more than nine times the next closest province. Over the past year the rest of Canada lost more than 33,000 net jobs. There is too much NDP in other parts of Canada. To the minister: why is Alberta the best jurisdiction to start and grow a business?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct. Alberta is the best because this government understands the fundamental principle that governments don't create wealth; the private sector does. We have a role to play to create an environment where wealth creators and job creators can come here and do what they do best. Because of that, we have seen job growth at 3.3 per cent over the last year, 85,000 new jobs in Alberta year over year. That is a win, and it shows that Alberta is leading the pack and that people are choosing and voting with their feet.

Mr. Stephan: Given that every year Ottawa takes about \$20 billion from productive Alberta businesses and workers for political vote-buying projects in other parts of the country and given that many Albertans are asking, “Other than attacking and holding Alberta back, what does Canada offer Alberta?” to the minister: how many billions in capital investment and how many thousands of jobs has Ottawa cost Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of jobs and the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. On average Alberta pays about \$23 billion more per year than we receive back from the federal government in projects, benefits, and other spending. This means that over the past 20 years we have a net loss of nearly half a trillion dollars. Trillion with a “t”. That’s a huge amount of money, another example of Alberta carrying Team Canada on our back, leading the charge because we fight for fair treatment within Confederation, and we will not stop fighting under the leadership of our Premier.

Mr. Stephan: Given that Alberta has the highest GDP per capita in Canada, given that Canada is seeing their GDP per capita falling like a rock, with Ontario and Quebec’s average GDP per capita among the poorest of the U.S. states, given that the average U.S. person produces about 50 per cent more per person than the average in Canada, to the minister: how can Albertans be protected from being dragged into the economic decline of the rest of Canada?

2:30

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, in this question period one of the members opposite said that we inherited one of the strongest financial positions ever in 2019 when we took over government. That could not be further from the truth, but despite the difficult circumstances that we inherited from the members opposite and the disaster they left for us, Alberta is set to continue to lead Canada in economic growth, not just in ’25, not just in ’26, but in ’27. Because of the leadership of this Premier and the members of this government caucus, Alberta is winning, and we’re leading with job creation, investment, and job growth, 85,000 jobs this year . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West. Let’s hear the question and let’s hear the answer.

AI Data Centre Projects

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, data centres should bring jobs, economic prosperity, and help Alberta achieve data sovereignty. We’d welcome these good things, but what the government hasn’t revealed are the potential long-term environmental impacts from their high water and energy usage. Of the 38 data centres proposed in the province, three-quarters of them are in regions under high or extremely high water stress. Since there are no new water licenses in the South Saskatchewan watershed, will the minister explain where the water is going to come from?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Technology and Innovation.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally we get a question on my file. This is great. Look. I want to reassure all Albertans. We are going to make sure that any data centre infrastructure investment in this province is done in a way that is in the best interests of Albertans, and that includes making sure that we are responsible in how we develop our water. Now, the good news, Mr. Speaker, is that there is new technology that is coming out so that data centres can actually cool their

infrastructure with zero water. If the members opposite actually did their homework, they would know that this is true, and in fact it’s a made-in-Alberta technology . . .

The Speaker: You got to stop when I stand up, Minister. Go ahead.

Mr. Ip: Given that there are concerns that data centres could expose Albertans to chemicals from gas turbines that can worsen diseases like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and given that forever chemicals used in their cooling systems and electrical components are also linked to cancers, birth defects, and thyroid disease, what is the mitigation strategy to ensure Albertans are protected and that these chemicals don’t end up in our air or water, or will the government admit there is no plan at all and that they’re just making it up as they go?

Mr. Glubish: What I can tell you is that the NDP have no plan on how to build an economy and create jobs, Mr. Speaker, because their idea of doing that was to impose a carbon tax on Albertans and then hand millions of dollars to an Ontario company to screw in LED light bulbs and replace showerheads. What we’re doing instead is a made-in-Alberta approach to ensure that we have the strictest and safest environmental protections for any industrial development, including data centres. The good news is that even though we have those strict controls, we are having a gold rush of opportunity of investors who are coming to invest in Alberta and create jobs here . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Well, everybody must have got something really important to say just there, but it turned out only one person was supposed to be heard. So let’s start with the question, and let’s hear the answer, too.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, given that data centres are driving energy demand at a time when Alberta’s electricity system is already under pressure and given that the minister stated every single data centre facility could turn into a peaker plant for the grid in periods of high demand, but what the minister doesn’t tell you is that data centres could draw from the grid during peak times as well. What assurances will families and businesses have that grid stability won’t be impacted and that they won’t see their costs for power spike because of increased demand on the grid?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, we’ve been very clear. Affordability and reliability of the grid is paramount, and every single one of our policies will protect that, no questions asked. What we are doing is making sure that if someone is going to be connected to the grid and able to draw from it, they have to have an agreement in writing with the grid operator. We’re never going to let someone plug into the grid and draw power in periods of peak demand if they didn’t have an agreement first. The fact is that every other project that is going to be connected to the grid that is developing more power than they need can serve as a peaker plant to off-set the demand that the rest of Alberta needs help with. This is good for Alberta.

The Speaker: You got to stop talking when I stand up.

Health Care System Capacity

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, Lorna has waited 3 years for a knee replacement. She finally has a surgery date but worries it could be postponed because of the UCP staffing crisis. In 7 years the UCP keeps making decisions that put patients at risk. Lorna can’t wait any longer. She deserves to know the folks taking care of her aren’t working in unsafe conditions. This government would move heaven

and earth to support separatists, so why can't it do the same for Albertans like Lorna who just need health care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's stories like Lorna's which have informed our investment strategy on the surgical side. We've performed a record number – 318,000 last year – through our investments and our internal ORs and our leveraging of chartered surgical facilities. We're on track to do 330,000 this year, but it doesn't stop there. Through the acute care action plan we secured over \$500 million to do 50,000 incremental surgeries on top of those record volumes. That means more people will get their surgery faster, which is better for Albertans, better long-term outcomes.

Ms Wright: Given that 1,000 new nursing graduates still need to be hired, given the UCP's supposed new hires haven't yet made it to Alberta's hospitals or to the front lines, and given other health care workers, including paramedics, wonder why they are still working short and face record levels of injury, burnout, and trauma, how long do these health care heroes and their patients have to wait before they finally get some relief and proper staffing levels in our health care system?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In actual fact, we've been adding record numbers of health care professionals: 2,200 doctors over the last five years, over 11,000 registered nurses over the same time period. We're up 74 per cent in nurse practitioners, adding 484. We've added over 2,700 LPNs and almost 11,000 health care aids. There's always more work to do. Alberta does hire the majority of people who graduate in health fields to work in our system. As you've just heard, we're recruiting record numbers. There's always more to do, but that's not accurate.

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, given that there's only about 120 advertisements out there for newly-graduated nurses, given one health care worker recently said, "Health professionals aren't just magically created," and given the system needs staffing and increased capacity of health care workers, but there is no plan, given health care workers can bring the lens of front-line health professionals to the table, yet the UCP excludes health care workers and their reps from all the task forces and committees that should be making those plans, how does the UCP expect to solve this crisis without including the health care experts: the workers themselves?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, we are in the process of doing a long-term workforce review, a 30-year workforce plan which will help us better invest in our postsecondary system and better calibrate policy to further grow a workforce. You can't make up statistics either. I just outlined that we had 25,000 health care professionals: 25,000 people over the last five years. That's the largest component of our \$32 billion investment in public health care. Despite what the members opposite say, we're hiring record numbers of health care professionals, and we'll continue to do so.

Highway 16 and 855 Intersection

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, the corner of highway 16 and secondary 855 near Mundare is a vital transportation link for local residents, commercial carriers, and travellers moving through this busy east-west corridor. The intersection continues to face operational and safety challenges, and the province is reviewing it

following recent collisions and longstanding concerns and identified interdepartmental assessments. To the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors: what work is under way to maintain and enhance safety at the highway 16 Mundare corner, and how is the department supporting residents and motorists who rely . . .

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for her advocacy for this very important intersection. I'm happy to say that a functional planning study for highway 16 and highway 855 was well under way last year and completed by McElhanney, and they found out that a diamond interchange is the best to make sure that this intersection is safe. There will be four corners that will need to be purchased for land at this intersection to make sure that construction on it will be done properly, but there's more additional engineering that needs to take place in order to fully design that. As I said, the land purchase will have to happen so we can get this job done.

The Speaker: Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the intersection has seen multiple serious collisions, including the July 23, 2025, incident involving a Mundare youth, highlighting concerns about visibility and traffic flow, and given that the department has been reviewing interim improvements such as lighting, signage, and other safety measures, to the minister: what maintenance work is under way at highway 16 and 855, including winter servicing, road repairs, vegetation management, and signage upgrades?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Emcon is our contracted highway maintenance provider in this area, and we just signed a 10-year deal with them, but as is the case with all 25 of our highway maintenance areas, we'll do annual reviews of them to make sure that adequate work is being done. In this area, on highway 16, it does receive a full cut every year. We're happy to work with the member to make sure that if there's any highway maintenance problems in this area, we can get them addressed with Emcon as soon as possible.

2:40

The Speaker: Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given that the long-term safety improvements require coordinating planning, engineering, and investment and given that a full, functional planning study for a future interchange is under way, evaluating design options, access management, right-of-ways, and long-term safety benefits, can the minister please explain how this long-term planning work is progressing and how it will help ensure safer and more efficient travel through highway 16 Mundare corner in the years ahead?

The Speaker: Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I said, we're doing the proper work by making sure we can do the planning and then the engineering and then the construction dollars to follow right after. That's the opposite of what the NDP did when they were in government. You look at the leader of the NDP when he was the mayor of Calgary for 11 years. He talked about the green line, but he could

never get it built. On this side we make sure that we do the proper planning, the proper engineering, and then we can get construction dollars to follow to get the job done, something that the NDP leader, when he was the mayor, could never ever accomplish when he led the government.

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Calgary-Foothills.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud the two columns written by disability advocate Cam Tait in support of Bill 206, one entitled *Cowardly Display of Politics by UCP on [Alberta] Accessibility Act*, the second entitled *NDP Private Member's Bill Essential for Albertans with Disabilities*.

The Speaker: Okay. Any other tablings? Seeing none.

Airdrie-Cochrane, yesterday you stood up about this time, too. Do you have a tabling by any chance?

Mr. Guthrie: I have a tabling, yeah.

The Speaker: Well, then you need to stand up during tablings. Since it's the second day, I'm going to allow it, but you almost missed the boat again.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the requisite copies of MHA grant payments made to Bryan Ward, lawyer of Sam Mraiche, as shown on the GOA grant payment disclosure table found on alberta.ca.

The Speaker: You just have to table it.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Just did. That's 20 words.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you. We don't count words, we just are sensitive to debate, rather than just introducing the tabling.

Mr. Guthrie: It was as quick as could be done.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you for that.

Oh, yes. We are at points of order. The first one today was called at or about 1:51, and I think that was called by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You're correct. I did rise on a point of order. At 1:51 the Leader of the Opposition was speaking and asking a question of the Minister of Finance. In that question the Leader of the Opposition explicitly referenced the minister and continues to say: the plan is to pray for war in the Middle East. I rise on 23(i), imputing unavowed motives, and 23(j), using abusive and insulting language. Unavowed motives towards the individual member: obviously to imply that the Minister of Finance is praying or would pray for war at any point is deeply scandalous and inappropriate. As you heard from the reaction from the government benches and, I think, members opposite as well, it's definitely abusive or insulting language likely to create disorder in the House.

Unfortunately, the opposition leader has a track record of these kinds of comments. In November 2024 he said publicly in allegedly

a joke that the UCP hates baby Jesus. I will remind all members of this House that preceding, just by a few minutes, that comment from the opposition leader we prayed together in this Assembly that we keep in mind their responsibility – “their” being members – to seek to improve the condition of all. To also imply that the Minister of Finance is praying not just to seek to improve the conditions of all but instead for war is incredibly inappropriate, we think deeply offensive, will continue to arouse chaos and disorder in this House, and we ask that the Leader of the Official Opposition personally apologize.

When we talk about what a prayer is, Mr. Speaker, it is a heart asking the almighty Lord for something that they believe is absolutely sacred and serious. To ask any individual to pray for war or to say that they are is so far beyond the appropriate language in this House that it ought to be condemned as loudly as possible by both members of this House, and if I see the member, the Opposition House Leader, rise to defend it, I will be scandalized.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Oh, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that the Deputy Government House Leader is very impassioned at this moment. I do not have the benefit of the Blues. I did not hear my leader imply that the minister was praying for war, but I look forward to hearing the Blues.

Quite literally, Mr. Speaker, in this place just yesterday we had a ruling where the Government House Leader said: I never assumed the Leader of the Official Opposition writes his own words. That was not found to be a point of order because it was not a direct insult. In this case I heard the Leader of the Official Opposition essentially say that hope is not a strategy: certainly not intended to offend any members, but I look forward to the Blues to see what your ruling may be.

The Speaker: Well, thank you. What I have here is that the government – or the Opposition House Leader said . . .

Mr. Williams: Opposition.

The Speaker: Thank you. I really appreciate that help except for the part I probably don't.

The opposition leader said, “The minister accidentally read his own talking points . . . huge deficits, no plan. If the plan is to pray for war in the Middle East, it's no plan for Albertans.” Well, let me just say that suggesting that somebody else is praying for war seems highly offensive and highly likely . . . [interjections] Let me – you know, I kind of listened quietly while you were talking, and you were quiet, in fairness, but I didn't make a lot of hand gestures either, right?

Listen, the suggestion that someone here is praying for war is highly offensive. We talk about how you can't say what you think is in somebody else's mind. We certainly don't get to suggest that we know what somebody else is praying for. This is highly offensive. The only point where it's on the line of a point of order is that it says, “if the plan is to pray for war.” Okay. The hon. opposition leader didn't say that the plan was to pray for war, but to suggest the plan might be to pray for war. I think that's always going to cause disruption in the House, as it did today.

I think it would be appropriate to apologize for that, because there are some things you can suggest in debate that are unpleasant to the other side, but in any way to suggest that somebody is praying for war or might be praying for war is highly offensive, and I think that an apology is appropriate here.

Ms Gray: On behalf of the member I will apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The next point of order is at 2:14 p.m., moved by the minister of social services, I believe.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member or Members

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23 (h), (i), and (j) in regard to an interjection that was taking place between the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora and the hon. environment minister in the context of the word “kickback” towards the environment minister.

Mr. Speaker, I’ll draw your attention very quickly to a couple of previous rulings in this space. March 12, 2025, page 2520 of *Hansard*, ruled a point of order: “I’ve read . . . in the newspaper that apparently the minister is getting kickbacks.” May 28, 2024, page 1664 of *Hansard*: just saying “sellout” to the minister ruled a point of order, apologized for. February 26, 2025, page 2438: “how much did they pay you?” I have other examples along those lines.

2:50

The challenge in this space, Mr. Speaker, is that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is a very learned member of this Chamber, a former Deputy Premier, a former cabinet minister. She certainly knows the traditions and the process of this place. To imply in any way that any member of this Chamber, let alone a minister of the Crown, is receiving kickbacks is highly inappropriate, particularly when you give the context of the debate around the Sam Mraiche issue, one of the largest donors to the NDP. We know that they have been having parties with that individual. They’ve been bringing Visa machines to collect payments. Nobody from this side of the House has implied that they’re getting kickbacks when they’re bringing Visa machines to get donations from these individuals, because that would be highly inappropriate even if I think it’s true.

I would expect the member to stand, withdraw, apologize, and respect the tradition of the Chamber that she’s been a member of for almost a dozen years.

The Speaker: The House leader of the Official Opposition.

Ms Gray: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. I completely disagree with that member and the arguments he made. In fact, the rulings that he cites will make my point for me. The member opposite was heckling about the issue of Sam Mraiche and the rampant corruption that we seem to have seen with this government; \$49 million still missing. Over and over he is tied in with this government with friends, family, and personal connections and seems to be personally benefiting from relationships with this government. It has continued since 2025 to be an issue of debate in this Chamber.

I will agree with the member that if we were to imply that an individual member was accepting kickbacks, that would be unparliamentary. But a heckle within the context that the minister at the time was saying “we aren’t able to comment” and the member saying “kickbacks” is not accusing any individual member. In fact, what the minister cited, March 12, 2025, page 2521 of *Hansard*, was specifically because someone was heckling the word “kickbacks,” and it was found not to be a point of order because the context at that moment was talking about the collectives.

We are aware of the rules. The member is a very learned member of this Chamber. I completely disagree that this is a point of order. If she had accused an individual member, yes. She did not. I think it was an entirely appropriate heckle given the rampant corruption that we are discussing in this Chamber.

The Speaker: Well, what we have witnessed here, for everybody at home, are two great examples of how not to argue a point of

order. Both sides used the opportunity to continue debates, both wildly inappropriate on the government side, wildly inappropriate on the opposition side. I will ask both House leaders to advise their members, even if they happen to be those members, to not continue that practice.

However, back to the specifics of the point of order. I have the Blues. It says, “Two companies have publicly disclosed some details to comply with Australian law.” This is on coal mines. “We are unable to comment on these matters as the terms of these settlements . . .” at which point it has the Member for Edmonton-Glenora saying “kickbacks.” The Opposition House Leader made her argument completely on the basis of context based on Sam Mraiche. Sam Mraiche was not part of this question at all. It was about coal mining; nothing to do with Sam Mraiche. The comment on kickbacks was wildly inappropriate because it suggested somebody from the government might take a kickback, which would be illegal and against the law and maybe criminal. Completely inappropriate; requires an apology and a withdrawal.

Ms Gray: On behalf of the member I’ll apologize and withdraw.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 17

Fiscal Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to move second reading of Bill 17, the Fiscal Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

This bill includes key legislative amendments that would implement policies from Budget 2026. This year’s budget is our plan to face a difficult year and respond to the challenges facing Alberta families, businesses, and communities today. It focuses on what matters, and I will outline the proposed amendments in Bill 17.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

First, we’re proposing amendments to the Tourism Levy Act to increase the levy from 4 to 6 per cent. This levy is collected by accommodation providers from their guests. Last year the tourism levy generated \$126 million, and the proposed changes are expected to generate additional revenue in ’26-27. The new rate would take effect April 1, 2026. Alberta remains a low-tax jurisdiction, and targeted levies like this help ensure more of the burden is shared by non-Albertans rather than broad-based taxes on Albertans.

Bill 17 also proposes amendments to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act to improve access to the caregiver credit. These changes would consolidate the caregiver credit and infirm dependent credit into a new Alberta caregiver credit. This will better target support to families caring for infirmed loved ones. It will provide access to increased benefits for an additional 7,500 Albertans. At the same time families with healthy parents and grandparents will no longer be eligible. These changes align Alberta with federal policy and other provinces and will better support those who need it most.

The bill also updates the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. It removes a provision related to the child and youth support program, which was discontinued in the fall of 2025. This is a housekeeping change to ensure legislation reflects current programs.

Bill 17 also proposes amendments to the Alberta Corporate Tax Act. These changes clarify how the data centre levy is calculated

based on actual power consumption. Power not drawn from the grid will be eligible for a zero per cent rate. The data centre levy framework took effect January 1, 2026, with rates as high as 2 per cent and lower rates for facilities that reduce grid impact. The levy is fully deductible against corporate income taxes, minimizing impacts on competitiveness. These changes provide certainty for investors while ensuring Alberta benefits from new investment.

The bill includes a technical amendment to the Employment Pension Plans Act. This will better align Alberta with other jurisdictions and reduce administrative challenges for employers operating across provinces. These updates modernize legislation and improve consistency.

Proposed amendments to the Loan and Trust Corporations Act will strengthen governance and oversight. They will reduce conflicts of interest by restricting certain board memberships. They will also clarify that dividends can only be paid from profits. These changes improve financial stability and regulatory clarity.

Finally, the bill proposes technical updates to the Credit Union Act. These changes will reduce regulatory inefficiencies and align Alberta with industry best practices. They will also strengthen oversight by providing additional authority to the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation.

Madam Speaker, Bill 17 makes practical updates to strengthen Alberta's fiscal position. It ensures legislation keeps pace with changing programs, modern industries, and the needs of Albertans. These amendments provide clarity, strengthen oversight, and support a competitive economy.

With that, I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 17. Thank you.

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

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise today and speak to Bill 17, the Fiscal Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. Just to note, it seems to be standard practice to lump amendments to multiple pieces of legislation together under the banner of: nothing to see here. I'm getting a little bit more accustomed to these bills as I gather more experience here in the House. This bill falls into that category. As the Minister of Finance just laid out, we see amendments and legislation covering the departments of Tourism and Sport, Technology and Innovation, Children and Family Services, labour, Finance, and Assisted Living and Social Services, just to name a few.

I'd like to start to talk a little bit about some of the things that the Finance minister raised in his opening. I'd like to start with the sales tax this government included in the budget. They call it the tourism levy, and it is increasing from 4 per cent to 6 per cent in this budget. This bill implements that budget item. This government, Madam Speaker, has been leading Albertans down the garden path, claiming tax reductions when they have increased every other fee and tax that they can get their hands on to fill the budget gap.

3:00

That's what we're seeing here with the tourism levy. The tourism levy is a consumption tax on Albertans. The levy increase will bring in an additional \$70 million in revenue for the province in '26-27. In total the levy will bring in approximately \$200 million in this coming budget year. Last week in estimates the Finance minister stated that they expect that approximately 45 per cent of that levy will be paid by Albertans, so roughly half. That's almost \$100 million the province will collect from Albertans out enjoying their stay-cations in their home province.

And while the government collects more revenue from Albertans as they tour their home province, they won't share any more of that

revenue with Travel Alberta, whose role is to promote Alberta to other Canadians and international visitors, where we could increase the share of the levy paid by visitors from outside of Alberta. While the revenue from the levy will increase to \$214 million by '28-29, the grants to Travel Alberta will remain flat, at \$75 million each year. Madam Speaker, if the goal is to grow the visitor economy and attract more Canadians and international visitors to Alberta, they should be funding Travel Alberta to do just that.

Now, Madam Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to discuss accessibility and how Bill 17 goes against increasing accessibility for Albertans. Just yesterday this UCP government voted against an act that would move Alberta forward, increasing accessibility for tens of thousands of Albertans. With this bill they are indeed reducing access for credit union clients, removing requirements for nondigital communications, putting up barriers for aging Albertans, those with disabilities, making digital services more difficult, and even those Albertans without digital access. Credit unions, which should be about community and access, will be allowed to make it more difficult for their clients to access information, to understand their rights, and to be full participants in their financial institution, which is what credit unions are all about. When they voted against Bill 206, the government claimed that there are so many other programs that enhance access for those facing disabilities, and at the very same time they introduce legislation reducing access to financial services to Albertans. Shame on them.

Bill 17 also makes changes to the data centre levy. Interestingly, the data centre levy has been amended twice since it was introduced just a few months ago. One must wonder whether or not there really is a plan in place for data centres. While this government jumps on the data centre bandwagon, we need to question if those data centres will be providing any direct financial benefit to the province. These changes will shift the levy from collecting based on their architecture accessing power to collecting based on the power that they consume. If they are off-grid, consuming only power generated for them, they will pay no levy, Madam Speaker.

Keep in mind that this UCP government is encouraging the data centres to bring their own power and pay no levy to Albertans. So this government is encouraging investment that won't actually directly contribute the financial benefit to this government and to Albertans. Data centres will pay 1 per cent if they generate their own power, are connected to the grid but don't draw power from the grid. They will pay 2 per cent if the power that they consume is from the grid. This government points out that the projects already in the queue that have been approved will pay 2 per cent, but they don't really talk about the fact that most of the projects that are coming won't pay anything.

Now, Madam Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about how Bill 17 takes away services or reinforces those services that have been taken away. The changes to the Alberta caregiver credit and the infirm dependant credit: this act merges two programs into one. Albertans will still be able to claim the same credits when they're caring for an infirm spouse; however, they will lose the ability to claim a credit for healthy parents or grandparents who live with them. Interestingly, when we look at this, we might say: that makes sense; if they're healthy, why should we get a credit for them? But I think that what we should be thinking about are the long-term implications for the province, that we want our aging population to remain healthy, to maybe remain in place, at home, and we're taking away credit that would have encouraged that activity.

Also, last year this UCP government took away the child and youth support program. This program provided financial and medical benefits for a child when parents or guardians were unwilling to care for the child. The Alberta NDP opposed those changes, and we oppose the changes today, which will strike out references to the

program and the authority that makes regulations under that former program. Madam Speaker, this program should not have been defunded, and it should not be stricken from the records with this bill. The right thing to do is to provide those benefits to people who are caring for those children.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I'll discuss Bill 17 and the changes to privately administered pensions. It appears that this government seems to be more concerned with the rights of companies than the people who work for those companies. Now, Bill 17 changes pension rules, allowing employers to convert negotiated cost plans into target benefit plans. On the surface such a conversion could be good for employees; however, the rules also allow for a reduction in accrued benefits for employees. This means that workers could see reductions in the benefits that they have already earned through the working contributions that they have provided to that company. Employers could make these changes without gaining written consent of the superintendent of pensions. So they're making these changes which could harm workers without really any oversight from the government body that was put in place to do so.

Employers will argue that these changes will help them avoid plan insolvency in the event of financial distress, but, Madam Speaker, the insolvency of these pension plans typically happens when the employers have not been making the contributions to the plans that they had committed to do. Regardless, employers shouldn't be able to reduce or lower those accrued benefits without any really substantiated reasons or gaining written consent from the superintendent of pensions.

Madam Speaker, on these grounds I will be voting against Bill 17.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill 17, the Fiscal Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. Without much surprise, I guess – this is a pattern from the UCP government – this is another UCP bill that once again makes life harder for everyday Albertans. Essentially, what it does is that it increases costs, it removes essential supports, and it creates new barriers to accessibility and critical information. It's a classic shell game that we've seen before. You know, on one hand they're telling Albertans that they're saving on taxes, but on the other Albertans are paying higher fees in other areas. That's why I'm speaking in opposition to this bill. My colleague did a really great job sort of covering some of the points here, but I think it bears repeating, some of the challenges and concerns with this bill.

3:10

I'll begin with the tourism levy. This government is effectively taxing Albertans who want to enjoy a stay-cation or a short getaway in their own province, and this is at a time when families are already struggling with affordability, from groceries to home ownership to car insurance and daycare. Increasing the tourism levy from 4 to 6 per cent is, frankly, simply asking Albertans to pay more for less. The revenue from this levy is projected to generate between \$66 million and \$70 million in 2026-2027 with a total of roughly \$200 million overall, yet rather than reinvesting this money into strengthening the tourism industry, the government will place it into general revenue. What a wasted opportunity, Madam Speaker. This is not investment in local tourism; it's essentially a hidden tax.

I think it's quite telling how this government is choosing to not reinvest, rather, this local tourism levy. Only 55 per cent of the revenue comes from non-Albertans, so what it essentially is doing: it means that Albertans themselves are footing a substantial portion

of the bill. I think this is, again, a pattern by this government. You know, it illustrates that this government likes to repeatedly pass costs on to Albertans rather than invest it into the needs of the people it serves.

Next I want to address the consolidation of the Alberta caregiver credit and the infirm dependant credit. On paper it seems administrative, but the effect here is that it reduces access to benefits for some Albertans who currently rely on support. Under the new credit individuals will no longer be able to claim support for healthy parents or grandparents over 65 who live with them. That's really unfortunate because what the government is doing is that they're consolidating programs and once again shifting responsibility to Albertans while claiming alignment with other jurisdictions like Ontario and British Columbia. But the reality in Alberta is different. Families face higher costs, and vulnerable populations are facing a shrinking safety net.

Speaking of the safety net, the amendments to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act are also particularly concerning because what Bill 17 does is that it strikes out the legislative authority for the child and youth support program, a program that was already discontinued last year. Let us not forget what the program provided. It offered financial and medical benefits for children whose parents or guardians were unable to care for them. This government's decision to cut this program is a cruel policy choice that has left vulnerable children and families without support. In April of 2025 our caucus called for the program to be reinstated immediately because – I think all members would agree in this House – children deserve more than a government that treats programs supporting them as expendable line items. Children deserve a chance to thrive, and what we're seeing instead is that they're caught in sort of the crosshairs of this government's fiscal decisions.

In this bill we're also seeing accessibility being another area where it, frankly, fails Albertans. Amendments to the Credit Union Act, for instance, remove the requirement for credit unions to provide physical copies of notices or brochures. While this doesn't seem like a particularly significant detail, I should mention that while digitization increases convenience for some, there are Albertans, particularly those with a disability or age or perhaps a lack of digital access, where this will actually reduce their access to information.

I should also note that it was this same government that voted down the Accessible Alberta Act legislation that our caucus introduced, that frankly is a piece of legislation that we should all support in this House. It was designed to remove systematic barriers for Albertans. Now, with Bill 17, we are seeing a continuation of that trend, where the UCP is interested in reducing the social safety net, reducing the supports that allow citizens to fully participate in their own communities and institutions.

I want to take a moment to talk about the Employment Pension Plans Act. While some changes are administrative or housekeeping in nature, I should mention that the bill allows for reductions in accrued benefits in certain circumstances. This is significant. Albertans earn their pensions through years of work and contributions, and the possibility that those accrued benefits could be reduced is both unusual and potentially harmful to employees' financial security. Again, I often talk about patterns in this House, and what we're seeing is a deliberate attempt by this government to wither away the safety nets that so many Albertans rely on. Yes, some unions have welcomed the increased flexibility for pension administrators to prevent insolvency. Even so, the lack of explicit safeguards or clear consent requirements raises serious concerns for the long-term security of pension plan holders.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I want to turn to an issue that is both critical and timely. I talked about it in the House today, and that's data centres. Data centres represent significant economic potential.

They can support data sovereignty, attract investment, and position Alberta in a global sector connected to artificial intelligence and advanced computing if done right, and I think that's the operative phrase here. In some communities these developments are being presented as major economic opportunities comparable to the province's historic resource boom, but I think what this government fails to mitigate, or at least it's unclear, is how they're going to address some of the substantial environmental, energy, water, and health risks that come with these projects. Right now the government's strategy is simply insufficient.

Recent reporting shows more than 40 proposed data centre projects across Alberta, representing a massive potential increase in electricity demand approaching the scale of the province's current peak usage. Many of these facilities propose their own dedicated natural gas generation to meet energy needs. Makes sense, right? In Olds, for example, a proposed \$10 billion data centre complex would have required energy infrastructure comparable to a mid-sized city.

Let's be frank here. Regulatory and community concerns, delayed approval, in part because of gaps in information and uncertainty about environmental and health impacts – in other words, you know, even though the government likes to talk a big game around data centres, it's not entirely clear how they're going to attract \$100 billion in investment. I think there are serious concerns about whether we have the appropriate infrastructure, the appropriate framework, to properly both regulate data centres but also support these proponents as they're looking to invest in Alberta.

Data centres also consume significant amounts of water, and water-based cooling systems are standard for large-scale operations. A medium-sized data centre can consume tens of millions of litres of water per year. When scaled to multiple facilities, this represents a very real strain on local water resources, competing with households, agriculture, and the natural ecosystem. I should mention that Alberta is a semi-arid jurisdiction. I mentioned earlier during question period today that in southern Alberta there are no more new water licences, and it's not clear where the water is going to come from. Now, the minister mentions that there are waterless cooling systems, but what he isn't clear about is whether he is requiring and whether the ministry is requiring that every data centre go waterless.

3:20

What we're seeing, rather, is that the government is big on hype but vague on details. They're saying: trust us. Well, you know, the truth is that Albertans and Canadians are skeptical and rightly so. In fact, just today Abacus Data released a poll showing that the majority of Canadians are opposed to or at a minimum skeptical about data centres. This government's lack of a real plan isn't helping.

I do want to take a moment to talk about the potential health impacts of data centres. Dr. Julia Sawatsky, an expert in environmental health, has warned that gas-powered AI data centres represent a growing threat to health. Again, during question period I did refer to the potential forever chemicals and various gases that can be released by data centres and their various components that can be linked to increased heart attacks and stroke. These are not hypothetical risks, Madam Speaker. They're real and measurable and supported by peer-reviewed research. Yet the Alberta government's data centre strategy doesn't actually address any sort of comprehensive safeguards around water usage or health safeguards or how they're going to mitigate against even some of the concerns from local community.

In addition to health and water issues, energy demand is a real concern. As Alberta expands its data infrastructure, the province must ensure that there's grid reliability, that they invest in transmission

capacity and ensure that household and business energy needs are not compromised. That's not clear, Madam Speaker. We haven't heard a single commitment from this government that we're in fact going to be modernizing the grid. What we're hearing is, "Bring your own energy generation," but not much beyond that.

Let me be clear, Madam Speaker. Economic growth is important, but we also need to make sure that it doesn't come at the expense of public health or environmental integrity or the well-being of local communities, particularly in rural Alberta.

I also want to take a moment to address other amendments in this bill such as changes to the Corporate Tax Act regarding the data centre levy. It's focused on some technical adjustments. They clarify that the levy will be based on actual power consumption rather than installed capacity. While these changes may improve revenue collection mechanisms, they really do nothing to address the larger environmental, health, and strategic planning issues associated with these massive projects. In fact, Madam Speaker, proponents of data centres have themselves felt that government did not properly consult them when it comes to the data centre levy.

In summary, Madam Speaker, Bill 17 increases the tourism levy. It consolidates caregiver credits while reducing accessibility support . . . [Mr. Ip's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thanks for the opportunity to speak to Bill 17, the Fiscal Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. In many ways I'm seeing this statutes amendment act as enabling legislation for the overall budget that this government brought forward in the last couple of weeks. With that in mind, certainly neither I nor my opposition colleagues will be enablers for what essentially was a very bad budget.

We know that with record energy revenues and other resource revenues this government has managed to rack up a \$9.4 billion deficit. Madam Speaker, never has a government in Alberta done so little with so much resource available to them. Bill 17 is just enabling this further, this poor management of our economy, making life way more unaffordable for Albertans, and I don't know who it's really benefiting. Where did all the money go? How could we have record resource revenue and then end up with such a huge deficit? That's the position that I'm moving with this Bill 17, which is enabling legislation around this bad budget.

There are a few key areas here that I think illustrate clearly just how much of a wrong way this government is going. A good place to start, I think, is with the increase to the tourism levy, which is being proposed and then finalized here in this bill, if it's passed. We can look at our tourism industry, which is growing quite rapidly here in the province of Alberta, but it's growing most rapidly with people from Alberta using our province as a tourist destination. By increasing the tourism levy, which goes into general revenues, by the way, Madam Speaker, we're essentially putting another fee and a tax mostly on Albertans travelling with their families here in the province of Alberta.

Now more than ever that's what Albertans are going to do. With the affordability crisis well under way, with prices for fuel and food and mortgages and car insurance at record-high levels, people are staying home or travelling in our province, which is a vast geographic area, and having holidays there. That's what my plans are, and it's a fine place to go on holidays. But why would we be putting extra taxes onto Albertans making those choices, investing in our tourism industry, and then not dedicating that levy back into building enhanced resources for people to enjoy this province?

I'm sure many people have visited Banff and Canmore in the last few years. There's an exponentially larger population visiting these places, a record number of visitors in the history of the national park and the adjacent provincial park, Kananaskis, yet are we investing in the tourism infrastructure that can accommodate for this increase in millions more people coming to those parks? No, not really. The local municipalities are stuck with it. The national parks are stuck with trying to cobble together the infrastructure that you need for this massive increase in tourism, and they just can't do it. The degree to which Banff and Canmore and the Bow Valley corridor are contributing to our overall tourism budget and economy here in this province is exponentially larger than the rest of the tourism that takes place here in the province of Alberta.

Why not take a tourism levy and dedicate it to making our tourism industry in the Bow Valley better? We would all benefit from it. That's the destination that's connected in with the Calgary airport, the Calgary Stampede, and the Rocky Mountains there. That's the ticket that brings in the international visitors as well. Taking and dedicating our tourism levy and using it as an instrument to attract more international travel and building the infrastructure for Albertans to enjoy an economical holiday in the province of Alberta: now that is a better way, a better decision that this government just seems to be blind to. Bad budget, bad enabling legislation; very difficult to support.

I'm interested in hearing from my colleague in regard to the data centres and energy sources. We know that there's a lot of interest in building data centres, not just here in Alberta but all over North America and in other jurisdictions as well. But you need to make sure that you're doing it right and that you're doing it for the benefit of the people who live in that jurisdiction here in Alberta. There are a lot of people out there trying to sell data centres as, you know, this miracle cure-all thing for an economy, for our grids, for the economics, and for building computing capacity, but we have to make sure that if we're making an investment, it is contributing back to the overall well-being of our population.

3:30

The changes in Bill 17 in regard to taxation on data centres and building the energy that's required for a data centre: it's questionable at best, and it seems to be confusing. I sat in the estimates as well. The minister was saying one thing, and then saying another, and saying that they don't need to use water, and otherwise, you know, they will bring their own energy – BYOE – somehow to these systems. You know, it sounded an awful lot like someone trying to sell a product that really wasn't fleshed out in terms of arguments and a coherent plan that gave us a head nod either in that committee or amongst the general public. We saw it with the Olds proposal, a very expensive \$10 billion proposal, and there were just too many pieces that were left out.

When this government says that they're being very careful and analyzing the proposals for data centres, and then they somehow are still going ahead with enabling legislation to move ahead, especially for people that purport to bring their own power to the proposal, that makes me very suspicious. Yes, to have data centres that help to protect the sovereignty of our data in this time and place in the history of not just our country but the world, for sure. That's a good idea, but let's make sure that it is coherent. Let's make sure that it's safe, and let's make sure that it's sustainable and gives back to the people of Alberta, as all decisions should do coming out of the Legislature here.

All right. Just a couple of other pieces that I did want to make a quick comment on in regard to this Bill 17. It is removing the legislative authority of the child and youth support program. This is kind of moving forward from legislation that was passed here last year, which we most vehemently opposed as Official Opposition.

We know that it's very important that we support families that have difficulties, and we need to have supports for young people that are living at home and so forth. We know that the legislation that was removed had a negative consequence. We can see real-time and real-world negative consequences, yet this legislation goes ahead to help formalize that circumstance. Again, I find that to be a reason to oppose this bill.

The last area that I just want to touch on briefly is in regard to the changes to the employment pensions act, allowing pensions to reduce accrued benefits in some circumstances. Now, I know that there's a mixed reaction to this in the pension world here in Alberta, but I think that there's an overriding interest, Madam Speaker, which we always have to bring back to the pension issue, and that is that this government has been very disingenuous around pensions generally and has constantly been pushing for a provincial pension plan, which is demonstrably less advantageous to people here in the province of Alberta. We pay for our pensions, we put our lifetime as part of our salary to go into pensions, and we don't need this government messing with that retirement plan that we make around our pensions.

Whenever I see the word "pension" and this government sticking their fingers into pensions, immediately I go in with a constructively critical but very suspicious eye to see what they're up to. In fact, the employment pensions act, you know, has had some positive reaction to it amongst some pensions, but let's make sure that we look at this in a fulsome way because we've seen this government going after our pensions, and we want to make sure that we keep them where they belong with the best return, and to make sure that they are there for when we need them for ourselves and our families.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-North East.

Member Gurinder Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When we look at a bill like Bill 17, it's easy to get lost in the technical language. Seven different statutes, dozens of amendments, pages filled with clauses that sound administrative, procedural, and lots of technical language. What we need to stress is not the technical language but everyday Albertans; the life that everyday Albertans live, the issues that everyday Albertans face, and how these bills impact their lives. Look at a family planning a short trip within the province, a caregiver looking after an aging parent, a worker counting on pensions that they have earned over a lifetime, and a senior trying to access information from their credit union. These are all the issues that everyday Albertans face, the things that Albertans care about.

Let me start with the tourism levy, Madam Speaker. This bill increases the tourism levy from 4 per cent to 6 per cent, which is about a 50 per cent increase. On paper that may not sound much but, as I have just mentioned, it is a 50 per cent increase from 4 per cent to 6 per cent. This cost increase at a time when Albertans are already struggling and stressed is problematic and adds more to their bills. Albertans are already paying more for almost everything, from groceries to insurance. If we talk specifically about Calgary-North East, the insurance has gone up significantly in the past years amid the hailstorms in 2016, 2020, then 2024. That has significantly ramped up the insurance prices. The mortgages have gone up, rent prices have gone up, so everything has gone up in Alberta. Adding this fee, especially when families are going out to relax, to enjoy the Rocky Mountains, and to spend some time with their loved ones, is problematic and concerning.

We often hear that this levy is meant to capture revenue from visitors, but the reality is a bit different, Madam Speaker. More than 40 per cent of that revenue comes from Albertans themselves. So,

basically, we are increasing the fee on Albertans, and what does this mean for everyday Albertans? It means a family in Calgary taking their kids to Jasper is paying more. It means a couple from Edmonton planning a weekend getaway is paying more. If it is invested back in tourism, maybe Albertans can think about it, but what this money does is that it doesn't go back into tourism. It doesn't make those trails better. It doesn't get invested in tourism, doesn't support the local operators. It goes into the general revenue of the budget. That is the concern, that the government is increasing the fees, adding onto their bills, and then adding that revenue to the general revenue, which doesn't benefit Albertans. If Albertans are being asked to pay more, they should see the benefit. Right now, with this bill, they won't be able to see that benefit.

Now let's talk about caregivers. This bill creates a new Alberta caregiver credit by merging two existing credits. At first glance this sounds like simplification. Yes, Madam Speaker, when we align our policies with other jurisdictions, nobody is opposed to it, usually, when it doesn't negatively impact others, but when you look closer, there are important changes being made. Under the new system Albertans will no longer be able to claim a credit for caring for healthy parents or grandparents over the age of 65. Just think about that. Think about the daughter who moves her aging mother to her home. Think about the son who helps his father every day, not because his father has some sort of formal diagnosis but because he needs support. These are the realities that everyday Albertans face and go through, and they just don't disappear because the government changed the definition. Caregiving is not always neat and clinical or easily categorized. It's messy and it's human and it's often invisible. This bill risks leaving some of those caregivers behind.

3:40

Madam Speaker, let's talk about pensions. There are provisions in this bill that allow, in certain circumstances, a reduction in accrued pension benefits. Benefits are not money falling from the sky for workers. It's something that they have earned throughout their life, throughout their years of work, their contributions, and through trust, and these could be reduced. "Flexibility, preventing insolvency, managing risk": these are all nice terms, but when it comes to workers, their pensions, they need stability, they need trust. We must be honest about what we mean when we say it. This bill shifts risks away from employers on to workers.

Madam Speaker, for many Albertans a pension is not an abstract concept. Albertans have already advocated very hard that they want to stay in the Canada pension plan. They do not want any kind of pension plan run by this government. Albertans deeply care about their pensions. It's their hard-earned money. It's the hard work that they have done throughout their life. It's their future, and it gives security to their future, and pensions are the promise that after decades of work there will be stability. So any change that touches that promise, that touches the pensions of hard-working Albertans, deserves careful scrutiny.

Now let's look at accessibility, Madam Speaker. This bill removes the requirement for credit unions to provide certain physical communications such as brochures outlining complaint procedures. Again, on the surface this may seem like modernization, moving towards digital communication, but not every Albertan lives in a fully digital world. Some seniors rely on paper. My wife's grandfather is a prime example. We need to help him out when it comes to applying for his benefits and maybe getting websites online. Sometimes he struggles with that, so we need to help him out. There are many other of his friends who don't even have or don't even carry a cellphone. This is a lived reality in my own constituency, in my own family, in my own circle. Some

individuals with disability rely on accessible nondigital formats. Many rural Albertans face connectivity challenges. For them it is not a modernization; it's a barrier. And when we remove access, even small pieces of access, we send a message about who is being considered and who is being left behind.

We have recently seen this government voting against the accessibility act brought forward by my colleague from St. Albert. This is concerning, and this shows how ignorant this government is about disability communities and the issues they face, the lives they live, the experiences they face every single day. It's just not on their agenda.

Madam Speaker, I also want to briefly address the removal of the child and youth support program from legislation. Now, to be clear, this bill is not cancelling the program. It has already been cancelled and discontinued by this government. Again, another shameful step, one of the major shameful steps that this government took. What this bill does is erase its presence altogether, so we won't even have this program in the law.

That matters to many Albertans, many families, our communities because that program provided financial and medical support to children in vulnerable situations, children whose families could not care for them, children who were being supported by other caregivers. This program was cancelled by this government, and now it's eradicating that program from the law.

I want to remind the members in the Chamber that my colleague from Calgary-Acadia, who is shadow minister of Children and Family Services, back on April 2, 2025, issued a very compassionate statement, and I want to share some parts of that statement. April 2, 2025, was "another day, another cruel cut to children in Alberta." The child and youth support program was cancelled. It was the program that provided financial and medical benefits for a child when the parents and guardians were unable to pay for them. The current program that was cancelled was "adding cruelty" to the cuts of this government, "the chaos and corruption agenda" of this government, and it failed vulnerable Albertans.

Now with this bill it will be gone altogether because when we remove it from legislation, Madam Speaker, we are not just cleaning up language; we are closing a chapter. The question we must ask is: what has replaced it? Is there a new program which is better than what we already had, or is there nothing for vulnerable children? What message this specific section of this bill sends is that this government cares more about Sam Mraiche and his profits than the most vulnerable kids of the province because the needs of those children have not disappeared.

There are other elements in this bill as well: changes to how data centre levies are calculated, ensuring they are based on actual power consumption, adjustment to financial-sector rules to improve stability and oversight. Some of these changes may be reasonable; some may even be necessary. That is part of the challenge with a bill like this. It bundles everything together. Instead of debating on these issues one by one, it's all bundled. That's the problem with this bill. It asks us to weigh increases in costs, reduction in supports, and structural changes to pensions all in one vote.

Madam Speaker, legislation is not just about what we pass. It is about who it impacts and how it impacts. When I look at this bill, I see Albertans being asked to pay more, I see caregivers losing access to support, I see workers being asked to carry more risk, and I see barriers – even though they are small barriers, they're real barriers – being introduced for those who are already navigating challenges.

The question before us is not whether this bill is technical. It is technical. The question is whether it moves Alberta forward in a way that is fair, inclusive, and responsible. On that I have concerns, Madam Speaker, because good policy does not just balance books;

it balances lives. It does not simply simplify systems; it strengthens people. And it does not quietly shift burdens onto those least able to carry them; it empowers those people.

Madam Speaker, we all want a strong Alberta, and I know colleagues on this side of the House do actually want a stronger . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to Bill 17 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 17. I rise today to speak against Bill 17, the Fiscal Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2026.

3:50

Let's begin with the hard truth facing Alberta businesses right now. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce released their latest business survey, and this month, in March, it shows that many businesses say that the current talk on Alberta separatism is already hurting their own operations. Over 90 per cent of these describe the impact as negative. Fifty per cent say that it's damaging the provincial economy overall, again the vast majority calling the damage negative. Businesses report planning uncertainty, reducing investment confidence, recession fears. Some are even looking at relocating out of the province. Revenues are already going down. Investors are steering clear. Jobs and growth are at risk because of this uncertainty.

At the very same time, the government introduced Bill 17 and slapped about a 50 per cent increase on the tourism levy, from 4 to 6 per cent. That's a heavy new burden on the industry and on families that are already struggling. Along with the Alberta NDP colleagues, opposing Bill 17 because Albertans are already facing a deep affordability crisis. Groceries are up and up every year. A typical family of four now pays about a thousand dollars extra just to keep food on their table. Car insurance, home insurance, rent, gas, utilities keep climbing while wages stay flat for seven years straight. Three out of 4 Albertans wake up each morning wondering how they will stretch every dollar until Friday. Families skip lunches, cancel kids' activities, and lie awake worrying about the next bill. This is not living. It is surviving day to day.

What relief does this government offer? None. This government has repeatedly refused to give Albertans the gas tax rebate. Even when oil prices sit way above the threshold that should trigger relief, families are paying more at the pump while this government sits on their hands. Instead of easing the pain at the gas station, they bring forward Bill 17 to make getaways more expensive, too. In times like these government's responsibility is to ease the burden, give families breathing room, help people to get ahead. Instead, this bill does the opposite. It piles more weight on already struggling Albertans. The tourism levy hike hits every hotel room, every motel, every short-term rental starting this April. Twenty to 30 dollars extra on family getaways may not sound like much in this Chamber, but for working families it is real money they cannot spare.

Madam Speaker, let me tell you about Mike, a constituent who works on the rigs. He and his wife, who does night shift at the hospital, saved for weeks, skipping small things, so they could take their two boys to Jasper for one night. The kids wanted to snow-angel and hot cocoa by the fire. That's what they do every year to catch their breath from the daily life struggle. Imagine that this year they drove again, full of hope, checked in, and the clerk quietly said, "New levy, sir." Mike paid the extra bucks, but you could see the disappointment on his face. "We live here," he told her. "This is our own backyard." And he's right.

The Minister of Finance admitted that only about 55 per cent of the money comes from out of the province who visited here. That means Albertans will pay a big chunk of the extra cost. This bill is expected to bring about \$200 million this year. That sounds like a lot, but only about 40 per cent may go back to the tourism program. That means the rest disappears into the general revenue with no real accountability, no guarantee to fix trails in the Rockies or help small families run lodges, pay their staff.

Those small operators are already hurting from the separation uncertainty. Bookings are down. Now government adds this extra levy on top. It burdens the hospitality industry at the worst possible time and taxes the very escapes that families need during the affordability crisis. When the daily grind hits too heavy, bills stacking, insurance notices arriving, you point the truck west: the rocky mountain with quiet snow on the pines, wind off the lake. You walk a trail, breathe deep, watch the kids laugh when they slip on the ice. For a few hours the weight lifts. You come home lighter, ready to face another week. But when every getaway costs more, families stay home. They stare at the same four walls. Stress builds. The rest we all count on disappears exactly when we need it most.

The bill also tightens the caregiver act. It merges two credits into the one Alberta caregiver credit with the same exact amount, maximum \$1,380, but changes the rules. Healthy parents or grandparents over 65 who live with their family are no longer eligible; only if they're officially infirm. Think of a 75-year-old living with her son. She cooks supper, watches the grandkids after school, folds laundry, and keeps the household running. Her son works late at a mechanic shop, cannot afford full-time help. Before this bill he received the credit. Now it's gone because she is healthy. She feels like a burden. He feels he loses money that helps keep the lights on. Families squeezing tighter. These grandparents are not a burden, Madam Speaker. They are the glue holding us together during hard times. Why punish the very people who give parents a fighting chance in the affordability crisis?

I urge all members to vote against Bill 17 in its current form and support meaningful amendments that put Albertans and Alberta business first. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Speaker and to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for his impassioned speech. We will take his urging under consideration.

However, at this time as the Deputy Government House Leader I'm going to move to adjourn debate on Bill 17 to revisit it in the future.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:00

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 16

Traveller Protection and Destination Development Act

Mr. Boitchenko: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 16, the Traveller Protection and Destination Development Act.

Over the course of this debate members have had an opportunity to discuss the long-term benefit of this legislation, and I want to take a moment to reflect on what this bill accomplishes and why it matters for Alberta's future. From the beginning, the intent of Bill 16 has been clear, to strengthen consumer protections and grow Alberta's visitor economy by building it on transparency, fairness, and trust. Tourism is a major economic driver in our province. It

creates jobs, supports local businesses, and helps us to advance towards our government's goal of reaching \$25 billion of visitor spending by 2035. That growth depends on ensuring travellers feel confident in the prices they pay in our province. This legislation does exactly that. Bill 16 introduces strong consumer protection measures by requiring that all fees related to accommodations or tourism experiences be disclosed upon the time of booking.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The price people see when they decide where to stay or what to experience in Alberta will be the price they can expect to pay upon checkout. If a visitor seeks to ask about the fee, businesses will be required to explain what it is for and how it is used. These are straightforward, common-sense steps that put an end to misleading or surprise charges at the last minute and reinforce Alberta's reputation as a fair and transparent destination. These fees, which are voluntary and industry driven, are already being used in many communities across our province. They play an important role in promoting local destinations, investing in development, and helping communities compete for tourism and visitors.

But until now there has been no consistent provincial framework to ensure these fees are managed responsibly or reinvested as intended. Bill 16 changes that by establishing clean and clear governance, accountability, and enforcement tools while maintaining industry leadership and local flexibility. It ensures that only one destination marketing organization, only one accommodation association, and only one trustee may be designated in each geographical area of our province, reducing confusion and strengthening accountability.

Most importantly, it makes clear what this legislation does not do. It does not introduce a new tax, and it does not make destination marketing fees mandatory. The role of government remains oversight. To support fairness and maintain a level playing field, the bill includes compliance tools such as inspections, administrative penalties, and offences for serious cases of noncompliance. These measures focus on those few who actually misuse the system, not on punishing responsible tourism businesses in the province. Recognizing operational realities for industry, the bill includes a transition period until December 31, 2026, giving organizations and operators time to adjust and come into compliance.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank members of this House for the thoughtful debate and consideration they have given this legislation at each stage of the readings. The questions raised and the perspectives shared have contributed to a stronger and better understood bill. Bill 16 is responsible, forward-looking legislation that strengthens Alberta's visitors' economy, protects travellers, and ensures that local destinations have stable and accountable tools to grow. It builds trust between visitors, businesses, and communities and positions Alberta to compete more effectively in the global marketplace.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 16, the Traveller Protection and Destination Development Act.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? The Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to Bill 16, Traveller Protection and Designation Development Act. This is how the government has worded it, and I'm honoured to share my comments on this on behalf of my constituents and fellow Albertans. Looking at this bill, this bill proposes a few changes with very narrow scope to the large tourism industry. This proposes, as usual, you know, that a lot of this government believes in a lot of power in ministerial hands all the

time, so they proposed that the minister will have the authority to grant designations to three organizations in the tourism industry. Three of them: designation marketing organizations – call them DMOs – and accommodation associations and trustees.

Looking at this bill, you know, I do understand that some of the changes were being lobbied and advocated for by some stakeholders of the industry, and that's the reason we like it. At least this is a very small step in a direction, but that is coming from the smaller partner of the industry. At the same time I've seen in this House from the tourism minister, the previous minister and the current minister, their very high goal about the tourism industry, and tourism is very important to our province. That's the fourth revenue-generating industry when it comes to the province's income. Definitely, a very important sector.

We also understand that Alberta is – not Alberta; many parts of the world are going through unprecedented, difficult times. The people, citizens, Albertans are experiencing unprecedented inflation, grocery prices, and gas prices. We also see that a lot of the revenue that comes to the tourism industry also comes from Albertans as well as international tourists.

This is the time to show leadership. This was the time for this government to come up with plans that have support, real support, for ordinary Albertans, that do not only provide them help in, you know, mentally stressful and difficult financial times but also in a way to support them to probably get away, get out, and explore the province and spend a little time with their families. I don't see it. It's another way, totally another way around.

4:10

I also wanted to say that we are looking at these changes, these changes being proposed in the bill, very positively and responsively, being responsible members of the Legislature. I'm sharing with a bit of disappointment that the same level of understanding I did not see from the other side of the aisle when we discussed two bills, 204 and 206, in this House. Even Bill 206 was recommended by the government's own officer, based on the recommendations of the government's own officer, but I did not see any support coming from that side.

I know many of my colleagues wanted to actually speak to this bill and share their comments on behalf of their constituents. I will conclude my remarks with this. This bill proposes a few good changes but does not do enough to support Albertans and also to support the tourist industry at large.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Wright: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and take some time to speak to Bill 16, the Traveller Protection and Destination Development Act. Certainly, on its surface it is legislation that should eliminate all those hidden fees in our tourism sector and improve consumer protection. I'm sure almost all of us in this House have experienced times when we've been somewhere at a resort or in a hotel and the number that we think will be at the bottom of our bill is not the number that's at the bottom of our bill, so a good thing. This bill would indeed require that all tourism-related fees, including accommodation charges and destination marketing fees, be disclosed clearly and up front at the time of booking rather than, as I said, unexpectedly as you're checking out.

One of the provisions that I certainly appreciate being in there and that I believe also answers some of the issues that other jurisdictions like Ontario have experienced is that a destination marketing fee can only, Mr. Speaker, be charged when there is a destination marketing organization already in place, already

established in that particular geographical region. This is important because it will indeed help Albertans and folks coming to visit us to feel some measure of trust that that particular money is actually going to be reinvested in the local economy, in the local tourism sector. That's important. It establishes some trust, again, not a bad thing. Everyone will understand the purpose of that fee that they're paying. Certainly, given some of the struggles both here and in other provinces, that particular level of transparency is welcome. It's warranted, and it's certainly helpful.

The legislation also provides a more consistent definition and structure in terms of how the fees are collected, where they can be spent, and although it's still going to be voluntary, just because that structure is in place, it should indeed help to mitigate the presence of any bad actors.

We also know that the Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association is broadly supportive, particularly of this particular section of the bill, again, because they saw it as a practical framework, something that was workable, something that provided transparency, and something that also clearly pointed toward this government being supportive of tourism, particularly as it relates to local economies.

As I said, on the surface it does the right things, but there are issues, and those issues primarily, Mr. Speaker, revolve around the issue of transparency, accountability, and a wee bit of a contradiction. There is a decided lack of transparency in terms of what the government is demanding of itself when compared to the transparency and the level of transparency that the government might be demanding from those members of the hospitality industry.

Tourism operators will be, as my colleague from Edmonton-Castle Downs noted earlier in the debate, required to show their work. They will have to report on how fees are collected, where they go, and indeed how they are used, except the government itself is not demanding the same level of transparency for itself when the tourism levy is talked about.

The levy was increased this year and doesn't appear necessarily to leave Alberta's tourism industry, really, any better off, and that, unfortunately, is because the funds are going to be directed into general revenue. How on earth will that engender trust, Mr. Speaker? Where indeed is all that money going to go? It is an unfortunate par for the course from this government.

Both those folks who work in the industry, those who take advantage of travelling to this lovely province of ours and, of course, Albertans who visit all the lovely places within the province, I am hopeful, will appreciate an answer to the question: why does the same standard in terms of transparency of where the money goes not apply to the issue of the tourism levy?

Albertans deserve to know that money given to resorts, hotels, and the like is at the very least spent in the community or provided through Travel Alberta. They deserve the same consideration when the tourism levy is involved. They need assurance that the levy will actually be invested locally in local tourism economies. When we consider how much potential money is involved, millions, potentially billions, one could be forgiven for asking again: where is all the money going? Being told that it's going to general revenue with a sort of slight promise to reinvest, Mr. Speaker, just isn't enough.

The other issue, of course, Mr. Speaker – and I do appreciate as well that, at least in the beginning, tourism operators were very, very hopeful and, I think, appreciative of the legislation itself. However, in terms of the tourism levy I don't think that there's quite the level of appreciation that the government thought there might have been. That's because they worry that the level of consultation has decidedly gone down since the ministry was first established.

The Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association talks about that the recent changes to Travel Alberta's mandate were thoughtful and strategic, and they appreciated the fact that they were involved in

those conversations. They talk about the fact that \$200 million from the tourism levy, though, will only see 40 per cent being allocated to Travel Alberta. They are hoping to revisit those sorts of terms with this government. They are also, they say – and I'm quoting here – particularly disappointed that the decision was made without consultation with Alberta's hotel industry. This stands in contrast to the government's approach to other legislation and the very inception of the tourism levy.

The industry itself, Mr. Speaker, has many, many concerns. I'm hopeful that as we go through this debate and as the minister perhaps considers what each of us on this side of the House are saying, this particular issue might be revisited, particularly since we hear often enough: "It's okay. It'll all wash out in the regulations. We'll do the consultation we need to." But it appears that at least this portion of the industry, the Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association, doesn't quite have that same sort of level of trust involved there.

Again, how will the tourism levy actually function? How will it be applied? How will it be spent? How will tourism operators and local residents know if tourism dollars, including any portion of a local levy, are being returned? What assurances will they have? What data will be collected? I don't think that this is an industry, Mr. Speaker, that deserves the level of – it's like instability. We know sometimes that this is an operation that operates very much on the margins. The profit margins aren't always huge. I do think that this particular industry and their particular concerns deserve a second look.

With that, I'll reserve my comments. Thank you so much.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to join debate on Bill 16. Very quickly, I just want to remind everyone that, of course, Alberta is one of the most fortunate places in this world. Within just a few hours' drive – right? – we can stand in some of the most breathtaking landscapes on the planet: the Rocky Mountains, our national parks, our lakes, our badlands. These aren't just provincial assets; these are global destinations. So when we have bills that come forward that influence, that change how tourism works in this province, it's really, really important that we have these important debates and take time to get on the record what our concerns are.

I just very briefly want to reiterate some of the things we've heard from this side of the House, some confusion or some concerns we have. I agree that this bill does bring forward some very good potential by introducing the destination marketing fund, specifically how it's going to be, I guess, accounted for, where the use of professional chartered accountants, or CPAs, in order to ensure that the trust is both managed appropriately and ethically and to the professional standards of that profession but, further, that it'll actually get reinvested where it's supposed to as opposed to ending up in, you know, a slush fund like we see with the tourism levy.

4:20

I am in support of this bill because it does take some good steps forward. It does not, unfortunately, reassure Albertans that what is being promised is going to be delivered because there are no accountability measures in here. Apparently, they're coming in regulations, which is, you know, all great and fun; however, that doesn't really bring confidence to Albertans that the promises that are being brought forward by this government will actually see the light of day.

With that, I will sit. Thank you so much.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak?

The hon. Minister of Tourism and Sport to close debate.

Mr. Boitchenko: Mr. Speaker, as debate on Bill 16 draws to a close, I want to thank all members in the Assembly on this side and the opposite side for supporting and for thoroughly discussing this bill. The contributions made in this House have reflected a shared interest in protecting consumers, supporting local businesses, and ensuring Alberta's visitors' economy continues to grow in a responsible and sustainable way. This legislation reflects extensive engagement with industry partners and response to real concerns raised by visitors and tourism operators alike. Bill 16 strikes a balanced approach by strengthening consumer protection, improving transparency, and providing a clear and consistent framework for destination marketing, all while respecting industry leadership and local flexibility.

I appreciate the questions and perspectives brought forward during the debate. These discussions have reinforced the importance of getting this right, and I'm confident that the framework set out in this bill does exactly that. It supports a level playing field, protects consumers from misleading practices, and helps to ensure our destinations have the tools they need to compete and succeed.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the House has had a full and thorough opportunity to consider this legislation. I would like to thank all members for their participation and engagement in this important discussion.

With that, I would like to close debate on Bill 16, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 20

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2026

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move second reading of Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2026.

If passed, this act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government. These supplementary estimates reflect our commitment to respond to real pressures as they arise while continuing to manage public dollars carefully. Bill 20 authorizes \$326 million in expense funding partially off-set by revenue, \$18 million in capital investment, \$202 million in other financial transactions, \$18 million for the Legislative Assembly offices, and \$734 million in transfers between ministries. In total this supports multiple departments and ensures funding keeps pace with evolving needs across government. These investments address priorities, including wildfire preparedness, seniors' care, child care affordability, public safety, and support for vulnerable Albertans.

Our approach is simple: stay disciplined, act when needed, and focus on what matters most to Albertans. A key focus in these estimates is supporting families and communities in Education and Childcare. Funding will help reduce fees for young children and improve access to licensed care across the province.

In Assisted Living and Social Services investments will strengthen seniors' care, expand access to community-based services, and support the workforce that Albertans rely on. These are practical steps that help make daily life more affordable and ensure supports are there when people need them.

Wildfire seasons are becoming longer and more complex. That is why Alberta is moving forward with the purchase of five new water bomber aircraft. This is a long-term investment in

protecting communities, reducing risk, and strengthening our emergency response. Additional funding will also support rangeland sustainability and environmental protection. Preparing ahead is how we reduce costs, protect people, and give communities confidence.

These estimates also strengthen Alberta's justice system and public safety. Funding will support legal aid, ensuring access to justice remains available and affordable. It will also enhance supports for victims of gender-based violence and expand services like the Indigenous court worker program. Investments in digital systems will improve efficiency and reduce wait times. In public safety funding supports wildfire response, law enforcement efforts, and action against gangs and organized crime. Albertans expect to feel safe in their communities, and these investments help deliver on that expectation.

These estimates also support Alberta's economy and workforce. Funding for municipalities will help build and upgrade infrastructure, support housing, and create local jobs. Investments in skills training and labour market programs will help workers adapt to global trade pressures and changing economic conditions. This ensures workers can access new opportunities and employers can find the talent they need.

Mental Health and Addiction funding will expand access to care, including supports for youth and recovery communities. Early access to treatment can make a lasting difference for individuals and families. Additional funding also supports community grants and programs addressing gender-based violence. These are targeted investments that support those who need it most while strengthening communities across Alberta.

These estimates also address financial obligations that must be met. This includes funding for legal settlements and necessary system updates within government. Transfers between ministries will ensure resources are aligned with service delivery, particularly in continuing care. This is about making sure funding is in the right place at the right time.

The Legislative Assembly offices are requesting funding to address operational pressures, including salary adjustments and legislative changes. Additional targeted funding supports smaller initiatives such as community programs and training. These are measured adjustments that ensure government operations continue effectively.

These supplementary estimates are about staying responsive as the fiscal year unfolds and making sure funding keeps pace with real demands. They reflect the reality that circumstances change and that government must adjust in a measured and responsible way. This is how we ensure commitments are followed through and essential services continue without disruption. It is also how we manage public dollars carefully, addressing pressures while maintaining discipline.

With that, I move second reading of Bill 20, Mr. Speaker, and through the Speaker I urge my fellow members to support this bill so we can continue delivering for Albertans in a responsible way.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the Member for Calgary-Foothills to speak.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for affording us the time to discuss Bill 20, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2026. Yester-eve we did have the opportunity to have a little bit more of a robust conversation about some of the elements in the bill. I will just say, you know, I think that it's now being in kind of like the process – I have always been surprised, when I'm looking at the news, when I look at other countries and how they happen to be handling

their finances and how they go into complete government shutdown without really knowing how much money is needed.

I do wholly appreciate the process that we have in place: to have a budget, to discuss the budget, to go through the course of the year, understand what additional funds are needed, and to have a conversation about those needs and for Albertans to be aware of what they are. I do think that this time is important for Albertans and that this process is something that I think we should all be considering, knowing what it means to Albertans to be informed about everything that we're doing.

4:30

That being said, I think that, yeah, Albertans are always going to raise questions when there is a debated budget, that there's a lot of thought and consideration that goes into a budget. Then as we get to the end of the year, we discover the decisions that were made through the course of the year without, really, discussions through the course of the year of what those additional funding requirements may be. I wonder whether or not, you know, we could perhaps be discussing some of these unanticipated changes through the course of the year so that we have a bit more of a heads-up and Albertans have a better idea and understanding of what's going on.

Last night we talked about ministries and some of the supplementary changes to ministries, but we didn't necessarily have a lot of opportunity to talk about the changes to the legislative offices' budgets. We didn't really have a chance to talk through the office of the Auditor General, the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, the office of the Ethics Commissioner, the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the office of the Ombudsman, and the office of the Public Interest Commissioner. You know, some things have happened through the course of the last fiscal year that have resulted in some changes in the allocations to these budgets, notably the Chief Electoral Officer and the Auditor General. I think it's worth while raising these points for Albertans to pay attention to.

We have to be clear here, Mr. Speaker, that the changes that we see here, these unanticipated costs were unleashed by the actions of this government. It was this government and this Premier that brought forward amendments to legislation to lower the threshold for petitions. It was this government and the Premier that brought forward amendments to legislation to lower the threshold for recalls. Of course, what did we see spring out of that? A number of recalls that I think many of us in this House, you know, may have questioned the need for. The government itself was questioning why all of these recalls were springing up. They seemed to be surprised that when they lowered the threshold for recalls, people would actually move forward on recalls.

Because of that, the Chief Electoral Officer is – if I'm reading page 1 correctly, it's \$13,329,000 of additional funds to handle recalls and petitions, and additional costs will come. There will be additional costs of – now that petitions have been brought to the Legislature and committees have been struck, this adds additional burden to legislative staff in supporting the committee in their work and any additional research that's going to be required to follow that process through to the end. I think Albertans should, you know, take a moment to ponder the decisions and actions of this government, the outcomes that they themselves questioned, surprised that it would happen, and that it's now costing Albertans millions and millions of dollars.

Now, interesting also: some procurement choices by this government. We have spent the last year talking about the corrupt care scandal. We've spent the last year talking about how since the firing of the CEO of Alberta Health Services and the discovery of where literally hundreds of millions of dollars have gone to, you

know, people with spurious connections or ability to secure contracts in areas where they have no previous business experience or work experience, that this spun out legal actions from that CEO against the government. This has spun out the government cancelling contracts when we'd already seen the government being forced to backtrack on privatization contracts for lab services, again, costing the people of Alberta untold millions. Now we can see here that the office of the Auditor General is needing \$4 million more, again, to accommodate for the actions and decisions of this government, to conduct investigations, when if this government had been operating in an accountable and transparent manner, those investigations wouldn't have been necessary and the hard-earned taxpayer dollars of Albertans would not have been spent.

Again, I'll come back to, you know, that I think it's important that we do take this time, that we do take the opportunity to raise this to Albertans, that the government's decisions have led to costs, unanticipated costs, of over \$17 million to \$20 million, money that could have been used to address emergency room crises in this province, money that could have been used for complexity teams in in schools that could have been deployed much earlier than they're being deployed.

Mr. Speaker, again, I thank you for the time to speak to this bill and to raise these issues with the people of Alberta. On that, I will allow my colleagues to share some more comments on this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer some thoughts on Bill 20, but before I get into the heart of the matter, I want to chastise my friend from Calgary-Foothills. Listen, the deal here was that we were supposed to talk to this bill until 4:50, and there are only two of us on this side who are supposed to speak to this, meaning he's leaving the bulk of the time to speak to this bill to me. I don't appreciate this unfair division of labour here in the NDP caucus, and I will be filing a complaint with the shop steward. Just letting him know that that's going to happen.

I want to follow up, though, on some of the statements that my friend from Calgary-Foothills was talking about with respect to this government's corruption and incompetence. In particular, with connection to the supplementary supply bill I want to hit on three items: one, the expenses that were voted for the Mental Health and Addiction ministry; two, the expenses that were voted for Energy and Minerals; and then end by commenting on some of the expenses that were voted for the office of the Auditor General.

My friend from Calgary-Foothills talked about the corrupt care scandal in some general terms, but I think we see some evidence of that here in this bill. That's particularly with regard to \$6.7 million approximately that was voted in capital grants for the construction of community treatment and recovery services. Now, it's funny, Mr. Speaker, that we have to vote for an additional \$6.7 million in community treatment and recovery service capital grants on the same day that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane tabled a number of capital grants that were granted to Bryan J. Ward Professional Corporation, who's also the lawyer for Sam Mraiche, the government's close friend and in some cases relative who is at the heart of the corrupt care scandal.

Just for every member's awareness, the grants that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane tabled included a \$6.9 million payment to the Bryan J. Ward Professional Corporation on the 9th of May 2024; a \$3.5 million grant to the Bryan J. Ward Professional Corporation on the 18th of April 2024; another \$3.475 million on the same day, 18th of April 2024. It was a heck of a day, 18th of April 2024, for

the Bryan J. Ward Professional Corporation. They got almost \$7 million in capital grants to construct recovery centres, which is odd because, you know, I didn't know that lawyers built recovery centres, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

There are a lot of questions around why a lawyer who is so closely linked to Sam Mraiche was granted \$13 million in this fiscal year. We had to vote an additional \$7 million in supplementary estimates. And when we ask the government, "Why is Bryan Ward, this lawyer who's so closely connected to Sam Mraiche, a personal friend and relative of the government, getting this money?" they throw up some flimsy excuse around how they can't possibly grant that money directly to the agencies that are building these recovery centres. They're dodging accountability by throwing dust in our eyes metaphorically and saying that they couldn't possibly have done it any other way, as if Bryan J. Ward was the only lawyer in the entire province who was available to handle these capital grants on behalf of the ultimate recipients and builders of these recovery centres. It's ridiculous. Nobody believes that that's true.

We didn't hear a single explanation from the Finance minister when he introduced this bill for debate today about what's going on with the Mental Health and Addiction capital grants that we're voting on today. That's one thing that I would appreciate some clarity on today, Mr. Speaker, from the Finance minister or any other members of the government who absolutely know what is going on with this money but refuse to tell the people of Alberta what's going on and who's actually benefiting from the construction of these recovery centres.

I want to know what the overall cost is of the recovery centres. All we see are capital grants that are going to the Bryan J. Ward Professional Corporation for a total of, like I said, over \$13 million. But is that the ultimate cost of the construction of these recovery centres, or is Bryan J. Ward skimming from these capital grants to deliver whatever services he seems to think he's delivering to advance these grants to the ultimate recipients? The people of Alberta deserve to know where this \$13 million is ultimately ending up. We have some suspicions that it's ending up in some pockets that don't rightly deserve to have this money, and the government owes it to the people of Alberta to come clean with that.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the estimates for Energy and Minerals. It was curious to watch the Finance minister when he introduced this bill for debate just quickly skip over saying, "Oh, we've got additional sums for legal obligations," neglecting to mention that we're voting for \$316 million to pay out legal settlements related to coal lawsuits that were filed against this government.

I want to take this opportunity to remind members of the House how we got here. This is from an article that was run from the CBC when they reported back in October that Evolve Power was going to be paid out \$95 million from the government of Alberta for the settlement of a coal lawsuit. Then the CBC article goes on to discuss policy changes over the years that led us to this point.

In 2020, the UCP government rescinded the province's longstanding coal policy, which had been established in 1976 under then-premier Peter Lougheed and had placed blanket environmental protections across wide swaths of the Rocky Mountains.

In 2021, amid widespread public outcry from a diverse group of opponents – including ranchers, environmentalists, First Nations, and musicians like Corb Lund – the government temporarily reinstated the old policy, pending public consultations.

In 2022, after carrying out those consultations, the government decided to stick with the 1976 coal policy after all,

but did allow four "advanced projects" to continue through the regulatory process.

In 2023, a group of coal companies, including Evolve and Atrum, sued the government for \$15 billion in damages, arguing the policy changes in 2020 had encouraged them to buy land and leases for coal mining projects, only for the rules to change again and effectively put some of those projects on ice.

I want to just take a moment here and reinforce this line that says that these companies argued that "the policy changes in 2020 had encouraged them to buy land and leases for coal mining projects," because we hear ministers from the government side say over and over again that some letter explaining the process that was written from our government in 2016 was actually the cause of this lawsuit. Again, nothing could be further from the truth, in the words of the minister for preventative health. It is the 2020 policy changes that prompted this.

Now, in June 2024 Northback Holdings filed a lawsuit. We don't know how much that was worth. What's interesting, Mr. Speaker, is that that's how we got here, but this CBC article only mentions two payouts that have been made public, one for \$143 million to Atrum Coal and then another for \$95 million to Evolve Power. That doesn't add up to \$316 million. That only adds up to \$238 million from my reckoning, so there's \$78 million here that's unaccounted for. Where is that money going?

I believe that my friend from Banff-Kananaskis pressed the minister of environment today on the issue, demanded that he reveal to the public who was getting the additional money that we paid for. You know, there aren't many nice things that I can say about the minister of the environment, but one thing that I will give him credit for is that he sticks rigidly to his notes and refused to divulge to us and the public who is the recipient of this additional \$78 million payout. I would love to know who is getting this money. I wish the Finance minister would have the temerity to stand up and tell us, when debate closes, where this additional \$78 million is going. The people deserve to know.

Here's what really grinds my gears about these settlements, Mr. Speaker. So far we've paid out \$316 million in settlements for coal lawsuits. You would think that at least if we were paying out that kind of money we would be protecting our eastern slopes from coal mining, but we're not. We've opened the door wide to coal mining. Not only are we paying at least \$316 million to coal companies to not mine coal; we're turning around and saying: come in and mine coal. It's absolutely offensive. We've gotten nothing but embarrassment for this \$316 million payout. The people of Alberta want to know that the eastern slopes are protected and that their money is looked after, and neither of those things are happening in this bill. This government has the responsibility to tell people the truth.

I will note that the clock now reads 4:50. I will save my comments on funding for the Auditor General's office until another time, but I urge all members of the House to vote against this bill. I certainly look forward to some further disclosures from the Finance minister about who's getting what when it comes to coal payouts and capital grants to the Bryan J. Ward Professional Corporation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak?

The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to close debate.

Mr. Horner: Waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

Bill 19
Appropriation Act, 2026

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move second reading of Bill 19, Appropriation Act, 2026.

This act provides funding authority for the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government of Alberta for the 2026-2027 fiscal year. This includes \$218 million for the Legislative Assembly, \$62.5 billion for expense, \$4.8 billion for capital investments, and \$1.4 billion for financial transactions. It also includes a \$2 billion contingency to address unexpected in-year pressures, including support during natural disasters. Together this ensures government can continue delivering the programs and services Albertans rely on as outlined in Budget 2026.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Budget 2026 is focused on what matters during a challenging fiscal year. Alberta is facing global uncertainty, rising costs, continued population growth that is putting real pressure on services. Volatility in oil prices reinforces the need for a cautious and responsible fiscal plan. Budget 2026 projects a deficit of \$9.4 billion in '26-27, improving to \$7.6 billion and \$6.9 billion in the following years. These projections reflect uncertainty but also our commitment to maintain essential services. We will not cut core services to eliminate the deficit, we are not raising personal income taxes, and we will not introduce a provincial sales tax. Instead, we're focusing on disciplined spending and clear priorities. That means investing in health care, education, and critical infrastructure while managing taxpayer dollars responsibly.

Health care remains a top priority for Albertans. A growing and aging population along with rising costs continues to put pressure on the system. Budget 2026 proposes \$34.4 billion in total health care expense, a \$1.9 billion increase from the third-quarter forecast. This includes \$13.8 billion to operate and expand hospital and surgical systems. It also includes almost \$2.5 billion over three years for emergency health services, a record \$7.7 billion for physicians, \$525 million over three years for 50,000 additional surgeries, and \$223 million over three years to expand cancer care capacity. We're also investing \$9 million to train and retain rural health professionals and \$150 million over three years to modernize primary care. In addition, \$5.9 billion is allocated for continuing care through Assisted Living and Social Services, an increase of \$495 million. These investments are about improving access, reducing wait times, and strengthening care across the province.

Education is another key priority. Budget 2026 includes \$10.8 billion in operating expense for education, the highest in Alberta's history. This funding supports growing enrolment and increasing classroom complexity. It includes a commitment to hire more than 3,000 teachers and 1,500 educational assistants over three years. It also includes \$1.8 billion to support students with specialized needs. These investments are about ensuring students have the support they need to succeed and that classrooms remain strong and effective.

Alberta's population growth is increasing demand for infrastructure across the province. Budget 2026 includes \$28.3 billion in the capital plan over three years to build and maintain critical infrastructure. This includes advancing 161 school projects and planning 40 new schools. It also includes investments in health infrastructure, including diagnostic services and facility upgrades.

Beyond that, the plan includes \$1.1 billion over three years for family social supports and housing, including \$786 million for up

to 13,000 affordable housing units and \$150 million for seniors' lodges; \$785 million over three years for postsecondary facilities, including \$384 million for the NAIT advanced skills centre; \$2.7 billion over three years for roads and bridges; \$7.1 billion over three years for municipal infrastructure; and \$4.2 billion over three years for capital maintenance and renewal. These investments ensure Alberta can keep pace with growth and support strong communities across the province.

Budget 2026 reflects the realities Albertans are facing. Demand for services is growing while revenues remain uncertain. That requires disciplined decisions and a clear focus on priorities. This plan protects core services, invests in key areas, and manages public dollars responsibly. Bill 19 ensures government has the authority to deliver on that plan.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to support this bill.

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

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 19, the Appropriation Act, 2026. As I begin, having already been chastised by the shop steward, I want to assure my colleagues that I will not leave them in the lurch for the debate on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, never before have we seen a government spend so much and deliver so little. With this budget this UCP government has made an \$18 billion negative swing in just two years. This budget forecasts a deficit of \$9.4 billion and will double Alberta's debt to \$137 billion, debt levels this province has never seen before. This budget breaks the fiscal framework put in place by this UCP government only three years ago. In a *Calgary Herald* article dated the 27th of February, 2026, entitled *New Budget [Is] on Course to Collide with [The Province's] Own Fiscal Guardrails*, Trevor Tombe said: this is the first test of the fiscal framework, and it failed. He further said: the whole point of a fiscal anchor is to affect fiscal policy to help ensure sustainable public finances.

Mr. Speaker, this budget exceeds the allowable deficit by more than double. This budget does not show a path to balance within the three-year time frame in the fiscal framework. The Finance minister shared that he intends to make changes to the fiscal framework this fall. I hope that Albertans are used to the massive deficits by this so-called conservative government, because the minister has painted himself into a corner and has no choice but to change the fiscal framework that allows continuous deficits into the future.

We have asked what this government is doing with respect to affordability in this budget. While they claim affordability is top of mind, this budget increases educational property taxes, the tourism levy, and 30 – yes, you heard that right, Mr. Speaker; 30 – other fees and levies.

This is the second year of auto insurance premiums for good drivers increasing by another seven and a half per cent. Under this UCP government drivers find themselves paying hundreds of dollars more each year in auto insurance premiums. What many Albertans are perhaps not aware of is that the government collects a tax on those insurance premiums. That is estimated at more than \$1 billion this year, rising to \$1.2 billion by 2028-29. So while Albertans have to pay more for their insurance based on the decisions of this government, the government will be collecting more in taxes on those premiums.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, the UCP will collect an additional \$350 million in educational property taxes in 2026, more than they did in 2025-2026. We've seen the mayor of Calgary share his concerns that this will raise property taxes, in the largest hike that Calgarians have

seen, by \$330 for the average homeowner in Calgary. With this item alone the UCP has wiped out much of the touted income tax deduction for Calgary households.

Mr. Speaker, as I have discussed in this Chamber, I'll also talk about the tourism levy, which will bring in an additional \$70 million this year as the rate increases from 4 per cent to 6 per cent. The total amount collected will be \$200 million, with only \$75 million going to Travel Alberta to grow the tourism industry. We can certainly ask why Travel Alberta is not being given more funds to do their work. I've asked that in previous debates. The minister himself acknowledges that they estimate that Albertans will pay about 45 per cent of that levy, so \$90 million in revenue collected from the tourism levy, \$90 million in consumption tax paid to the province as Albertans enjoy their stay-cations and what this beautiful province has to offer.

Mr. Speaker, the government has stated the objective to have more people working in the trades, yet at the same time in this budget they will increase the fees for apprenticeship education, entrance qualifications, and entrance exams to get into the trades. The government is also increasing fees for class 1, 2, and 3 registration for vehicles and licensing fees. This seems counterintuitive if we want people to go into the trades and if we want to grow our transportation industry, which is critical to the economy of this province.

This government has also stated that they want to grow arts and culture industries, but at the same time they're going to ask Albertans to pay more for tickets at the Jubilee auditoria, more to access provincial historic sites. So just in general, I guess, with respect to tourism and enjoying everything that this province has to offer, this government wants Albertans to pay more. And let's be honest about what they are. They're consumption taxes.

Mr. Speaker, the government wants to grow agriculture, yet they increase costs to access grazing leases rather than looking at ways to increase access to leases in years of drought. The budget also does not include meaningful provisions to support farmers in their succession planning so that their children can take over the family farm.

In addition to increasing educational property tax, the UCP government in this budget is increasing fees for land titles and surveys. Mr. Speaker, this doesn't make housing more affordable, especially for younger people who are maybe looking at purchasing their first home.

This budget doesn't meaningfully include provisions to grow Alberta's tech sector. Mr. Speaker, as I debated earlier, this government is leading Albertans down the garden path. This budget raises taxes, levies, and fees to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars on everyday Albertans. This budget doesn't address Albertans' questions on where the money is going.

The corrupt care scandal isn't gone. We know that this UCP government wasted over \$100 million in their attempt to privatize lab services. We know they wasted \$70 million on Turkish Tylenol that wasn't used or wasn't even delivered. We know this UCP government had to cancel private surgical contracts to the tune of hundreds of millions more due to questionable purchasing contracts. Yet in the largest reorganization of the health system in Alberta's history, with the creation of 11 new Crown corporations and the shifting of authority and responsibility of services to four newly formulated ministries, the budget does not have clear accounting of the costs of that reorganization. Rather, the costs are obscured, like a game of hiding something underneath the coconut shells and moving them around and seeing whether or not you can keep track of where it is underneath the coconut shells.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have the same questions about a \$900 million loan to the Alberta petroleum marketing corporation. This Crown corp shouldn't need cash to operate. It trades in noncash

bitumen credits. When asked, the minister suggested that over \$300 million was required to meet the loan requirements for the North West upgrader. That still leaves \$600 million on the table which isn't accounted for. That sounds suspiciously maybe like the amount needed to conduct the studies required for a new pipeline to the west coast that Albertans might be paying for.

Finally, in estimates, Mr. Speaker, I pointed out that the budget documents state that, and I quote, the contingency amount is intended to address unanticipated spending, including disasters and emergencies and emergency priorities that may arise during the year. In addition, Treasury Board and Finance has an economic assessment team that assesses risks to the government of Alberta. Given that citizen petitions are being conducted as we speak, that could come to a referendum later this year, and the economic fallout seen in other places that have conducted referendums on separation, I was surprised the minister and his team have not budgeted any funds for conducting an economic impact assessment, nor did they set aside anything in the contingency for any potential negative impact on Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, there is much more to debate with Bill 19. I will not be supporting this bill. I encourage others to not support this bill, and I look forward to the debate of my colleagues.

Thank you.

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

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and deliver just a few comments in regard to Bill 19, the Appropriation Act, 2026. This is, as my colleague has so eloquently laid out, a money bill to approve Budget 2026. It is a lot to unpack. Of course, I think it is our responsibility here in this Chamber to do our very best to translate what can be very complicated and kind of burdensome documents and try to translate how it's going to impact the everyday lives of Albertans. They are big figures: a \$9.4 billion deficit and a \$137 billion debt by the end of fiscal year 2028-29. Those are big figures that I don't think any of us really have any point of reference to speak to. What I think is so important is that we take Budget 2026 and we distill it down into the ways that it actually impacts regular, everyday folks and regular, everyday households.

In Calgary, of course, where I have the pleasure of serving the good people of Calgary-Currie, their households just at minimum are going to be experiencing on average a \$340 increase to their property taxes at a time when cost-of-living and affordability considerations are absolutely top of mind. We know that the kitchen-table challenges, those real bread-and-butter issues around simply just making sure that the kids have the shoes that they need and the jacket for the weather, and maybe there's a summer camp or two lined up, are the kinds of considerations that are having to be made by families in Calgary and across the province. It begs the question of how Budget 2026 is actually making life easier and more affordable for families and for individuals who are just trying to get through another day and make it to the end of the month for the next paycheck.

In many ways I think Budget 2026 is a tale of two throne speeches. It strikes me that back in 2023 we heard the Premier reporting that Alberta was going to double its population by 2050, that Red Deer was going to hit a million people. Then the throne speech in the fall of 2025 told us: "Albertans are well aware of the effects of both high and low oil prices and inherently understand there is no need to panic or overreact. This isn't Alberta's first oil price roller coaster, after all." What a story those two throne speeches tell about the flux that Alberta has experienced in the last three years.

5:10

Budget 2026 is demonstrative of that, of a real complicated mess that we have got ourselves in when it comes to the economic growth and the expectations that we have of that economic growth as a result of a growing population with a growing tax base and people participating with discretionary dollars, getting out there, contributing to consumer spending, creating jobs. Now we see in Budget 2026 that a flow of people out of the province is actually going to dampen all of those things. We are going to see a sticky unemployment rate. We're going to see reductions in job creation and employment rates. I really worry deeply about the young people who are looking at Budget 2026 or who are watching today and thinking: where is the place for me in Alberta? Where is the place for me in the labour force?

I don't think that we really have found our way here in Alberta, and if Budget 2026 tells me anything, it is that the government has not done a great job of planning for a changing economy, for accommodating a really, indeed, challenging geopolitical environment and an ongoing reliance on incredible volatility when it comes to labour force, inputs like artificial intelligence, increasing costs for training and education, and certainly when it comes to trade diversification with partners across the country and around the world.

But back again to the impact of Budget 2026, because it is ultimately how it is going to hit people and their pocketbooks. We see just so, so little in Budget 2026 on how it is actually going to put more money in people's pockets and reduce the costs of everyday expenses. When it comes to the Ministry of Affordability and Utilities, Mr. Speaker, there is nothing to be done about the cost of groceries, one of the most pressing and most prominent issues for families, regardless of where they sit socioeconomically. The cost of groceries is eye-popping when we go to the grocery store, and I see nothing in Budget 2026 that is in fact addressing the cost of groceries and the cost of food.

Employment rates are fluctuating wildly, and as I mentioned, young people are wondering how they can afford to make ends meet. Will they be able to afford a home? Can they pay for the insurance of their vehicle? Can they pay to insure their home? When the inflation rate in Alberta has consistently ticked higher than the national averages in all of the main categories – food, shelter, transportation, and energy – I wonder where that Alberta advantage actually lies. Instead, what we have is increased volatility, increased market uncertainty, a deficit of \$9.4 billion, and debt servicing alone that is greater than probably half of the ministries that we have before us. It is setting ourselves up for some very, very challenging times and for the next generation who are going to be coming up, paying taxes, doing their best, trying to raise a family.

The point that we've made many times in this Chamber, and then I'll wrap up for the next person here to raise points on Budget 2026, is that the UCP government has never spent so much but delivered so little. What that means, I think, is about value for taxpayers' dollars. Are they feeling it? Are they seeing those investments? Do they actually believe that they are getting the programs and services, the infrastructure that their taxpayer dollars are paying for? It's about value, Mr. Speaker, and it's about the demonstration of impact on those programs. They're big dollar figures. I don't deny that. Nine point four billion dollars, a budget of \$85 billion in expenses, \$10 billion or more in capital spend: they are big numbers. But does it actually deliver the value that Albertans would expect, and are they feeling it every day when they have to go to the grocery store and pay what they do for some of the most basic costs?

Thank you so much. I'll pass it along.

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

Ms Al-Guneid: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 19, the bill that brings this budget to life. Thanks to the Member for Calgary-Currie for sharing her thoughts. Yes, as she has mentioned, it's the same budget that brought Albertans a \$9.4 billion deficit, and it's not by accident.

Alberta has enjoyed record oil production and exceptionally high resource revenue, which really are conditions that should have strengthened public services and made life better for Albertans. It takes some special UCP talent to waste money. The sheer size of the deficit has everything to do with the government's choices and unwillingness to control spending: Turkish Tylenol at \$70 million, legal payouts to foreign coal companies at \$200 million and more to come, new carpet at the Premier's office at \$280,000, just to name a few.

The Finance minister seems to be keeping a blind eye on wasteful spending in other ministries. Since the Finance minister delivered a deficit of \$9.4 billion, maybe, just maybe, it's time to pay attention. As we heard from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, we know the minister has not been paying attention to the Mental Health and Addiction ministry, where Sam Mraiche's lawyer has been handling funding for the recovery centres. Let's maybe help out the Finance minister with some other ministries.

We can start with Affordability and Utilities, shall we, Mr. Speaker? The Minister of Affordability and Utilities is authorizing the Alberta Electric System Operator to spend hundreds of millions of ratepayer – that's taxpayer – dollars to fund a market redesign. The numbers are always insightful. The market redesign budget increased from \$36 million in 2025 to \$85 million in 2026. The strategic-related initiatives increased from \$9.6 million in 2024 to \$103 million in 2026. That's a 1,000 per cent increase. The enabling of transformation increased from \$6.8 million in 2024 to \$100 million in 2026. That's again a 1,000 per cent increase in just two years. Oscar Wilde once said that bureaucracy is expanding to meet the needs of the expanding bureaucracy. That is a lot of money.

The AESO expenses are ultimately recovered from consumers, Mr. Speaker. These are ratepayers, and ratepayers are taxpayers, aren't they? Conservatives are fond of saying that there's only one taxpayer, but now they're trying to wiggle out of the accountability of the system operator's wild and rising costs by claiming that it's only paid by power consumers, not taxpayers. Taxpayers are power consumers. They are Albertans. Again, where is the Finance minister? Where does he sit on AESO increasing its spending by 1,000 per cent in just two years?

The Affordability and Utilities department has lost the plot on the affordability part, Mr. Speaker. These wild and increased costs are coupled with them limiting competition in the market and limiting the entry of low-cost energy to the market. Yes, we have increased supply of natural gas from Cascade and Base plants right now. We also have increased renewable generation. Both types of supply have nothing to do with the UCP policy. Alberta must plan for more affordable energy to enter the market for the future. That's for this department: out-of-control spending on the public dime with no real actions to improve affordability.

5:20

In fact, instead, with this budget Albertans received more property taxes, fees for seniors in continuing care, vehicle registration costs, registration costs for small businesses, and fees for trade workers to get certified. Not only that; there isn't a single action or specific step to help Albertans with the price of groceries. In fact, the minister of affordability failed to point to a single specific action his ministry is

doing to improve grocery prices despite multiple questions asked from my colleagues. So that's Affordability and Utilities.

Let's look at the Energy and Minerals ministry, Mr. Speaker. In 2023 five largely Australian companies – that's Valory Resources, Atrum Coal, Northback Holdings, and Cabin Ridge Holdings and Evolve Power – sued the Alberta government for a total of \$15 billion over the UCP flip-flopping on the coal policy. Some companies settled with the UCP government, and we only learned that because the companies disclosed the settlements in their financial statements. Neither the Premier nor the Finance minister, not anyone in this government, disclosed that the government settled with coal companies. Why?

Mr. Speaker, we found \$360 million in litigation matters in the supplementary yesterday, part of this budget, and Bill 19 right now, that is implementing this budget. Albertans are on the hook for over \$316 million in legal payouts because of this government's coal policy flip-flopping, and now there's a new \$2 billion lawsuit. Why didn't the Finance minister disclose the exact amounts when the settlements had happened, and why didn't he disclose this \$2 billion lawsuit? Can the minister confirm the exact settlement amount per company that received the settlement? Which companies and for how much? And how is that total \$360 million spent? Was there an alternative to settling with coal companies to protect taxpayers?

Where is the Finance minister in all this, Mr. Speaker? It is enraging, actually. It is offensive. And in the same energy ministry we see the ministry busy starting a new trade desk, the gas royalty in kind program, or GRIK. Does the Finance minister even know about this? It's not only a massive taxpayer risk, but it's also a program that the industry strongly opposes, yet we find it in this bad budget that the Finance minister produced. Why does the UCP government think it is competent enough and has all the right talents and expertise to do commodity trading and to compete with the private sector? Does the Finance minister actually understand that when the government takes oil or gas instead of cash, the province and, frankly, us, the taxpayers, are now exposed to more risk, the risk of price fluctuation, transportation bottlenecks, and bad timing in the market?

Does the Finance minister understand that when commodity prices fall or pipelines get clogged or issues arise that could impact this potential gas royalty in kind program, taxpayers, Albertans, would eat up that loss and not the private companies, Mr. Speaker? Does the Finance minister recognize that when things go wrong, companies would still get credits to set against the royalty obligation, but it is the Alberta budget and government revenue that would take that hit? That affects schools, health care, taxes, and all public services. Can the Finance minister explain: why isn't he asking questions about the increased risk and fiscal mismanagement in this energy ministry? So that's energy, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to end with the Environment and Protected Areas budget and the massive missed opportunities there, Mr. Speaker. For starters, environment was cut overall by 15 per cent, and what's hit the most here are important programs that help with water management and clean air programs. Also, the business communities need these programs to engage with First Nations and impacted communities through the ministerial programs.

Most tragic is the ongoing weakening of Alberta's industrial carbon pricing, or TIER, managed by this ministry. It's a program that attracted billions of dollars in investments and reduced emissions in heavy industry. It is truly unfortunate because major clean tech projects require stable carbon prices for decades. I heard the Finance minister actually mention Dow and Air Products and a few more. Well, that's progress, but I'm not sure he's making the connection between his budget and TIER and these major projects. Unfortunately, we didn't get any clarity of this program in this

budget and what the government would do to bring more certainty to the market, not only to slash emissions but to bring new major investments.

So here we are. The UCP were handed some of the strongest economic conditions in a generation and still produced a \$9.4 billion deficit, Mr. Speaker. It's a terrible budget. I will not be voting for Bill 19.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 19. This is a bill that will approve an enormous budget, but I will not be voting for this bill. This is a budget with a \$9.4 billion deficit, a budget that projects a debt of \$137 billion despite this government benefiting from near historic resource revenues. Never have Albertans seen their government spend so much and get so little back for it. After seven years of this UCP government and four years of this Premier there is not even any path to a balanced budget.

This budget fails to address priority issues, and I thank my colleagues that have spoken already to many of those issues that are missing. Priorities include affordability, health care, education. We are not seeing the things we need in health care. Wait times are not decreasing. Patient attachment is not increasing. Home care is not improving and getting to where it needs to be.

Let's look at what they've actually done for Indigenous health. Last week on March 20 they made an announcement that was exceedingly misleading and suggested new investment in Indigenous health. In their strengthening Indigenous health care announcement they said that Budget 2026 was investing \$34 million in initiatives to improve primary care for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Alberta, but let's check some of those facts.

They promised \$16 million in 2026 to support 95 physicians, several of whom are Indigenous, to help deliver reliable and accessible primary care and noted that these doctors are serving 18 Indigenous communities as well as in Edmonton and Calgary. This was presented as new money – they are going to improve Indigenous care – yet this is not an initiative of this government.

I checked with Dr. Esther Tailfeathers, who is a well-recognized Indigenous health care leader. In fact, the Indigenous ARP, which is a model of funding doctors to provide quality care, was started in 2012, when it supported five doctors, including Dr. Tailfeathers, and this grew to over 95 physicians. They serve over 45, not 18, Indigenous communities, and this was well before this government played any role. They did not answer the need for faster and easier access by anything new in this budget. That was there. This \$16 million is not new funding, and it is not anything they should pretend to take credit for.

Four years ago this government brought together Indigenous health leaders to make recommendations to improve Indigenous primary care because it desperately needed improvement. The report was called Honouring Our Roots, and it made 22 recommendations. One year later the government put out an implementation plan. This was under our current Premier. None of these recommendations have been implemented, yet this government continues ongoing projects, which is good, but is marketing them as their great initiatives that they're now investing in.

5:30

They said that over the past three years they've begun taking meaningful steps forward and that they are acting on these recommendations. Instead of implementing any of these 22 recommendations, they implemented something unique called the Indigenous primary care innovation fund. This is a smokescreen.

This is a grant system that pits communities against each other for pennies. Only a few grants are awarded out of the over 100 that were requested. These were never built to be sustainable, and there's no opportunity to learn from successful projects and scale them up. It is another way that our government has wasted public dollars and not done anything that brings value.

This is the pattern that's reflected in our 2026 budget. In this announcement last week they also said that they will spend \$16 million to recruit and train patient navigators. I would like to know how much of that funding is actually new because this is not a new program.

In 2019, when I was still working in the health system, I worked with Eileen Booth, who was the Indigenous liaison, a new title, maybe called a navigator. She was the Indigenous liaison at Foothills hospital, and at that time we looked to understand, find, and implement solutions to help Indigenous patients who lived on nations to improve their ability to attend outpatient clinics. We worked together as a team with the booking clerks and the whole team that would be involved in this, including an Indigenous medical student, including the people that lived on the nation. We learned and were able to find that there was knowledge that the booking clerks had no idea of such as that transport could only be available during certain hours of the day, so no point booking an appointment at 8 a.m. because people couldn't actually get there.

Booking clerks were empowered by this. Indigenous people were empowered by the questions that followed from booking clerks saying, "Hey, what works for you?" rather than just taking a power trip and telling them when they had to be there.

A major limit of care for Indigenous people in our hospitals is indeed co-ordinating discharges, and the navigators are meant to be in that role. They're needed more than ever because of the breakup of the health system. Nobody really knows what part of the system's different services are going to be provided, and a patient, an Indigenous patient, being discharged may need all the pillars. They may need primary care. They may need mental health. They may need ongoing specialty appointments through the acute-care system.

Now, by breaking things up, we need to push more people spending their time trying to talk the language of: who does what? This is not a good use of money. We should have been fixing the gap at the end, which was making sure we had primary care at the end to serve Indigenous people and provide that coverage that was needed.

This is all a consequence of the disintegration of the system at a time when we need integration and when every other health system is moving towards integration. The liaisons are now simply discharge co-ordinators, and it's being presented as a wonderful new opportunity.

Quit wasting money. Spend it on the real solutions. Take advice from those who know what we need and know how to fix the system instead of sidelining them and listening to consultants who can look at reports but not know on the ground what actually is needed in the system.

The health of Indigenous people should be improving. Life expectancy in First Nations is a staggering 19 years less than the provincial average. Infant mortality is twice the rate of the Alberta average, and suicides are three times, but what is this government measuring? I'll tell you. They will measure the volume of correspondence received by the Indigenous patient safety investigator. Yikes. We should be looking at health outcomes.

The previous implementation report said that immediate action was needed to develop key performance indicators based on primary health care indicators, and we need benchmarks to moderate change. I want to thank the people within the ministry and

the Indigenous community for knowing what's there, for making these recommendations, and I hope that this government will start spending money where it needs to be spent instead of wasting it. I definitely cannot support this budget as it is, which continues to go down the totally wrong path.

Thank you. I will turn this over to my colleagues.

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

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to join debate against this 2026 budget brought forward from this UCP government. Bluntly, this budget is a double whammy for Albertans, a \$9.4 billion deficit with a plan to keep Alberta in a deficit for, well, the foreseeable future anyway, deferring the cost of the UCP's bad decisions on to the next generation of Albertans so that they can carry it and then eventually repay it while, on the other hand, also raising fees and taxes. Yeah. Alberta has the highest youth unemployment, so what message does this budget send to our young Albertans? There's nothing in it for them that's going to make life better now, but certainly there are things that are going to, well, burden them forever with a deficit.

Please make this make sense, Mr. Speaker. Make this make sense to my constituents. I had the privilege to spend some time with a young lady. Let's just call her Liv. She's a five-year-old. She is full of curiosity, movement, and so much potential. Now, Liv and her dad visited me in my constituency office so they could share some of the struggles that they are facing every single day living in Alberta. In addition to being an energetic, cheeky five-year-old, Liv has a rare disease. At first this was diagnosed as mild autism. Her diagnosis has since been updated to Rett syndrome. This rare disorder stems typically from a single mutation in a chromosome. It means that her parents did absolutely nothing wrong. They did nothing wrong.

Now, with Rett syndrome children afflicted start life very normal, like every other kid, hitting those milestones one after another, but as they age, in that six- to 18-month period subtle changes start. They're starting to be noted. Reduced eye contact, slower motor development, and then it progresses into rapid regression, where hand skills and speech are replaced with repetition and, well, busy hands.

Now, Rett syndrome has no cure, so the absolute best option is for Liv to receive the support the minute there's an indication of a concern, and that's exactly what Liv's parents did. They sought out support. Liv was provided the diagnosis of mild autism at the time. As her symptoms progressed, they sought out support again, and although her diagnosis changed to Rett syndrome, the supports that she and her family received did not.

Liv was added to the wait-list for FSCD funding back in 2023, and the hope was that Liv would have access to occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech-language pathology, all of these things and whatever other things she needed access to, those necessities of life, those health care pieces she needed, early, but that's not what happened. Now, I met with Liv and her dad in January of this year, and there's no indication of the length of the FSCD wait-list, nor how much longer Liv will wait until she can access the health care she so desperately needs or when she'll hear an update on her – where is she in the wait-list?

5:40

Mr. Speaker, early intervention is key. It's key to maintaining the abilities that Liv has right now. It's key to ensuring that she has the best life she can have even with a diagnosis where her quality of life will continue to get more complicated and her needs will increase year after year. Liv's prognosis means that she will be dependent on her parents for her entire life.

Now, you might ask: why wouldn't Liv's parents access through paying for private? Well, because they can't. Their household relies on a single income. They are parents to two young people, including Liv, who requires the round-the-clock, increased care. Carl, Liv's dad, shared that in addition to the frustration and desperation from the lack of access to health resources his daughter so desperately needs, he then also has to weigh whether to feed his family or find the funds to pay out of pocket so that Liv has access to the health resources she needs. This means that Carl has to look at continuing to rack up debt on those credit cards and pay interest as he tries to get Liv the care she so clearly deserves. What's in this budget for Liv and Carl? What portion of the \$9.4 billion deficit comes from investing in Albertans like Liv and Carl? It's really hard to tell, Mr. Speaker.

Now, in estimate discussions for Children and Family Services I emphasized the importance of early intervention. It's a concept that has been discussed inside this House several times. Although early intervention shows the biggest return on investment, that a dollar today is worth hundreds tomorrow – and this is especially true when we consider Albertans like Liv, where Liv's quality of life, goodness, the quality of life for her entire household depends on this government doing their job and allocating resources smartly and responsibly for Albertans – did we see real investment in early intervention in the 2026 budget? Shocker: we did not. In fact, what the minister of children and services decided was to resource early intervention at just over 1 per cent over this year's forecast. Yeah. That's not an investment, Mr. Speaker. That's straight up poor decision-making. Well, that is, of course, if your goal is to serve Albertans and not yourself.

Now, Bill 19: bringing forward Budget 2026 does not make Liv or Carl's lives more affordable. It doesn't provide access to the health care supports desperately needed for Liv right now. Liv is only five years old. She is happy, and her parents work their tails off so that she stays that way, but what happens when her parents' strongest, best effort isn't good enough, Mr. Speaker? Liv's prognosis keeps her dependent on her family for the duration of her lifetime.

Liv's father is now watching his daughter slowly regress, seeing more excited hands, less intentional movement, fewer spoken words, and more frustration from a five-year old who's just trying to communicate. Does this budget help Carl? What about Carl's mental health? Where in this budget does it support Carl when the voices in his head tell him to quit, when the voices in his head tell him that his family would be better off without him, that his best efforts are just not good enough? Where in this budget is that investment for Carl? Mental Health and Addiction ministry? No. Carl does not have an addiction concern. Well, not yet. Carl needs mental health support so that he can continue to be the amazing parent he is to Liv and her sister. Now, as we've discussed, there's nothing here for Liv. She will continue to age without the necessary resources to set her up for success. That is a decision this UCP government made. That is intentional.

Now, somehow this UCP government is wasting a boom during a boom. Alberta has shown near-record resource wealth, yet somehow this government expects Albertans to be okay with a \$9.4 billion dollar deficit. They aren't, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, it is required of me to interrupt you at this point. In accordance with Standing Order 64(3), the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bills on the Order Paper for second reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:46 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Deol	Ip
Batten	Eggen	Metz
Brar, Gurinder	Ellingson	Sabir
Brar, Gurtej	Eremenko	Schmidt
Chapman	Guthrie	Wright, P.

Totals:	For – 44	Against – 15
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[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. After a very fulfilling day in the government, I wish to move that the Assembly be adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30, March 25, 2026.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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