



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 25, 2026

Day 38

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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Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)  
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Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)  
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Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC),  
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Smith, Hon. Danielle, ECA, Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC),  
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Tejada, Lizette, Calgary-Klein (NDP)  
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Wright, Justin, Cypress-Medicine Hat (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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Devin Dreesen	Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors
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Nathan Neudorf	Minister of Affordability and Utilities
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R.J. Sigurdson	Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
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Chelsae Petrovic	Parliamentary Secretary for Health Workforce Engagement
Jason Stephan	Parliamentary Secretary for Constitutional Affairs
Ron Wiebe	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (North)
Justin Wright	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (South)
Tany Yao	Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Northern Development

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

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**Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee**

Chair: Mr. Lundy  
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Sawhney  
Ellingson  
Nixon  
Pancholi  
Sawyer

**Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Chair: Ms Lovely  
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring  
Batten  
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**Standing Committee on Private Bills**

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

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Cyr  
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**Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

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Cyr  
Ip  
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Rowswell  
Yao

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 25, 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 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 Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Camrose.

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some guests I have today from Countryside Christian School and their teacher, Mr. Liam Giesbrecht. Would you all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Chamber.

**The Speaker:** Leduc-Beaumont.

**Mr. Lundy:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you on behalf of my colleague the MLA for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain a group of grade 6 students from Meridian Heights elementary school. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members 52 amazing grade 6 students from Grace Martin school in the heart of LeeField Community League. I invite you to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Members, I am pleased to introduce Sarah Clark, a fantastic young woman with an impressive record behind and a bright future ahead of her. Sarah is a constituency assistant serving the wonderful riding of Calgary-Peigan and has served as a youth representative on the Calgary-Hays board for many years. Today Sarah is joined by her mother, Teresa Clark. Sarah, I know I speak on behalf of many colleagues when I say that we look forward to what you choose to do next. I ask that both of you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Next up is Calgary-Edgemont. Calgary-Edgemont.

**Ms Hayter:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's bringing me great joy today to introduce you to my daughter. Fun mom brag, she got 4 out of 4 on her last math test as well as a speech she did to her class. I'm always so proud of you, Clara. Thank you for joining me during your spring break and learning more about what we do here in the Alberta Legislature. Please rise and receive the well-deserved welcome.

**The Speaker:** My apologies, Calgary-Edgemont. It looked to me like somebody else was going to get up, and then they didn't, and I was wrong.

Next up is the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce and welcome the mayor of the town of Stettler, Gord Lawlor, along with councillors Dusty Myshral and Sharon Fischer and the members of the town administration. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Mr. Ip:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you members of the Edgemont Community League. They do incredible work in supporting communities in my riding of Edmonton-South West. We have President Connor Haste-Palindat and board members Kathy Pham, Stacy McIntyre, Kirsten Swensrude, Raymark Dizon, and volunteer Pia Liberty Velasco. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Kim Ruse. Kim is the CEO of FearIsNotLove. Her tireless advocacy for victims of domestic violence is certainly well known. I ask Ms. Ruse to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

### Members' Statements

#### High-risk Offender Monitoring

**Mr. Rowswell:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on a matter of fundamental importance to every family, business owner, and resident in our province: the right to feel safe in our own communities. For too long Albertans have felt the consequences of the federal catch-and-release bail system that often prioritizes the interests of repeat offenders over the protection of law-abiding citizens. Our government is saying: enough.

With Budget 2026 we are putting the safety of Albertans first and holding criminals accountable by providing \$4.1 million over the next three years to expand Alberta's ankle bracelet electronic monitoring program. This is more than just a line item on a budget. It is a critical tool for our justice system. By expanding this program, we are ensuring 24/7 supervision of high-risk and repeat offenders who are out on bail or community release. This technology allows for the enforcement of strict inclusion and exclusion zones, barring offenders from homes, workplaces, and schools where they could do further harm.

Perhaps most importantly, this expansion is about giving victims their lives back. For the first time, participating victims will receive instant, real-time alerts on their devices if a high-risk offender violates a boundary or nears their location. This provides a level of real-time awareness and peace of mind that was previously unavailable.

These funds support a centralized monitoring unit within Alberta correctional services that tracks GPS devices around the clock. This is not just about watching but intervention. It adds a robust layer of oversight to our existing supervision methods, ensuring court-ordered conditions are followed. Mr. Speaker, we're providing the court with the tools they need to combat crime effectively. We are sending a clear message. If you are a high-risk offender, you will be monitored, you will be held accountable, and the safety of our communities will not be compromised.

Thank you.

#### Property Taxes and Government Spending

**Member Kayande:** When people think about Calgary-Elbow, they think about the beautiful homes on the riverbank, but I want to talk about the other Calgary-Elbow, the inner city riding with one of the highest percentages of renters in Alberta, with postwar bungalows

crammed to the rafters with people struggling to afford their lives. This Calgary is unaffordable. Calgary renters will see their rent go up by \$250 per year on average to pay for this UCP government's property tax increase. Servers, Uber drivers, gig workers, employees at the local Safeway, cleaners, health care aides, school educational assistants: your cost of living is going up because of this government.

The UCP promised a tax cut and then took it all away with higher property taxes. What do these property taxes pay for? Seventy million dollars blown on Turkish Tylenol; \$50 million of that is still held by the vendor and the government refuses to get it back. Untold millions in health care severance payments that the government is still hiding from us. Eleven health CEOs where there used to be one. Four health ministers and staffed-up ministerial offices, up from one. Let's not forget the Premier's beautiful new red carpet, higher MLA living allowances, new salaries for a platoon of parliamentary secretaries. It's millions spent to feed those who already have enough.

Oil revenue is high, the fourth highest on record. Deficits are high. Spending is a record. Results have never been worse. My constituents want to know: where did the money go? I tell them the truth. The money has been siphoned off for a bloated bureaucracy of the UCP's own making, sweetheart deals, consulting fees, and middlemen. I tell them the RCMP is investigating. Maybe they'll find out where the money went, but the money is gone and your taxes are going up to pay for it.

**The Speaker:** Airdrie-East.

### Midwifery Services

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The role of midwives in supporting women, newborns, and families across Alberta has been important to me and so many for many years. I've consistently advocated for strong recognition, support, and integration in midwifery care within Alberta's health care system. I've heard directly from families and midwives across Alberta about the difference this model of care makes. It offers continuity, trust, and patient-centered support during pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period. Midwives are especially important for families who face barriers to accessing maternity services. This is why I've continued to raise the issue and work alongside my colleagues to ensure midwifery care is supported in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Our government recognizes the vital role midwives play and is taking concrete actions through the Alberta midwife strategy. This \$10 million three-year investment focuses on long-term workforce development, better integration within the health system, and expanding equitable access to care. The strategy reflects a shared commitment to excellence and growth in midwifery services.

1:40

The progress is clear. As of January 2026 approximately 190 midwives are practising in Alberta. This is a 25 per cent increase since 2021. This gain helps ensure families in and around Alberta continue to have access to timely care. This strategy also places a strong emphasis on innovation by supporting rural and remote birth worker initiatives, expanding education and training opportunities, and strengthening collaborative care models. Together these efforts help ensure that families receive safe and well co-ordinated care while also supporting the long-term sustainability of midwifery services in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, supporting midwives has long been a priority of mine, and I am happy to see that advocacy reflected in real action. As evident through its actions, our government remains committed to working

with partners to ensure families receive high-quality, compassionate midwifery care now and into the future.

### Cancer Surgery Wait Times

**Ms Hoffman:** By the end of this statement you'll know the truth about what's happening with cancer care in Alberta today, but let's start with what the Premier said before the last election. She pledged that no one would have to pay for health care. She signed a guarantee. She said she would fix health care in 90 days, and then when talking about cancer patients, she said, and I quote: everything that built up before you got to stage 4 and that diagnosis, that's completely within your control. End quote. Hearts stopped. Did she really blame cancer patients for their diagnosis? Women dealing with breast cancer, firefighters developing lung cancer? Surely she didn't mean that.

Four years ago 70 per cent of breast cancer patients had their tumors removed within the medically recommended window. Today that's down to 43 per cent. That firefighter who got lung cancer because he was doing his job helping others, today he's half as likely to get his lung tumor removed in the window as he was before the last election. Why are wait times going up, some ask? Because the UCP cares more about American-style, two-tiered health care than they do about you. They prioritize staffing private surgical centres, leaving hospital operating rooms empty right now because nurses and anesthetists are working for the Justice minister's cousin Sam Mraiche at his private surgical centres.

I'll bet there isn't a single Albertan who wants someone to lose their window to beat cancer because the UCP chose to prioritize profits over people. To the cancer patients, this is not your fault. To the voters, this isn't your fault either. The UCP promised that they'd make things better and said that you could trust them with your health care, but they've broken that promise, and that's the truth.

**The Speaker:** Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

### National Indigenous Water Operator Day

**Mr. Cyr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today to recognize National Indigenous Water Operator Day. It is an honour to be able to shine a light on the amazing professionals who work diligently behind the scenes to protect the most precious resource. As we often say, water is life, and those who protect it deserve our highest respect and support. While much of their work goes unseen, these water operators provide an essential service and the foundation of health and safety in Indigenous communities every single day, and this government will always support them.

World Water Day is recognized and celebrated on March 22, but this day comes first. It is a vital reminder that before we celebrate water as a global resource, we must honour and recognize the people who protect it locally and those who benefit, our friends and neighbours. Since this day came into effect in 2022 it has been embraced from coast to coast to coast, from community ceremonies to educational tours to the illumination of Niagara Falls.

For many Indigenous communities water is far more than just a utility; it is a living entity and the heartbeat of life itself, Mr. Speaker. The role of an Indigenous water operator carries a unique importance. These individuals are skilled professionals who are cultural stewards of the land and waters, ensuring their communities have access to safe, reliable water, all while protecting this resource for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, these operators are the front-line protectors of our environment and the public health. They show up each day and make sure these systems work properly no matter how remote the location. I

ask that we recognize National Indigenous Water Operator Day inside of this Legislature.

**The Speaker:** Calgary-Currie.

### Complex Classroom Supports

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In November the Premier hosted a teachers' telephone town hall. That evening a teacher and constituent of Calgary-Currie called, and much to her surprise, the Premier took the question. My constituent's name is Melissa. She's a junior high teacher. She also works part-time at Indigo bookstore to make up for lost wages and to get a discount on books for her classroom because otherwise there wouldn't be any. Her colleagues have been working for months with money won from a private grant to add books to the school library for the first time in decades, and because the school doesn't have a librarian, the teachers volunteer their time so that students can build a love for reading.

Melissa goes to Costco every Sunday to buy food for kids who would otherwise have nothing to eat. She buys her students their pencils, their notebooks, markers, and calculators since these supplies aren't funded after grade 6. More than 80 per cent of the students at her school are English language learners. Each class, with at least 30 kids each, has at minimum five coded IPP students with numerous more waiting for assessments. The school has just one part-time educational assistant.

Hearing the story, the Premier was shocked. She'd never heard such a thing. But she assured Melissa that, come the new year, supports would arrive, and hers would be one of the first schools to get help. Guess what. Her school was not on the complexity team list, and no help is on the way. For every school that is getting the support, there are dozens more who continue to go without. The Premier made a promise to Melissa in November, to 51,000 teachers, to hundreds and thousands of children and their families. They are tired of waiting, and they're tired of the UCP's empty promises.

### Notices of Motions

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

**Mr. Dyck:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 207, Primary Provincial Industries Recognition Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, sponsored by myself.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of the dashboards that I referred to today about people being treated for their lung cancer surgeries and breast cancer surgeries outside a window. They're printed from the government website.

### Oral Question Period

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

### Premier's Acceptance of Gifts and Benefits

**Mr. Nenshi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's story on gifts from the Saudi Arabian government keeps changing. They have a real responsibility here to clear the air by doing something they never do, which is to be transparent. What do they have to

hide? How many flights? Which hotels? Which palaces? In the last two years of her public disclosures the Premier has disclosed precisely zero gifts. This is absurd. Will the Premier simply disclose a list of all the gifts she has received?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the member opposite has spent the last two days talking about cat sculptures that have a market value somewhere around \$80 if you melted down the copper while I was at CERAWeek in Houston selling Alberta to the world. This is the reason why we do these trips, so that I can be on a stage with energy minister Tim Hodgson talking about how Canada and Alberta are working together with our MOU so that we can expand pipeline access. It's why I was able to meet with Doug Burgum to talk about how we're going to get more pipeline access built to the United States. That's the work that we do when we go abroad.

**The Speaker:** I'm not sure whether the rule about mentioning someone's presence or absence in the House applies when it's yourself. [interjections] No, it was the answer, not the question.

1:50

**Mr. Nenshi:** Of course, while at CERAWeek the Premier's chief of staff had an aneurysm on Twitter talking about golden cats.

Now, the Conflicts of Interest Act, however, is very, very clear. The Premier should know that. She's the only Premier ever to be found in contravention of said act. It says that a member may disclose any advice that they have received from the Ethics Commissioner. The Premier has claimed that the Ethics Commissioner cleared her receiving the largest gift of any Canadian politician in history from a foreign government and that it was A-okay. She's allowed to table that result. Why doesn't she table that now?

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, the only one who was having an aneurysm was the man across the aisle. I watched him flailing his arms and bulging his eyes as he talked about a gold cat that turned out to be made of copper.

Here's the fact of the matter. I know he's unfamiliar with the ways of international protocol, but what happens is that when we host international delegations and when we want to take them to the oil sands, we have to take them in a chartered aircraft. We don't have government planes anymore, and I was partly responsible for that decision, I must tell you. But what happens is that when we charter a plane, we do it because . . .

**Ms Gray:** Point of order.

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

**Mr. Nenshi:** We're actually quite familiar with international protocol here, and we know that it is possible to say no, to say: no, it's not right to accept lavish gifts from another government. In fact, each year every MLA has to fill out a form saying if they've flown on any noncommercial aircraft. I always thought it was a bit silly because who does that? Well, the Premier does. Yet the Premier chose to keep it a secret until I asked her about it. We still don't know how many flights she took or which hotels. Will she tell us today?

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite has no credibility because when he says things that just aren't the case, it diminishes the next thing that comes out of his mouth. This is a member

who has insulted the Americans. He's insulted the Saudis. He has insulted hockey team owners. He has insulted developers. He insulted the head of Uber, that I think also got him sued. This is not somebody who knows how to do international diplomacy. We do on this side. We've been doing it well. It's part of the reason we've got great and growing relationships with many members.

**Ms Gray:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** A point . . . [interjections] I will recognize you, but you've got to wait for that because I need to point out that a point of order was noted at 1:52.

Now for the second set of questions. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Nenshi:** I'll tell you who this government insults every single day, Mr. Speaker. It insults the common sense of Albertans by thinking that Albertans are stupid and will fall for their gaslighting.

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

### Children's Pain Medication Purchase

**Mr. Nenshi:** Speaking of gaslighting, let's talk about Sam Jaber. The government is intricately tied to this guy, a storefront accountant who has somehow become incredibly wealthy and incredibly well connected because of this government. It's worth nothing that he was the CFO for Sam Mraiche during the Turkish Tylenol scandal, and that was not AHS procurement; that was the Premier. Why doesn't she ask her buddy for the money back?

**The Speaker:** A point of order was noted at 1:53.  
The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the health minister has mentioned several times that this was an AHS contract. AHS wrote the terms. AHS did not do the conflict screening. AHS did not have oversight of a lawyer to make sure what would happen if there was nonfulfillment of the contract. As a result, after the passage of time they have made a choice to try to seek reimbursement, and that is an AHS decision. There are established processes when you have contract disputes, and we look forward to them pursuing them.

**Mr. Nenshi:** That backtracking is remarkable, but let's backtrack even further to October 2023. That October Mr. Jaber set up a numbered company to get a private surgical account. A week later the Premier's office pushed for immediate action to get him appointed to the Invest Alberta board. Two weeks later she flew him on taxpayer dollars to the Middle East with her, and a few weeks later Mr. Jaber hosts the Premier in a lavish suite in Vancouver. Who is this guy? How did he get these connections? What the heck is going on here?

**The Speaker:** First of all, I want to say that a minute has now passed without a point of order. That's a good start.  
The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, there are lots of people who wish to do business with government and the various agencies. I have many meetings. Staff have many meetings. Ministers have many meetings. We always make sure that any contract negotiations are done by the independent public service. We now have a new procurement process to make sure that all of the protocols are followed with contracts to ensure that there aren't any of the mistakes that were made in the AHS procurement. It's part of the reason why we had to develop a different process.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Of course, Justice Wyant said that AHS procurement said: don't do this deal; this is a bad deal. It was political direction from the Premier and from the then health minister and from their political staff that forced AHS to do this deal. Now the Premier is trying to blame AHS procurement for the deal when the Wyant report said that it was her fault. Once again, why did the Premier get involved with all these people, and why did she push so hard for her friends, her buddies, her travel partners, and the Justice minister's cousin to get hundreds of millions of dollars in government contracts?

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. What is true is that when I first got elected, we ended up having supply chain problems that led to an international crisis in being able to get children's ibuprofen and acetaminophen. There were very few suppliers in the world, and our job as officials is to make a decision on whether or not we want to send our procurement department from AHS out to try to find some. We, of course, made the decision that we wanted to do something. I'm hearing from the member opposite that he would have made the decision to do nothing, but the fact of the matter is that there are a lot of family members who were feeling very concerned with sick kids not able to get the medicine they needed.

**The Speaker:** A point of order is noted at 1:57. [interjections] Order.

For the third set of questions we have the Leader of the Official Opposition.

### Premier's Acceptance of Gifts and Benefits (continued)

**Mr. Nenshi:** To be clear, this government did worse than nothing. They wasted \$100 million of taxpayers' money on nothing. Now, quote: duplicitous, entitled, secretive, wasteful, and completely out of touch with the priorities of everyday Albertans. End quote. That is a quote from 2014 from the Premier when she was Leader of the Opposition. Now when she's asked about things, she says, "All the rules were followed," never mentioning that she changed the rules to her benefit. What happened to that person? Why the change as soon as she became Premier?

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

**Ms Smith:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would invite the member to go and speak to his House leader, who actually has been a minister and has been in government before and understands how protocols work. When you have an ambassador that you host, there is a customary exchange of gifts, artwork. In fact, I've got a very long list in front of me that's about seven pages long of all of the gifts that they exchange with various dignitaries. This is what happens in government. It's a way of building trust, a way of building relationships so that you can further that into trade relationships. You've got a member opposite who doesn't want to be friends or build relationships with anyone. That's pretty obvious.

**Mr. Nenshi:** She does tend to go to personal insults when she's that rattled, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Nenshi:** The reason that she's got this list is because we disclosed everything. She discloses nothing.

The Premier once said that the PC Party simply can't be fixed because it views the public purse as its birthright. Of course, she

said that before she crossed the floor to that party and before her chief of staff did the remarkable job of crossing the floor twice. I suppose that power changes people. Premier, were the private jets, seven-star hotel . . .

**The Speaker:** The Premier.

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, I don't know. For a mayor who had to host a lot of international dignitaries and also white hat a lot of them, I would have thought he understands the issues around hosting and protocol. When we receive gifts on behalf of the people and the province of Alberta, they are on display in many government offices. They are not personal gifts. He is mixing a number of different things up. When we want to host people, as they have four times when they were in government, to see our oil sands, yeah, we also host them at government expense.

**The Speaker:** A point of order was noted at 1:58.

**Mr. Nenshi:** I'm going to reread a question from that same member from 2014.

This government continues to claim that they are living within their means, but when the Premier herself spends more on a single trip than thousands of hard-working Albertans earn in a single year, it is impossible to take these claims seriously. The Premier's credibility is in tatters and with it the credibility of the government on fiscal issues. Again to the Premier: why doesn't she see that her actions and her words simply don't line up?

2:00

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the job of the Intergovernmental and International Relations minister, which I am, and the job of me as Premier of Alberta, which I am, is to be our number one diplomat, and that means that we have to go and meet with people to talk about the advantages and sell Alberta to the world, as I was just doing in Houston. I can tell you that we are very close to seeing hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil going in all directions, and the reason for that is because we're building relationships. We're telling the Alberta story. We're building those relationships, and we're going to continue to do that. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The next set of questions belongs to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, and we should all make it possible to hear both the question and the answer.

### Citizen-initiated Referendums

**Ms Pancholi:** Twice now the Member for Leduc-Beaumont has been asked as committee chair when he will be calling the first meeting of the committee reviewing the forever Canada petition. Twice now the chair and the UCP have refused to answer this simple question. I wonder why. It's obviously because the Premier is trying to bury the voices of half a million Albertans to stack the deck in favour of a UCP-supported separatist petition aimed at taking Alberta out of Canada. Why else would the UCP ignore the only valid petition that is before this Legislature?

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and answer the questions from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud on this topic. I have already answered a number of times in this Chamber and have been very clear that there's a process in place. The report was tabled and the committee has been struck. The chair will call that whenever he feels it's necessary to do that.

But what I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that I am surprised that the members opposite actually want to participate in this committee at all, or any committee, for that matter. Last time we put together a committee, they decided to not show up at all. In fact, they became the classic quitter caucus.

**Ms Pancholi:** The Premier and every UCP MLA have been asked to denounce separatism many times. Instead, they just mindlessly repeat the same word salad phrase while changing the rules to give separatists a clear path to a referendum. The reason why is clear. The CEO of the Alberta Prosperity Project, Mitch Sylvestre, is leading the separatist cause but also remains a UCP constituency president. The Prosperity Project also took in more than \$1 million from undisclosed, possibly foreign, sources while also meeting with U.S. officials to promote Alberta becoming the 51st state. Will the UCP just admit what Albertans already know? There's no distinction between the UCP and separatists.

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, in that word salad I didn't hear a single thing that resembled a question from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. What I can say is that on this side of the House we do believe in direct democracy. We believe in a threshold that is reasonable, and as a result, we have a petition process that is going through and we're watching it as it goes through the process. The members opposite hate direct democracy because the last two times we've gone to the polls, they have been trounced. Albertans have rejected them, and they're going to keep rejecting them time and time again.

**Ms Pancholi:** Well, half a million Albertans have already used their direct democracy tools, and the UCP is ignoring them. The vast majority of Albertans do not want to separate from Canada, but they do deserve to know who is funding the separatist movement since the separatists are the only ones the UCP are listening to. National law enforcement and intelligence agencies have warned about the risk of foreign interference in a separatist referendum. It doesn't matter if the Premier gets her security clearance when it seems she only has ears for the separatists. Will the Premier clear the air and remove the people trying to break up Canada from her party?

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP only has ears for the communists, and on this side of the House we have ears for all Albertans. That's why the Premier continues to go and sell Alberta as a prominent place to do business.

Now, the members opposite, their approach to the current situation we're in with the relationship with the United States is to insult President Trump. On the other hand, our Premier goes to the United States, meets with high-ranking officials, including one of the most powerful secretaries in the cabinet, Doug Burgum, to sell Alberta. Mr. Speaker, we are known on the international stage. The members opposite are nowhere to be seen.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and we're at the point without preambles on the supplementaries.

### Food Prices and Affordability

**Mr. Schmidt:** The cost of groceries has skyrocketed out of control, and more Albertans than ever don't know where their family's next meal is coming from. What has this government done to help? They've built a website called affordable advice for life, with tips for Albertans to save on groceries. One such helpful tip: shop for generic brands. How can this Premier justify spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on luxurious red carpet for her office while telling starving Albertans just to buy no-name butter?

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really proud to be part of a government that puts Albertans first every single day. In fact, one of the most effective tools that a government has to address affordability is maintaining great supply and demand, which is why our Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation has done a tremendous amount of work to see production in Alberta increase. It's why we've lowered taxes. It's why we've seen venture capital come to Alberta in numbers never seen before, especially not under the NDP who drove out investment, to make sure that Albertans have good-paying jobs and a place to shop, and to make sure that they have a future to look forward to.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, given that dairy is supply managed and given that the website offers even more helpful advice, like splitting a Costco membership with family members to buy groceries in bulk, and encourages people, "Don't be afraid to access your local emergency food banks," and given that at the same time this Premier is accepting skybox tickets for Oilers games, private flights and luxury stays in Middle Eastern hotels, and shiny golden cats from Saudi princes, if the Premier is behaving like Marie Antoinette, will she update the website to tell Albertans to just let them eat cake?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad the NDP is finally admitting that it is federal policies like dairy supply chain that are driving prices up for Albertans and all Canadians. In fact, all these measures that the federal government put in place, from carbon taxes, methane taxes, strychnine bans, fertilizer bans, fuel taxes, and all those costs: you know who kept them in power that whole time? The NDP. They're the ones who drove up costs. In fact, they even ran the last election on increasing taxes for Albertans. Thankfully, our government did the most affordable thing for Albertans, and made sure the NDP never governs again.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Given the federal government has never accepted flights from Saudi princes and given that the same government website has another nugget of wisdom for people struggling to afford food . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Let's hear the question and then maybe just for fun let's hear the answer.  
Go ahead.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Given the same government website has another nugget of wisdom for people struggling to afford food, which is, "Be Content with What You Have," and given that be content with what you have is what this Premier should have told Sam Mraiche rather than letting him run off with hundreds of millions of dollars for Turkish Tylenol and private surgery contracts, will the government reverse course, stop lining the pockets of its friends and families . . .

**The Speaker:** You've got to stop talking. When our time is up, we need to stop talking.  
Now you have a little bit of time, Minister.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to see the NDP continue to support the federal leaders and his flights around the globe, spending more money than any Prime Minister in history; travelling, spending Canadian tax dollars, courting foreign dignitaries, not helping with the cost of food in Canada or Alberta. Do you know what our government did, though? We cut income taxes. We've lowered . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. I just asked to hear the question. Now I'm asking to hear the answer. It seems fair. Let's try it.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've cut income taxes, we've lowered the cost of electricity, we're lowering insurance rates. We're making sure that we stand up for Albertans, something that the NDP has never done. We're putting Albertans first.

**The Speaker:** Well, the next question, if we can hear it, belongs to the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

### High-risk Offender Monitoring

**Mr. Yao:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta has always been the best province in which to live, work, and raise a family, but it's no secret that crime has become a growing concern in our neighbourhoods across the province. From our largest cities to our most remote rural municipalities, Albertans are increasingly frustrated by a revolving-door justice system created by the NDP-Liberal alliance that seems to prioritize the interests of repeat offenders over the safety of law-abiding citizens. To the Deputy Premier: what is this government doing to crack down on career criminals and ensure that high-risk offenders are held accountable while out on bail or community release?

2:10

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are combatting the broken bail system created by the C-75 and the Liberal-NDP government from 2019. The initiative utilizes GPS technology, which provides around-the-clock surveillance for high-risk offenders. We're making ankle bracelet monitoring a standard tool for courts to consider during bail and, of course, community release. We're filling in the gaps left behind by the federal government.

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

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans are tired of the consequences of the federal catch-and-release bail system, which has allowed crime to flourish in communities right across the province, and further given that Budget '26 provides \$4.1 million to expand the provincial ankle bracelet electronic monitoring program to provide 24/7 supervision of high-risk offenders, to the same minister: how will Budget '26 and this enhanced electronic monitoring technology help give victims real-time awareness of a situation as well as the peace of mind that they deserve?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, thank you. Budget 2026 allocates \$4.1 million to specifically expand this monitoring technology. The funding supports real-time awareness, victim-centric security, proactive intervention. This is the government that is committed to doing whatever it takes to keep victims safe.

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

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the minister. Given that the trauma of victimization often lingers long after a crime has been committed and that all Albertans deserve to feel secure in their homes, workplaces, and schools and further given that this expanded program will, for the first time, provide participating victims with instant, real-time alerts on their devices if an offender violates a boundary or nears their location, to the same minister: can

you explain how victims become eligible to receive these proximity alerts, and what options are available to them if they wish to join, pause, or withdraw from this notification program?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you. The notification program is designed to be accessible. It's designed to be voluntary, responsive to the needs, of course, of the victim. This tool is a tool box for all the courts. The victim becomes eligible when the court imposes electronic monitoring as a condition of an offender's release. The victim can opt in or out any time, temporarily stop or pause the notifications. It's entirely voluntary. We're providing 24/7 monitoring to victims to give them the peace of mind that they deserve.

### Coal Mining Litigation

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans are on the hook for millions in legal payouts thanks to the UCP's coal policy flip-flopping. There's now a new \$2 billion lawsuit hanging over taxpayers' heads. Why did the Premier hide this massive financial risk from Albertans, and where is the Finance minister? Why didn't he disclose this lawsuit? I'll ask plainly: did the Finance minister know about this \$2 billion lawsuit, and if so, why didn't he come clean with taxpayers?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of the environment.

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member knows full well that if there is litigation ongoing, we cannot discuss that. I will say this. When the hon. members were in power from 2015 to 2019, they invited many people from companies from Australia to be able to come in to open up the coal of eastern slopes. We have fixed that here, and we have continued to fix that. We'll make sure that we protect our eastern slopes as that's what Albertans want us to do. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** It's someone else's turn, right?  
Go ahead, hon. member.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Given that it seems the environment minister and the Finance minister are missing in action and given that under article 9.24 of the trans-Pacific partnership agreement the \$2 billion lawsuit must have been made public, did the UCP government ask the feds not to make these documents publicly available on the Global Affairs website, and why isn't the Finance minister disclosing this massive financial risk to Albertans and reining in his government's wild fiscal adventures while the Premier is enjoying her Arabian nights in Saudi Arabia?

**Mr. Hunter:** Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the members that the Alberta coal industry modernization initiative will protect water as our top priority. Protecting our waterways will be our primary concern. Mountaintop removal coal mining has been prohibited. There will be no new open-pit coal mining in the foothills. I will also remind the member that we have also bought back 40,000 acres in order to be able to protect our eastern slopes. We'll continue to do what Albertans want us to do with that feedback.

**The Speaker:** Let's try hearing the answer and the question this time.

**Ms Al-Guneid:** Given that the Finance minister is not questioning the UCP's wasteful spending – no wonder he delivered a \$9.4 billion deficit – given that the AESO budget increased by 1,000 per cent, spending on expensive market design and wasting \$10 million

on an office shuffle within downtown Calgary, Mr. Speaker, given that UCP ministers are burning through public money all while the Premier is busy discovering a whole new world on a magical carpet with the Saudi prince, where is the Finance minister? Where is Waldo?

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, the member should know that AESO is funded by industry, not by taxpayers. That line of questioning is completely ridiculous because I can tell you right now that the Finance minister has tabled a budget that is prioritizing health care, prioritizing education, prioritizing physician compensation. If the members opposite want to vote against a budget that is putting Alberta's health and education first, I dare them. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The next question . . . [interjection] No. When I stop, it's not your cue to fill in the empty space. It's your cue to wait until there's a speaker recognized. That speaker will be the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

### Affordability Measures

**Member Irwin:** This past weekend while out door-knocking in my constituency, I met a senior who shared that he and his wife have never struggled as much as they are right now. The costs of everything are piling up. He teared up as he asked me how he could access the food bank. I shared with him that we proposed solutions to help with the price of groceries, like banning restrictive covenants, taking action on shrinkflation, holding large corporations accountable, and much more. What do I say to the senior? Why won't this government do anything to address skyrocketing grocery prices?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, if I was that hon. member, I would say to her constituent that while her party is going around getting scared of \$80 copper cats that are sitting in McDougall Centre, this side of the House is investing an unprecedented amount of money helping her constituents: \$6.7 billion this year alone to support seniors, the highest payments into continuing care in the history of this province; lowering rent four times the national average; continuing to make sure that we invest in the supports that Albertans need. Unfortunately, that hon. member and her party have voted against it every time this budget year.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member.

**Member Irwin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that two days ago a senior walked into my office in tears, frightened about cuts to seniors' benefits, and given that she also expressed worries about talks of separation, noting that she's scared that if Alberta separates, the UCP will take her CPP, one of her last reliable sources of income, to anyone in this government: do you realize the stress and the worry that you're causing to so many, like seniors who've spent their lives building this province and are having their dignity stripped away through cuts and threats of sovereignty? How do you look your constituents in the eye when they express these fears?

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud each and every day that I sit in this Legislature. I'm not a member of a party like that who focuses on fearmongering and causing Albertans to be scared. This budget alone has over a half a billion dollars in direct senior benefits, the most, again, in the history of the province, something that member and her party voted against, just like they voted against the most disability supports in history, just like they voted against the best investments in continuing care in history, and just like they ran a health care system that left our seniors to rot in acute care.

**Member Irwin:** Given that I met a single mom of four kids who said that the price of gas is making life so hard for her and her family and given that I saw prices of 173.9 today, higher than I've ever seen in my 41 years on this earth, and while the Premier jets around on private planes from Saudi princes, she claims that she can't drop the fuel tax because gas prices going up and down is, quote, just how it's supposed to work. My constituents are asking for relief at the pumps. Do I tell them that they're just going to have to keep struggling? Is this just life in Alberta under the UCP and this Premier?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, it would be hilarious if it wasn't so sad coming from the members opposite. From 2015, when Alberta elected the leave-it-in-the-ground, pipeline-protester, activist government that intended intentionally to make life more expensive for Albertans, every good that's transported, food, fuel, and when they were asked about why, they said: because we want you to drive less, we want it to cost more, and we want you to change your behaviour. That is what we've seen from the members opposite. We're focused on affordability every day.

2:20

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

### Child and Youth Mental Health Supports

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I was a young project manager, I was made fully aware of the Westray mine disaster. It was used to reinforce . . .

**Ms Gray:** Point of order.

**Mr. Getson:** . . . the responsibility we had as management for safety. Out of respect for the victims of the Tumbler Ridge shooting and for the protection of Alberta children, I have a few questions regarding safety today. Nine people were killed up there; 27 people were injured in Tumbler Ridge. It's become abundantly clear that the shooter had many recorded incidents of mental health. For some reason he didn't receive the mental health he needed, and he wasn't incarcerated to stop that horrific accident. To the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction: what supports are available for young people struggling with mental health in Alberta so we can prevent . . .

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

Oh, pardon me. Wait, Minister, please. A point of order was noted at 2:20.

Minister, a fresh 35. I don't think you got a chance to start. Go ahead.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. What happened in Tumbler Ridge was, of course, very heartbreaking, and our thoughts still remain with those victims, their families, and that community. As a grandfather that tragedy weighs heavily on me. It reinforces how important it is that we support mental health early and compassionately. That's why we're expanding our mental health supports. We've started new Kickstand hubs, Kickstand Connect. We've also expanded our CASA Mental Health classrooms, many of which are going to be located in rural areas. Young Albertans can also access support any time through our kids helpline, 211.

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

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that the government has made mental health a priority, it's increased funding for a wide range of mental health issues for those who need it, further given these services may be concentrated in our medium and large cities, making access difficult for those who live

in rural Alberta, to the same minister: what is the government doing to improve access to mental health supports for those families and kids out in rural Alberta?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. Where someone lives should never determine whether they can access mental health support. That's why we have tools like 211 Alberta that are so important. It's going to connect Albertans anywhere in the province, including our rural communities, to mental health, addiction, and community services by phone, text, or online. Among these services is Counselling Alberta, which helps people quickly access affordable counselling, including online options that make it easier for those in rural Alberta and remote areas to get support. Like I said, we've got our Kickstand hubs and our CASA Mental Health classrooms that also serve rural areas supporting youth who need help.

**The Speaker:** Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

**Mr. Getson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that for many factors – some are social constructs, social pressures, nutrition, financial strains, et cetera – people across the country have been reporting increases with their struggling in mental health and their well-being, further given the potential stigma regarding mental health issues and recovering from mental health care for professionals and how to receive those, to the same minister: what can Albertans do to support friends and family experiencing mental health challenges, and if they're experiencing them on their own, what can they do to get support?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has been very focused on what matters, and that includes building out the Alberta recovery model. This is a publicly funded continuum of mental health and addiction care so Albertans know they're not alone and help is always available. Albertans can support friends or family by listening without judgment and encouraging them to seek help early. If someone needs support, call 211 Alberta. It's a simple first step to find mental health, addiction, and community services close to where they live. Remember that service, Recovery Alberta, is totally free.

### Eastern Slopes Protection and Coal Development Policies

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans were promised that our eastern slopes, our headwaters, would be protected. Instead this UCP government opened the doors to coal mining that threatens the very water millions of Albertans rely on. At the same time their reckless decisions have triggered massive coal company lawsuits that will cost billions, so I'll ask the minister of environment: why is the UCP risking Alberta's drinking water and handing public dollars over to coal corporations? Where is that money going to come from?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of the environment.

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for this question. The reality is that I actually am downstream from those eastern slopes. We have invested record amounts of money into building some of the best agrifood processing corridors in the world, and we are proud of being able to develop the 65 specialty crops there. We will do nothing that will jeopardize the work that we've done downstream, and I can assure Albertans that

we are making sure that those waters that come out of the eastern slopes are the most pristine in the world.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the UCP pretends to care about fiscal responsibility – their coal policy explicitly demonstrates how they do not – given that they cancelled protections, created chaos, and now Alberta is facing enormous legal liabilities from international coal companies, given that families are deeply worried about selenium contamination in their water, how can this minister justify exposing our rivers, our ranchers, and our communities to long-term water damage while writing what could become a billion-dollar check behind closed doors? Where is the money in the budget line?

**Mr. Hunter:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I will say that when it comes to the water quality coming out of the eastern slopes, I had the opportunity of meeting with a company in Germany that was interested in working in this area, in the agrifood processing in our area in Alberta. I was telling him about all the value proposition about what we have here, that we have 70 per cent of Canada's irrigation land right here in southern Alberta, that we have all of these different things. He stopped me and he said: but you have the best water coming out of the eastern slopes. We will not jeopardize that.

**The Speaker:** The next question to the hon. member.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this conversation is about priorities and given that this government won't fund services Albertans rely on like schools and hospitals but miraculously somehow there's always money when multinational coal companies come a-calling, given this government's flip-flop on coal has put our clean water at risk and opened Alberta up to massive lawsuits that our grandchildren are going to be responsible for, again, how much will Albertans be forced to pay for the UCP's failure, and why won't this government protect the headwaters, the eastern slopes?

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

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question because she served it up. The reality is that in 2016 the NDP government at the time invited those same companies to come here from Australia. We are cleaning up that mess, and because of that we have been able to identify 40,000 hectares of pristine land that will not be actually worked through with coal companies. We've protected that area, and we'll continue to protect the eastern slopes. This is an issue before the courts, and that's about as much as I can say on that issue.

**The Speaker:** The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

### Federal Equalization Program

**Mr. Bouchard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret that Alberta plays the leading role in keeping Canada's economy strong. Our province generates billions that flow into the federal equalization system. Albertans are generous, but they should not be expected to accept a system that is neither fair nor sustainable, especially when that money could be invested in health care, education, affordability, and infrastructure here in Alberta. To the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance: how is our government standing up for Alberta taxpayers while managing our role as a net contributor and pushing for a more balanced fiscal relationship?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's true. Alberta sends billions more in taxes to the federal government than we receive back in services, and Albertans expect that imbalance to be addressed. The current equalization formula isn't working for any of us, Alberta or, I'd argue, the other provinces. It's growing in cost and does not encourage economic growth in recipient provinces. Alberta's position has been more consistent. We will continue to call for a fairer, more sustainable program that respects contributions and supports long-term growth across the country. If the federal government is serious about nation building, I would expect they'd agree.

**Mr. Bouchard:** Mr. Speaker, given that Albertans work hard and contribute significantly to Canada's finances and given that equalization is funded through federal taxation, with billions leaving Alberta each year and none returned through this program, and further given that this fiscal imbalance amounts to roughly \$29 billion per year net loss to Albertans, to the same minister: what is our government doing to demand a fair deal for Alberta and ensure this program respects the contributions of our province?

2:30

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. We continue to be the fastest skater on a slow team, punch above our weight here. Alberta's economy continues to generate significant wealth for the entire country, yet federal policy has not rewarded that reality. Our Premier has been working tirelessly with the federal government to get the Carney government to revisit their equalization policies. We've been clear that Canada's fiscal policies and framework should encourage growth across the nation, reduce reliance on transfers, and recognize the provinces driving national prosperity.

**Mr. Bouchard:** Given that federal taxation and equalization already place a significant burden on all Albertans and further given that rising carbon taxes continue to drive up costs for the industries powering Canada's economy and discourage investment, to the same minister: what concrete actions is our government taking to push back against this growing burden and fight for a fair and sustainable federal approach that puts Alberta first?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta already contributes more than any other province to federal finances while receiving less in return. At the same time the equalization program continues to grow, with Alberta's share growing with it. The burden is disproportionately carried by Alberta's businesses and industries, the very job creators driving investment, exports, and growth across this country. If it wasn't for Alberta this last year, there would be negative jobs produced in this country. Alberta's government will continue to press for a fair approach, one that respects provincial jurisdiction and, most importantly, one that doesn't limit our potential.

### Grocery Stores' Use of Restrictive Covenants

**Mr. Dach:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling with the high cost of groceries, but the government allows schemes that crowd out new grocery store competition. Restrictive covenants are private agreements registered against a land title that prohibit a similar business – for example, a new grocery store – on these lands. Many exist on land titles of former grocery store properties across Alberta, and as a result of

limited competition people end up paying higher grocery store prices. Why does the government allow such anticompetitive restrictive covenants, that are contributing to higher food prices for Albertans?

**Mr. Nally:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the question. I'd like to point out that we've noticed what's happening in Manitoba with looking at restrictive covenants on grocery stores, and we recognize that it's an effective way to increase competition in that sector. But I have to comment on that caucus's childlike enthusiasm for their revisionist history because it was that caucus that made everything more expensive, including groceries. They broke it, and we're going to fix it.

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

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I'd like to have an adult debate here and given that in 2026 food prices are forecast to rise in Alberta by 4 to 6 per cent and given that Alberta also has the highest proportion of people, 30.9 per cent, living in food-insecure households, when will the UCP government act to help Albertans who are struggling to feed their families by increasing competition among the giant grocery retailers and outlawing registration of anticompetitive restrictive covenants on commercial retail properties?

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to be part of a government that puts Albertans first every single day across every single ministry. That's why we've cut income taxes. We're lowering the wholesale cost of electricity. We're working on lowering insurance rates. We've got the clean electricity regulations suspended. Hopefully, they'll be gone forever because they would increase the cost of electricity 35 per cent and make our system 100 times less reliable. All of these are baseload costs that our government is fighting and standing up for Albertans for to make sure we put them first and give them the best chance of a better tomorrow.

**Mr. Dach:** Given that we're talking about food and grocery prices and given that as a realtor I witnessed the devaluation of many neighbourhood shopping centres caused by supermarket property controls and given that other prime commercial tenants will flee to other shopping centres once the anchor tenant grocery retailer is gone, diminishing the community's access to premium retail services, and given that local residential property values soon suffer in turn because the neighbourhood is deemed less desirable without local groceries, when will Alberta follow Manitoba NDP's commitment to free and fair competition and drive down grocery prices and remove restrictive covenants?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of red tape reduction.

**Mr. Nally:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll repeat what we said. Yeah, we like what we're seeing in Manitoba with the restrictive covenants. We're taking a look at it now to see how that would work in Alberta. We know that it's a conservative tenet that if you want to lower prices, you increase competition, so that's exactly what we're going to do. After the four years of NDP government it was nothing but warm beer and cold ice because they made everything more expensive for Albertans. We're going to take a look at that, and we're going to do what we can for Albertans.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-Ellerslie.

## Insurance Premium Costs

**Mr. Gurtej Brar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are facing the worst affordability crisis, and insurance is what keeps people up at night. Families across Alberta are now paying the second-highest auto insurance rate in Canada. Premiums are through the roof while wages have been frozen for seven straight years. When will this government stop crushing everyday Albertans with unbearable insurance premiums?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for the question. Automobile insurance rates are high in Alberta. They've been high for a while. We are the second highest in the country, but we're beneath Ontario by about \$300 on the average premium. That's the newest data that we have. This speaks to the answer. That's why we're changing the system. We're moving to a care-first system January 1, 2027, that will provide better care at lower, more sustainable rates. It should be what everybody in the province is looking forward to.

**Mr. Gurtej Brar:** Given that the UCP only knows how to take money out of Albertans' pockets, not to put it in, given that the UCP removed the Alberta NDP's cap on auto insurance increases and premiums have skyrocketed while wages have stayed flat for seven years, given that families in Edmonton-Ellerslie tell me that they cannot keep up, will the government finally fix this insurance crisis so Albertans can afford the coverage they need, or will they keep blaming immigrants for their own bad decisions?

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to dignify that last part with a response.

Back to the insurance statement, we're working on it. This is not a simple fix. Major system changes like this in four-year election cycles are rarely undertaken by governments. This is important to us. We want to get it right. We want a system that provides better care, where injured Albertans can more quickly return to their lives, whether that means getting back to work or getting back to what they care about, while keeping prices sustainable. We know that this is important to Albertans. We've seen what's working in other jurisdictions. This is the Alberta solution.

**Mr. Gurtej Brar:** Given that home insurance costs are also exploding and Albertans are struggling to afford it, given that homeowners across Alberta face huge premium jumps and much higher deductibles, some worry they will lose coverage altogether. After years of inaction what concrete steps, if any, is this government taking today to protect families before more Albertans are priced out of getting insurance coverage?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, we've answered this question many times, so I know the members opposite know that we don't regulate property insurance like we do with auto insurance. We make it the law that you need auto insurance to drive on our roads. Property insurance is a little different. That doesn't mean that we haven't been working with some of our ministers like the Minister of Municipal Affairs, working with building codes, ensuring that when there is damage, there are incentives in place to build back better, whether that's stronger, more resilient materials against hail and other things. We continue to do that work, and we will do more.

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

2:40

Okay. Hon. members, we are at points of order. The first one was at or about right when we started, as I recall. I think it was 1:51, and it was raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

### Point of Order Insulting Language

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I did call this point of order at 1:51 under 23(h), (i), (j):

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives . . .

and particularly

- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

At 1:51 the Premier was speaking in response to the Leader of the Official Opposition, and she proceeded to speak of him directly and proceeded to say, “I watched him flailing his arms and [rolling] his eyes.” I will edit. She continued, “I know he’s unfamiliar with the ways of international protocol.” I will not re-enact it as well, but she proceeded to physically mock him flailing his arms.

All of this was abusive and insulting language, and the mockery that the Premier engaged in, I believe, raises this to a point of order. I think it’s incredibly clear that these were incredibly specific allegations against another member, in this case specifically stating what she knows he’s familiar or unfamiliar with. I believe this is a point of order, and I look forward to your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, I would disagree with the assertion that this is a point of order from the member opposite. My unofficial records simply say that the Premier said, again unofficially, “the only one . . . having an aneurysm [is] the man across the aisle. I watched him flailing his arms and bulging his eyes as he talked about [the] gold cat that turned out to be made of copper.”

Mr. Speaker, it seems that the NDP is chasing their tail on this issue and certainly interested in going down a rabbit hole when it comes to a gold cat or a copper cat or whatever, but to point out simply what the member was doing in this Chamber I don’t think is a point of order. I don’t think there are any personal insults that were intended so much to say that it appears that the member opposite is quite animated. I don’t think anyone in this Assembly would disagree – this is not meant to be an insult – that the member is animated. Some members are a little more subdued; others are more animated. That member is certainly very animated, particularly when things in this Chamber get a little more testy, so I don’t think it’s out of line to point out one’s gestures, not in a mocking way but point it out. Not a point of order.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Thank you, both sides. Thank you.

Well, let me say that there are a very low number of members in this Chamber – there are probably a few – whose medical opinion I would trust, especially about something as important as when somebody’s having an aneurysm. I don’t think that in itself is a point of order, but it’s not helpful language. Let me say this. When somebody talks about somebody waving their arms, well, I think that’s kind of – thank goodness, it’s not all the time, but it does crop up. I tell you, I hear comments about somebody pointing and gestures and whether somebody’s unbuttoning their jacket or one thing or another.

But the one comment, in my view, that makes this a point of order is the “bulging their eyes” comment. Honestly, I’ve said it before. I’ll repeat it now. Making personal comments about another member is not what we do here. It’s a point of order, and let me just say this. I’m not encouraging the comments about waving arms or

whether a jacket is buttoned or unbuttoned or that kind of stuff. They’re not helpful either, but actually describing physically another member or attempting to is a point of order. It needs to be withdrawn and apologized for.

**Mr. Schow:** I withdraw and apologize.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Number 2, also from the leader of the official – sorry; I keep trying to promote you. The Official Opposition House Leader.

### Point of Order Language Creating Order

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I raised the point of order at 1:52 under the same Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) as the previous point of order. Specifically, at that time the Premier, in response to the Leader of the Official Opposition – and I don’t have the benefit of the Blues, so please correct me at any time in your ruling if I don’t have the correct language. What I heard the Premier saying is:

This is a member who has insulted the Americans. He’s insulted the Saudis. He has insulted hockey team owners. He has insulted developers. He insulted the head of Uber, that I think also got him sued. This is not somebody who knows how to do international diplomacy.

Under 23(h), (i), and (j) these are very specific allegations against another member. This absolutely imputes false and unavowed motives to another member. I do think that repeating over and over what another member has done and speaking so directly has caused disorder in this Chamber in the past, has been ruled points of order in the past, Mr. Speaker. I believe that at times we have talked about the difference between somebody in an official role. I certainly at times have argued that we should be able to talk about things the Premier has done or not done. Those types of comments have been more clearly ruled out of order as we go. In this case the Premier is clearly talking about the individual. She did not even couch it as the Leader of the Official Opposition or any kind of role comment.

I think this is a clear point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). I think it’s language that’s unhelpful to this House. It’s very difficult in this back and forth, especially when there are six different accusations of what the Leader of the Official Opposition has done. There’s no opportunity to rebut this. It’s insults that are unhelpful. I believe this is a point of order, and I look forward to your ruling.

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, I contend that this is not a point of order. It is a matter of debate. Whether or not the members opposite think that what we said is true is by the very nature of definition a debate. The Leader of the Opposition has said a number of negative comments in this Chamber about the President of the United States. He’s made comments specifically about the Saudi prince, the person with whom the Premier met when she was over there negotiating and building relationships, as we’ve already discussed. The member has made multiple insults in this Chamber, and whether or not they find it insulting or whether we find it insulting, that is debate. This is not a point of order, and I leave it in your hands to rule, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Well, let me just say that I don’t want to encourage this, but I will say that we all own our words in here, and here’s what the Blues say just for those that want to hear this. “This is a member who has insulted the Americans. He’s insulted the Saudis. He has insulted hockey team owners. He has insulted developers. He insulted the head of Uber.” None of those are personal comments. They’re all about things that a member of the House has

stated. It's kind of fair comment in here. It's not helpful today to talk about and name the chief of staff of the Premier. It's not helpful to talk about the former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whose name crops up here. None of those are a point of order, but they're not helpful either.

This is a matter of debate. It's not a point of order, but no one should interpret my remarks as encouraging it, either. Let me just say, editorially and, I hope, hopefully, that members, beginning with the leaders of each party, insulting each other is not really helpful here. It's not always a point of order, but it's not helpful either.

The Government House Leader at 1:53.

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, I would rather get to government business than debate this frivolous nonsense back and forth, so I'm just going to withdraw this one.

**The Speaker:** The matter is dealt with.

Point of order – my goodness. I don't see a number 4 here. Oh, I do. It's there. It's just that I didn't see it. Thank you for providing me, everybody, with so much paper. I'm not making fun of the table staff here. They have to provide the paper. I'm thanking all the hon. members that have provided me with all this paper by having caused all the points of order.

This one was called by the Official Opposition House Leader.

#### **Point of Order Allegations against a Member**

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. At 1:57 I did call a point of order. The language that caught my ear, Mr. Speaker, was specifically “None of that is true,” language that we've heard in this House, and it has been debated in points of order in the past. It specifically ties into talking about people lying or not lying and doing indirectly what you cannot do directly. It certainly caught my ear because I believe it crosses the line of what we should engage in in debate.

2:50

There's a very specific reason why we often hear “nothing can be further from the truth,” because we found the line, and that is okay. That is indirect enough that it is not lying, and we've gone that way. But to the best of my recollection, starting to say, “None of that is true” is over the line in implying that the member who's asked the question has done so with lies. It's that indirectly doing what you can't do directly. I believe this is a point of order. I encourage my own members not to use language to that effect. I don't believe it's helpful. I think if it's ruled a point of order and we stop hearing that kind of language, that would be good going forward, but I leave it to you to rule, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, there are so many synonyms to say that none of that is true: it's factually incorrect; members remain unencumbered by the truth. I could go on and on. This is a frivolous point of order. I hold the Leader of the Opposition in the highest regard despite our political differences, but this is a stretch. If you rule against us being able to say, “None of that is true,” that would make debate in this Chamber very difficult because our job is to debate what is and what is not true.

**The Speaker:** Well, here's what the Blues say. “Well, Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. What is true is that when I got elected, we ended up . . .” and then a bunch of things that the Premier considers true, with no further comment about whether the other person thinks it's

true or not. This is not a point of order. This is, honestly, right along the lines of: nothing could be further from the truth. If it was in any way calling the Leader of the Official Opposition a liar, it would of course be a point of order.

I think where we try to parse this in here – and none of this is helpful, but I don't imagine for a second it's going to stop. The Official Opposition House Leader correctly points to the common phrase here: nothing could be further from the truth. The reason that that's not a point of order is because if it was said, “Nothing could be further from the truth, and the member knows it,” then it's suggesting the member knows it's not true and is saying it anyway, which is a lie. In this case it wasn't said that the Leader of the Opposition – it says that the Premier disagrees, but at no point did the Premier say that it's not true and he knows it. If she said that it's not true and he knows it, that, of course, is calling him a liar. That would be a point of order. This is just saying: I disagree. It's debate, which is what we do here. It's not a point of order, and this matter is now dealt with.

That takes us to not very much later in the day at 1:58. A point of order called by the Deputy Government House Leader.

#### **Point of Order Insulting Language**

**Mr. Williams:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time the Premier had answered a question, and a member of the opposition, the leader, was saying that the Premier always turns to personal insults, or words to that effect. I know we addressed some of this previously in a point of order earlier from the Opposition House Leader. I'll leave this in your capable hands whether or not it rises to a point of order. It was personalized with “she” and: always turns to personal insults. We would agree that we want to avoid implying that a member of this House is insulting another member of this House or other people in the public.

With that, I'll leave it with you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Right before that I have the Premier saying, “[I've] got a member opposite who doesn't want to be friends or build relationships with anyone.” I did not call a point of order on that language, but I do think that that was another personal insult. We've already had one apology and withdrawal from this session.

That being said, I believe the Leader of the Official Opposition was just saying what he thought was happening in the Chamber, but on his behalf I will apologize and withdraw because in this case he did say, I believe, that the Premier was going to personal insults. In this case I will agree with him, but I'm also apologizing and withdrawing. We should call points of order, not describe it out loud.

**The Speaker:** In order to be helpful, I'm going to provide some further comment here. In my view, this is not a point of order, but let me put some context around that. “She does tend to go to personal insults when she's rattled.” I think we've heard pretty much exactly the same words coming out of the government several times to describe the Leader of the Opposition. What's good for the goose is good for the gander. Again, I'm not trying to encourage this because it's not helpful. When the two leaders drop the level of debate to that level, which has happened on more than one occasion, then it seems to encourage everybody else in this room to follow suit.

To use the other example that the Leader of the Opposition said – I'm trying to remember that. It's something that was a point of order. You know what? It's a matter of what the standing orders

say. You cannot project thoughts into somebody else's mind. If you don't like what they said, you can say they're wrong, but you can't say that they think that – whatever – they hate children; they hate seniors: you can't describe what's in their minds.

This is not a point of order, but again, I hope you're hearing the lack of encouragement for the insults going both ways, and I can assure you that I have heard them go both ways.

Number 6, 2:20 p.m., by the Official Opposition House Leader.

### Point of Order

#### Referring to the Absence of a Member

**Ms Gray:** Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, at 2:21 this point of order was called on the practice of this House not talking about the presence or absence of a member. It was called because I have had to manage this issue in the past, and I would like to put it to a stop immediately. In previous sessions when a Leader of the Official Opposition has had to rise from their chair and leave during question period, we've had points of order dealing with the members opposite heckling and saying goodbye or acknowledging that that departure is taking place. It was found to be a point of order. It is unparliamentary to draw attention.

In this case as soon as the Leader of the Official Opposition rose to attend to other business outside of the Chamber, the minister of assisted living immediately started saying: oh, oh, oh. Other members then looked up and noticed it as well and joined in saying: oh, oh, oh. I can see what it is, Mr. Speaker. I know you might not rule it a point of order, but I will voraciously call this one because this is unparliamentary, and I hope that the government does not continue that behaviour.

Also, as I'm talking about presence or absence, I believe previous Speakers have ruled that MLAs cannot speak to their own presence or absence. Some of our members at times have tried to talk about going to conferences and things, and they were ruled out of order. That just came up earlier, and you wondered about that. I'd be curious to find out more, and I will review my previous points of order to find out later.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have established in this Chamber that acknowledging the presence or absence of a member is unparliamentary. We also did establish under the previous leader, Rachel Notley, when she would leave immediately after the initial questions and one of the ministers would say, "Hey, part-timer" or "See you tomorrow; same time, same place" – I mean, these kinds of insults flew pretty freely, and the Speaker of the day did make a point of ruling those out of order because they directly acknowledged the member as that member was leaving the Chamber what appeared to be quite early. The concern on our side was that for 50 minutes a day, during question period, we are expected to be here if we are in town, if we're not on a mission or taking care of other business. To that end, it could be frustrating to members on one side or the other that it appears that on a consistent basis a member would be leaving. This would be the frustration, again, with Rachel Notley. It was made apparent. So ruled out of order; that precedent has been set.

In this instance at no point in time did any member of the government benches yell out the member's name, the member's constituency, acknowledge that the member was leaving. They simply said: oh, oh. Now, if this was a court of law, I don't believe there's any ability to – though I'm not a lawyer. I don't even play one on TV. What I can say is that I don't think that that's much of an excuse, to suggest that you know what the member is acknowledging

by saying the word: oh, oh. There is a whole lot to be said. At the exact time that these comments were made, the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland was standing up to ask a question. That, "Oh, oh," could be acknowledging an excitement to hear the member's question, Mr. Speaker, so timing is the key.

3:00

This is a situational thing, and in this instance I will repeat: at no time did any member of the government benches yell out the member's constituency, the member's name, or the member actually physically removing himself from the Chamber, which is what was happening at the time, at 2:20. Mr. Speaker, I'm only bringing that up because the member called the point of order on this. It's not a point of order, and if it's called a point of order and ruled as such, I have very big concerns about anything we can do in this Chamber because then it could be attributed all kinds of false motives.

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh.

**Mr. Schow:** Now, I can hear the members opposite have a whole lot to say on this. I'm excited to hear the defence.

**The Speaker:** Don't encourage them.

**Mr. Schow:** Not encouraging, Mr. Speaker. What I do know is that when I stand on points of order, there seems to be this inclination to begin to mock the arguments that are being made. It happens on both sides, but I'd like to point out that there hasn't been a whole lot to say from those members on these issues, so I'll leave it at that. Not a point of order.

**The Speaker:** Well, it does happen on both sides, and probably the only ones talking when a point of order is being debated are the ones debating it, so I'll encourage everybody to let that happen. It's enough that we had trouble during the regular part of question period, not to extend the interruptions to this part, which is supposed to be settling the previous interruptions, nor is it a good idea to continue debate.

I've got the Blues. I'm not saying that it wasn't said, but there's no, "Oh, oh," on there. I do remember the previous examples raised by the Opposition House Leader where a pattern of, I suppose, mocking words or comments to indicate somebody is coming and going. One of the rules around here is that you can't do indirectly what you can't do directly, and one of the things you can't do directly is make comments about the presence or lack of presence of somebody in the Chamber.

There's no evidence at least in the Blues, so there's no point of order to be called here, but I will encourage all members of this House not to begin a pattern that has had to be stopped in the past of indirectly commenting, remarking, taunting, whatever, the presence or lack of presence of another member in the House. This matter is dealt with and concluded.

## Orders of the Day

### Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

#### Bill 17

#### Fiscal Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

[Adjourned debate March 24: Mr. Williams]

**The Speaker:** Let's hear from the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

**Member Tejada:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise to speak to Bill 17, the Fiscal Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. What we see here is another example of how this government is fully committed to making choices that make life harder for everyday Albertans. It means higher costs, it means fewer supports, and it means new barriers: barriers to accessibility, barriers to information, and barriers to opportunity.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are already feeling stretched. They feel that they are making difficult decisions at their kitchen tables about groceries, about rent, about child care, about whether or not they can afford to take a break even for a short time in their own province. Instead of easing that pressure, this government is choosing to add to it.

We'll start with the tourism levy. This change represents a 33 per cent increase. Thirty-three per cent. Mr. Speaker, that's not a minor adjustment. That's not a technical tweak. That's a significant increase that will be felt by families across this province. It means that Albertans who want to take a stay-cation, for example, might want to explore their own province, support local businesses, and spend time with their families: well, now they'll have to pay more for that experience. They'll have to pay more to see their own backyard, they'll have to pay more to support their own communities, and they will have to pay more at a time when many can least afford it. This is just another example of this government raising costs in the middle of an affordability crisis.

Mr. Speaker, we hear a lot from this government about affordability. We hear lots of nice sounds, lots of talking points, and lots of slogans, but what Albertans are seeing and what they're experiencing is something very, very different. They are seeing higher costs, they are seeing fewer supports, and they are seeing a government that continues to shift the burden onto them.

This tourism levy increase is expected to raise between \$66 million and \$70 million starting in the 2026 fiscal year, and when we look at the total, we're looking at about \$200 million collected through this levy in a single year. Two hundred million dollars. Now, where does this money go? It's not going back into strengthening the tourism sector. It's not going back into supporting hotels, local attractions, or small businesses that rely on that tourism. Instead, it goes into general revenue.

Mr. Speaker, let's call this what it is. This is effectively a sales tax on Albertans who are travelling within their own province. I want to be really clear here. Alberta's New Democrats have been on the record opposing this increase because it places a burden not only on families but also on the hospitality sector, on hotels, on workers, and on communities that depend on tourism. Once again, under this government Albertans are paying more and getting less. Paying more and getting less.

When I talk about the other part of this bill that's impacted, which is recognizing the changes to the child and youth support program, this is something that's deeply concerning, the now defunct child and youth support program. When this government cut that in 2025, we said at the time that it was a cruel cut, and today we stand by that assessment because that program mattered. It provided financial and medical benefits to children whose parents or guardians couldn't afford those supports. It provided help in situations where a child was being cared for by another adult but did not meet the threshold for intervention services. It filled a gap, a very real gap, and now that gap is back, and it's wider than ever.

Mr. Speaker, the reality facing many families in this province is stark. We now have what can only be described as a two-tiered system when it comes to our kids, one where some children are

included and others are left out, where some children can participate fully and others cannot, where some children are fed and others must go without. That is the reality, one that this government is increasingly out of touch with. It is unacceptable.

Let me repeat, Mr. Speaker, that this is unacceptable. We know from Food Banks Canada's HungerCount 2025 that food bank visits in Alberta have risen by 134 per cent since 2019. One hundred and thirty-four per cent. Over 210,000 people are visiting food banks every single month, and nearly 76,000 of those are children. Children. Those numbers are not abstract. They represent real families, real struggles, real hunger. And at a time like this what is this government doing? Cutting supports, removing programs, and making life harder for the very people who need the help the most.

This government is failing in its responsibility to care for vulnerable Albertans – failing – and our children deserve better. They deserve stability. They deserve support. They deserve a government that sees them and acts in their best interest, a government that believes in the limitless potential of every child in this province and is willing to invest in it. The child and youth support program should be reinstated immediately so that all Alberta children have an opportunity to thrive.

In terms of accessibility, because here again we are seeing a troubling pattern, this government is removing requirements for nondigital communications at credit unions. This may sound technical, but its impact is very real. I'm actually a little bit surprised that a government would be taking a measure such as this, but maybe I shouldn't be because there are also other measures that they're taking that are impacting seniors.

**3:10**

It means that Albertans who cannot easily access digital services, whether due to disability, age, or limited access to technology, will face new barriers in managing their own finances. This may come as a surprise to some members on the other side of the aisle, but many Albertans still rely on information delivered to them by mail, brought to their door by the dedicated members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. This information provides a very real, tangible link between individuals and their financial institutions.

What we're seeing in this bill is this: barriers to information, barriers to communication, barriers to independence, and this isn't happening in isolation. We've already seen this government vote down the Accessible Alberta Act, a bill that would have created a framework to identify, remove, and prevent barriers across this province, a framework that was long overdue, a framework that Albertans have been calling for, and that's from every end of the political spectrum. I'm sure the members opposite have heard their own supporters call for it. And instead of moving forward, this government chose to step back. Instead of removing barriers, they create them, and that sends a message, Mr. Speaker, a very clear message. It tells Albertans that accessibility is not a priority, it tells Albertans that inclusion is not a priority, and it tells Albertans that their government is willing to make life harder for those who already face challenges. That's the wrong message. It's the wrong direction.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to address the changes in the Employment Pension Plans Act because here we also see cause for concern. Specifically, section 20(2) introduces changes that could affect employees' pension arrangements. Now, the conversion from negotiated cost plans to target benefit plans is often presented as positive steps, and in some cases it could be. The concern here lies in what is being allowed now under these new rules because these rules open the door to a reduction in accrued benefits. Let me say that again: a reduction in accrued benefits. These are benefits that workers have already earned, benefits that reflect years of contributions, years

of work, years of planning for retirement. Under these changes those benefits could be reduced. It's highly unusual, it's deeply concerning, and it raises serious questions about fairness and security for workers in this province.

Mr. Speaker, pensions are not a luxury. They are not optional. They are a fundamental part of a worker's financial future. They represent stability. They represent dignity. They represent the promise that after a lifetime of work there will be some measure of security. Any change that puts that at risk deserves careful scrutiny because Albertans deserve certainty, they deserve transparency, transparency this government is definitely not willing to provide, and they deserve a government that protects what they have earned, not one that puts it in jeopardy.

Mr. Speaker, when we step back and look at Bill 17 as a whole, a pattern becomes clear: higher costs, fewer supports, more barriers. Higher costs for families trying to make ends meet, fewer supports for children and vulnerable Albertans, more barriers for those already facing challenges: that's the pattern. That's why we cannot support this bill because Albertans deserve better. They deserve a government that lowers costs, not raises them, and strengthens supports, not cuts them.

For that reason, I urge all members of this House to carefully consider the impacts, to stand with Albertans in opposing it. Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Are there any others wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Elbow has risen.

**Member Kayande:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak on second reading of Bill 17, the Fiscal Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. The Member for Calgary-Klein on this is a hard act to follow, actually, because there's a lot of stuff in this bill, like many omnibus financial bills tend to be.

Let me focus first on the increase in the tourism levy. I didn't realize until I read the text of this bill that we can actually have a PST in Alberta as long as we call it a tourism levy. This is a PST. It is a PST primarily paid by Albertans. I believe the Minister of Finance – by the way, I do want to applaud the Minister of Finance for generally answering questions explicitly when he's received them in estimates – said that the tourism levy is paid roughly about 55 per cent by Albertans. So basically this, while it may be promoted and spun as something that is paid by travellers to Alberta, is in fact a tax that is predominantly paid by Albertans. It's paid by Albertans who are doing their patriotic duty to take their vacations in Alberta, and this government is making them pay more for it.

What this does is that it effectively discourages people from travelling within Alberta. It not just discourages people from travelling within Alberta, but of course people who oftentimes are taking a long weekend or in many cases – I remember growing up without a whole lot. My parents and I and the family often went and spent the weekend at Lake Wabamun, and we thought that was just the best. That was the best. Any sort of tourism area for which this levy applies: that trip just got more expensive.

It is a tax increase of about \$70 million. More than half of that is paid for by Albertans, so roughly it turns out that this is a \$40 million tax increase on the people of Alberta. It roughly pays for a little bit more than half of a Turkish Tylenol contract, if you're trying to benchmark at home exactly what amount this is.

I want to put on the record here why we as an opposition caucus entirely do not support the idea of sales taxes. First of all, there is an enormous amount of waste in this government. I would much rather spend money on reducing the amount of money that we spend on Turkish Tylenol to zero than on increasing taxes on hard-

working Albertans. I think that's something that every Albertan can agree on. I would much rather that we get the \$50 million that MHCare is holding of Albertans' money instead of raising the tourism levy in order to fund government services. I really would prefer that, and I think the people of Alberta would as well.

Sales taxes are a tax on people who are least able to pay for them. The economic concept of this, that economists talk about, is the marginal propensity to consume. Marginal propensity to consume is basically how much of your paycheck you are spending on your day-to-day. When you increase sales taxes, what you're doing is forcing the people who earn the least to have to spend the most of their paycheques on living their day-to-day lives. You're taxing them, effectively, more of their income. It's wrong, and that's why as the party of workers I will never support that.

I have been in many, many very fancy living rooms in my riding where inevitably somebody – let's call them somebody with a low marginal propensity to consume, somebody who's got, you know, trust funds and large investments – asks me: yeah, but why is the NDP opposed to sales taxes? And I remember going into, like, a \$15,000-a-month seniors residence for a forum against my UCP opponent, who said there: "Oh, yeah. Right. You know, like, no sales tax right now, but you know what? Next time in our term we'll think about it." That's actually what my UCP opponent said during an election campaign. So I just want to be one to say: look, I'm the MLA for Calgary-Elbow, the whole of Calgary-Elbow, and I oppose sales taxes and I oppose increasing the sales taxes that we have.

Now, around the data centres – let's focus this back on to the tourism levy, the PST associated with the tourism levy. It should not be increased.

3:20

**Mr. Nixon:** What? Tourism?

**Member Kayande:** The minister for something or other just said: should tourism not be increased? Of course tourism should be increased. The tourism levy should not be increased.

Now around data centres, I'm very pleased that in 2015 the software company that I worked for was one of the first firms to actually employ high-intensity GPU-related processing in order to provide software services to clients. It was a revolutionary technology at the time, and I'm very proud that the team who put together our software offering was able to make use of it in a way that created something that was groundbreaking and ultimately game changing in our industry and resulted in a sale of our company for over a billion dollars. The company I worked for turned out to have been the second unicorn, they used to call it. The software company sold for over a billion dollars, and it sold for a billion dollars in cash, and that was primarily because we were one of the first companies in the world to make use of high-intensity GPU-based processing that was a precursor to artificial intelligence. It was an incredible ride, an incredible moment, and an incredible Alberta success story around technology between 2015 and 2020, that I was very proud to have been a part of.

We needed to use a lot of GPU data centres in order to do the processing. Those data centres were at the time much less common than they are now. Now there's a massive, massive data centre build-out. That build-out is coming slowly to Alberta, slower than it should, primarily because it is very, very difficult to get renewable energy permitted. Renewable energy is the lowest cost form of electricity available, so basically by making renewable energy permitting more difficult, this government is driving up the cost of energy for data centres and picking and choosing, you know, getting into their kitchen on what investment decisions they're going to make.

Now, this budget forecasts higher natural gas prices for Albertans on the back of higher power consumption driven by data centre activity. Yes, despite this government claiming that they could build all the data centres in the world without increasing power prices, they leave open whether all of these data centres will actually increase natural gas prices. And guess what? According to this government itself it absolutely will. We don't know how much. They have the modelling. It would be nice to know.

The other issue around this – this is more of a question that I have because we're in second reading, so I hope that the minister can answer. It opens up the fact that there's a data centre levy being attached to the electricity, and my question is that this data centre levy apparently is connected with data centres that don't pay Alberta corporate tax. It's my spidey sense tingling, because this is a classic transfer pricing problem where the costs and revenue associated with one specific asset are not easily determinable. Of course, the cloud computing service is sold. The cloud itself manages which data centre is going to be doing the work. That work that is done by the data centre is not very easy to tie to the amount of revenue that's coming in to the cloud provider, be it Microsoft or Meta or Google or whatever.

We see this in pharmaceuticals all the time, where a portfolio of patents is sold to a subsidiary in Ireland at a very low price, and then at some point in the future, when certain drugs become blockbusters, the revenue that is associated with those patents is paid at a very, very high amount in order to put more of the taxation in Ireland, which has a very, very low tax rate on some of these things. That's my question: how is the Ministry of Finance going to address these kinds of transfer pricing challenges when we know that it's only going to be getting worse?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to close debate. We waive.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a second time]

### Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

#### Bill 20 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2026

**The Deputy Chair:** Any comments or questions? The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you very much. Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2026, deals with unanticipated expenses between the third-quarter fiscal update and the end of the year, March 31. I want to start with digging into this – well, the responses that were brought forward by, I guess, the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board yesterday. In *Hansard* here he talked about \$326 million in expense funding. That can be found on page 1, expense funding, \$326,164,000. He didn't really go into the basis for that. I don't see it anywhere here anyway.

You know, we've been able, through questioning, through our own research, to find out that we're really talking about the coal lawsuit payouts that came forward from a number of companies. Only two have been identified publicly, and they don't add up to

that \$326 million. I guess the question that has been asked several times by members on this side: where is the rest of the \$78 million unaccounted for, in terms of the expense line there, going? We know through public disclosures, not from this government but from other places, that Atrium Coal is getting \$143 million from settling with this government, and Evolve Power is getting \$95 million from settling a lawsuit out of court with this government.

The challenge that I have is that the actions of this government flip-flopping on the coal file are really costing Albertans and taxpayers a great deal of money. It's over \$326 million by what I can see here, but of course only about a quarter of that billion is identified in terms of where it's going. The actions of this government are wasteful and reckless, and I think it's evident in terms of this supplementary supply before us.

3:30

The second point I want to bring up is also something the Minister of Finance brought up. I think it's laudable to talk about enhancing supports for victims of gender-based violence. That is found in the supplementary amount of \$5,055,000 requested to provide, and then it breaks it down on page 46 of the actual book before us, supplementary supply estimates, general revenue fund. It breaks it down about where that's going, and of course we know that the money is fully off-set from federal funding. So this is federal money coming in that's getting disbursed.

The challenge that I have is that while victims of gender-based violence are talked about in terms of additional programming, there are excellent programs out there that look to address the male perpetrators of domestic violence, which about 95 per cent are male perpetrators. One excellent program that, unfortunately, is being overlooked in this supplementary supply and has been in the news and identified as an economic cost-saving measure not only for Calgary, where the study was done, but all across Alberta, because the same kinds of interventions could be put forward across Alberta – the research report that I looked at talking about involving males who are perpetrators of domestic violence in more basic existing approaches for behavioural change would be minimal in terms of the cost of investment.

We know that in Calgary alone it costs \$58 million from other systems addressing male perpetration of domestic violence. That \$58 million can be saved if we just look to a program for violence prevention that research shows is effective. Calgary is, you know, the biggest city in the province, followed closely behind by Edmonton is about – what is it? Getting close to 5 million Albertans now. This \$58 million if you multiply it by four times could be significant in off-setting the cost to other programs, including police services and other kinds of treatments. But we don't do that, and that's not found here, unfortunately. We know that the federal government would support more action to support gender-based violence. They've got an amount of \$1.231 million here, but we're not seeing that flow into the community to address male perpetration of domestic violence, which is not a good way to do things.

The next thing I'd like to talk about is the actual Arts, Culture and Status of Women file again to talk about something that, unfortunately, didn't get addressed in the supplementary estimates. We know that volunteers throughout this province are supported significantly with some of the programming in Arts, Culture and Status of Women. The thing that's missing from supplementary supply that could have been addressed, because there were warning signs to this government that cut three provincial heritage organizations in this budget – that, again, is cutting off your nose to spite your face kind of behaviour that we see from this government, where it doesn't take the best approach – is really trying to make

available the thousands of volunteers out there who want to do the best thing possible for their interest area. It helps out this province, and it could have been addressed in supplementary supply, but it's missing here.

I know that they're talking about the investing in Canada infrastructure program. That's not where you get ongoing program dollars, unfortunately, for volunteers. That \$3.8 million is going to something else in community, culture, and recreation, which is a good thing, but we're missing the opportunity, like I said, to make sure that volunteers are better supported in this province than what we're seeing here.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to address a couple of other things here. It's in the legislative offices of the Auditor General, Ombudsman, Chief Electoral Officer, Ethics Commissioner, et cetera. There are several offices that we know are coming forward for additional supplementary supply. One of them in particular, the office of the Auditor General, had a long back and forth with the Public Accounts Committee. Finally we see that it's been recognized that \$4 million is being attributed to their expenditures, but that's as a result of all of the actions of this government and what they've done to make it challenging for the office of the Auditor General to do their work. Not only has it been challenging for that office to do its work, but the actual Auditor was not continued in his role to complete the procurement audit that he was investigating. He was initiated to look at the actual cost related to so many things in the private surgical area.

Mr. Chair, what we're seeing is that many of these supplementary supply numbers are as a result of the actions of this government and not of good governance. It's the actions of a government that in many ways plays fast and loose with the majority they have, and it's costing Albertans more and more.

The last thing I'd like to address is transparency, I guess, Mr. Chair. That relates to the actions, again, of the Auditor General's office. What we know is that in previous governments, particularly the NDP government, we had a review. It happens every year. There are different organizations that look at how governments report their accounts, and we know that this government is starting to fail in terms of its transparency around the reporting of its accounts. We were one of the best in class when we were government in terms of, you know, looking at our books. They were transparent. Many of the organizations didn't like our fiscal policies, but what they complained about is our fiscal policies, not the way we accounted for those.

Mr. Chair, I think what we're seeing here in terms of supplementary supply are additional costs that are brought to us by this government not doing a transparent kind of reporting. We're also seeing costs attributed to the taxpayer as a result of this government getting into legal troubles with the coal companies, and we haven't seen the end of it. We haven't seen the end of it, and though the other side will say, you know, that was brought on not by them, it's clear. It's clear in the reporting. It's clear in what the companies are alleging in court against this government, that this government was responsible for those lawsuits coming forward, not previous governments.

With those thoughts in mind I'm going to be taking my seat, Mr. Chair, and I'll allow somebody else to address this. Thanks.

3:40

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there others wishing to make comment? The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Pleasure to rise today to speak about supplementary estimates, the reasons for some of these requests, and the government's response to them. The 2025-26 supplementary supply estimates cover legislative offices as well as many departments which have asked for supplementary dollars

above and beyond the original budgeted amount, and one of those legislative office entities was the office of the Auditor General. I have a particular desire to speak about this office. As I think about the current Auditor General, Mr. Doug Wylie, I think about the example he sets as a legislative officer, as a public servant. Throughout my time during his tenure as the Auditor General I've had nothing but the utmost of respect for his work ethic, his professionalism, his organizational capacity, and capabilities in leading the Auditor General's office. I think any Albertan who's witnessed his work during his time as the Auditor General would say, without exception, that he's been one of the finest Auditors General that this province has ever seen.

I was pleased to see initially, when he did come forward with a request for an extra million bucks earlier on, that that ultimately was granted. Now, of course, we see an additional \$4 million – in fact, \$4,057,000 – subject to approval by this House, as the request is. Some of that money is for additional costs associated with the procurement and contracting examination with Alberta health and Alberta Health Services. If indeed the government wouldn't have invited extra questions, I imagine this money would not have had to have been spent, but there definitely are questions around the procurement policies and procedures as well as the division of Alberta Health Services into four different entities, which raised questions around the accounting of the new agencies and corporations.

These additional costs for the audits are reflected in this request for \$4,057,000, and I'm urging the House to of course accept this request for the additional funding in supplementary estimates in the spirit of truly reflecting upon the service of Mr. Wylie and his team over his tenure in doing so. I would like to think that the government would have acceded to his request, Mr. Chair, for an additional extension to his contract when he suggested that he'd be willing to do so and complete his audit work, yet the government saw fit to find that as the escape route to prevent, I believe, in my opinion, Mr. Wylie from completing his examination work that was undertaken to look at the audits that were under way for the procurement and contracting examination with Alberta health and Alberta Health Services.

While the supplemental estimates are still under debate in this House for this legislative office and while earlier on \$1 million was approved in additional funding, an additional \$4 million is being sought now, and the government has put this forward as something they wish to have passed. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Chair, that the government has made another decision which pre-empts the goodwill that may be seen on passing this supplemental estimate request. That decision, of course, was not to accept Mr. Wylie's offer to continue on with his contract while he was in the midst of audits that would perhaps expose some pretty damning expenditures and decisions by the government with respect to Alberta Health Services and the procurement policies within Alberta Health Services. I think that the government has chosen a mechanism beyond the denial of supplemental estimates dollars or the million dollars that was given before as an off-ramp to terminate Mr. Wylie's continued efforts to allow Albertans to know the full story behind the procurement debacles at Alberta Health Services.

That said, those are the comments that I wanted to make about that and make it very clear that I'm ashamed, actually, of the treatment that Mr. Wylie has been subjected to by this government. I was really disappointed that the government chose not to extend his contract and permit this outstanding Auditor General to continue his work. I would think that it will be a stain upon this government's record that they've failed to permit this consummate professional to continue his work and complete the audits with his excellent team that he's had under way.

No doubt Mr. Wylie will do his utmost during the time he has left in his tenure, I think until April 26, to ensure that there's a very

professional hand-off to whoever takes over the position and the team members that continue the work that they're doing within his office. I'm, once again, sorely disappointed that the government chose to treat a consummate professional such as Mr. Wylie in this way and not accept such a generous offer to continue on his tenure until the work was completed.

It's such an important audit, Mr. Chair, that one would have thought that a government interested in providing Albertans with real answers to the questions that were being sought, the answers to the questions Mr. Wylie was seeking to provide for Albertans, would have actually gone forward and allowed him to continue his tenure. However, one does question the motives of the government in denying that right or that request of Mr. Wylie, to continue his work.

I'll leave that there and let Albertans decide, Mr. Chair, on whether they believe the government was right or wrong in not agreeing to continue Mr. Wylie's tenure and seeking another Auditor General while he was in the middle of very important auditor work which could very well have exposed some pretty damning choices by the current government. I'll move on to other parts of the supplementary estimates that will raise questions as well.

Now, the items that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo talked about were pretty interesting to me as well. This House will be well advised that, of course, the government has been subjected to numerous lawsuits by coal companies over their abject failure in handling the approvals and then nonapprovals processes for considering a development of coal deposits in the eastern slopes of the Rockies. The results are that we have \$316 million to pay out in legal damages, and the numbers aren't adding up. There are two payouts that have been made and publicly reported, one for \$143 million to Atrum Coal and then another for \$95 million to Evolve Power, but that doesn't add up to \$316 million. It only adds up to \$238 million. There's a huge gap there. It's a \$78 million gap that's unaccounted for.

Albertans rightfully are asking: where's that money? Where's that money going? What happened to that? It's \$78 million, Mr. Chair. I don't know if there's a song written about that, but if I had \$78 million, I know a lot of things I'd do with it. I'd probably spend a lot of it on continuing care and making sure emergency hospital rooms were properly staffed and that people weren't lining up with serious illnesses and not getting care in our emergency wards. I could think that maybe the minister of transportation would spend some of that on some of the roadways that he is responsible for, where historically we have 42 per cent of our roadways in either poor or fair condition. Seventy-eight million dollars is just one hole in the bucket, Mr. Chair.

3:50

We've got \$316 million in coal settlements already paid for. The Member for Banff-Kananaskis today, earlier in debate and in a member's statement, revealed that there's another \$2 billion lawsuit – \$2 billion lawsuit, Mr. Chair – that Albertan taxpayers are going to be on the hook for, potentially, depending upon how that goes in court. Now, of course, the members opposite, the government, refuse to talk about this, even mention it, even acknowledge the fact of this \$2 billion lawsuit on top of the \$316 million in settlements that have already been talked about. They refuse to talk about this \$2 billion lawsuit, claiming that it's before the courts and it wasn't something they could talk about.

However, there was a requirement that this actually be reported, that the government faced this \$2 billion lawsuit. There appears to have been a failure to report the matter in the appropriate fashion, as required under law, and I'm hoping that the government rectifies this and at least follows the requirement to properly report to

Albertans what liabilities they face when it is as large as \$2 billion, Mr. Chair. That's a very, very large lawsuit that is being led by a coal company against the province, seeking damages once again in an allegation of wrongdoing and contractual fault.

I don't want to skip over an amount so large as the \$2 billion, but it just follows a pattern, seen in the supplementary estimates, of having to pay out coal companies because of the mismanagement of the government's coal file and the whole approval process and the decision not to approve and the back-and-forth uncertainty that they've created when, in fact, Albertans have said loud and clear that they are not in favour of mining coal in the Rocky Mountains. We heard earlier today members opposite and the environment minister, I believe, talking about how the government is hell bent and determined to protect our water supply, yet the evidence is clear, Mr. Chair, that our water supply is put under threat by allowing coal mining to happen.

The messaging that this government has been giving to coal companies is causing them uncertainty, and Albertans deserve clarity over the whole issue of development of coal reserves in the Rocky Mountains. This uncertainty is costing us billions of dollars, potentially \$2 billion in one particular lawsuit that's just been revealed, that the government failed to properly identify as required. Who knows how many more may be forthcoming, Mr. Chair? These are not small amounts. I mean, I talked about \$78 million that are unaccounted for and the \$316 million total of these lawsuits that have already been settled. Now we've got \$2 billion hanging over our heads as taxpayers in Alberta. For what? I mean, for total mismanagement.

We've been talking about the development of the coal deposits in the eastern slopes of the Rockies for a long time, Mr. Chair. I said in this House before that as a young grade 11 student debating in high school, I debated a topic on a Sunday radio debate with the then minister of the environment, Mr. Bill Yurko, myself and my debating partner, and we researched for a few months the topic. Mr. Yurko came in and figured two grade 11 students would be easy conversation, but the topic of debate back in 1974 was the development of the eastern slopes of the Rockies. The question was then: should it be parks, staying parks? Should a development of coal deposits be allowed, or should it be pristine and left in its natural state?

Of course, the pro development lobby was hoping to have it opened up to coal mining, and Mr. Yurko was more in support of that than the pristine state or the park argument. Unfortunately for him, fortunately for Albertans, in 1976 the then PC government of the day actually saw some light and recognized the value of the eastern slopes of the Rockies and brought in their coal policy, which gave a measure of protection to the eastern slopes of the Rockies, which, of course, this government has removed.

I'm concerned once again, Mr. Chair, that the eastern slopes of the Rockies are going to be exposed to massive coal mining, and we're going to be perhaps suffering more lawsuits of this magnitude and maybe even greater as a result of the mismanagement of this file. I mean, no matter what side of the coin you're on, certainty in business is something that has to be provided to major corporations and small ones. No matter what the decision is of government, businesses need to have certainty. So do families in their daily lives. The government have been terrible at providing mixed messages, and they've been called to account. I mean, we've been called to account. The government members, I guess, are all taxpayers as well.

Every one of us has been now found to be on the hook. We paid out \$316 million or thereabouts. There's 78 million bucks we still don't know what happened to, so we'd like to know where that money went. We're on the hook now, potentially, for \$2 billion.

Like, what in the world? Two billion dollars is an incredible amount of money. I'd like to know where that money might come from if indeed we end up having to pay for it.

Lots of questions, Mr. Chair, on the file with respect to the supplemental estimates for payouts on coal liabilities. We look forward to getting some solid answers from the government.

**The Deputy Chair:** Any others wishing to comment? The Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. One of my favourite things about Committee of the Whole is that we can speak as many times as we want. We can go back and forth, so I'm going to be asking some questions. Certainly, if the ministers responsible for those areas choose to engage in responding to those questions, I will take that cue as a sign that they're ready to speak and that I can ask further questions later on.

I'm going to start by saying that there are sort of a few key areas that we couldn't debate at prior opportunities that I want to touch on. One is that the Chief Electoral Officer within this budget has some supplementary supply, and that is, of course, because of increased demand that's being created by government legislation around citizen engagement initiatives, including recall petitions as well as other types of petitions that are being gathered around specific issues. Absolutely, it makes sense that we need to bolster that office given the government's decision to bring in legislation that increased workload in those areas. I am not entirely sure if this is sufficient to meet the significant workload, given how many government caucus members and cabinet members have had recall petitions initiated against them, but welcome any information on how this will meet that demand within the supplementary supply. That work has been ongoing. [interjections] Yeah, I certainly welcome any of the cabinet ministers who want to engage on this to speak specifically to that.

There were a number of petitions around recall that have been initiated, and that's one of the reasons why we're being asked today to approve more money, because of the government's legislation that, first of all, created that opportunity but then, second of all, initiatives that were undertaken by government that have led to constituents being frustrated and wanting to recall them. That's one area that I haven't had a chance to speak to before.

Another area I wanted to touch on was the coal liabilities. It was my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar who articulated some of that earlier. I don't recall seeing supplementary supply brought into this place before for hundreds of millions of dollars without having substantial justification provided for it. The Finance minister definitely quickly skipped over the fact that there's \$316 million in this bill through supplementary supply that we're being asked to approve because the government is paying out legal settlements related to coal lawsuits that were filed against the UCP government, the current government, based on initiatives that the current government, the UCP government, has undertaken.

4:00

The only ones we've heard about publicly are \$143 million for Atrium Coal and then another \$95 million to Evolve Power. Of course, that leaves another \$78 million that we still haven't heard about publicly where it's going to, yet the government's asking us to approve those two numbers. The two that the government has talked about publicly are \$238 million, so where's the other \$78 million going? I think that would be something that I'd certainly welcome anyone who knows – I assume all members of cabinet know where that money is going and for what lawsuits that is being required.

But asking this House to approve \$78 million without any transparency – it's money that's already been spent, right? The government comes here with supplementary supply, saying, "Here's money we've already spent; we need to have approval for this before the end of the fiscal year," which is in, oh, a week, "so please vote for another \$78 million to be spent" without even telling us who it's going to or specifically for what. That is very concerning. Having already paid out \$316 million in settlement for coal lawsuits, I think it would be important for us to know how much additional liability the government is facing through future lawsuits because of work that the current UCP government has undertaken.

Also, it's not that they're paying these out because they're using clauses to protect the eastern slopes and protect our headwaters. It's money that's being paid out, and there is still further exploration and consideration for further mining on the eastern slopes, something that so many people overwhelmingly oppose. Again, one of the petitions that's out there right now gathering signatures, got a lot of people organized – and I'm shocked how many. I was at a restaurant the other night, and somebody was in the restaurant walking around with a coal petition, getting signatures. So these two line items certainly go hand in hand.

So far I've talked about the legislative offices, and I've talked about coal. I want to take a moment to just touch on a few other areas in the supplementary supply bill. Right now I'm on page 42, which is around Advanced Education. There is a transfer of \$857,000 for French language initiatives, fully funded, dedicated under the Canada-Alberta agreement. I totally understand why we're doing that. The transfer is requested to provide from arts and culture to this other area, so the fund from the federal government under the national action plan to end gender-based violence is what is going towards funding that, but because it's being moved from one ministry to another, they need to account for it here.

What I wish we would see, because we hear lots of talk around there not being enough health care workers – and that is absolutely true. We've got about 1 in 5 Albertans without a family doctor right now. We have wait times in emergency departments out of control. We have twice as many people not making their recommended guidelines around the time to get their cancer removed from their bodies for the top five cancers than we saw under previous governments. One of the biggest solutions is, of course, making sure we have enough health care workers in the province of Alberta to be able to serve in those areas, but one of the first areas that conservative governments, in particular this UCP government, have cut time and time again is postsecondary education.

We say that we need more health care workers, but we're not actually funding an expansion of those programs to make sure that we meet our demands. It's something that certainly would be financially responsible, to ensure that we're doing the training locally. I think, I would hope, that nobody would argue against their constituents having an opportunity to pursue education in their own province and then serve and work in their own province in helping meet the demands that we have. When it comes to allied health, for example, perfusionists are being recruited away from the U of A hospital right now, the Mazankowski Heart Institute. Perfusionists are being recruited away, and we don't have a perfusionist program in the province of Alberta to be able to offer that education to our own students and then be able to have them employed in our own institutions here in the province.

This could be one area that the Advanced Education minister, I would hope, could have some opportunities to work with the minister responsible for hospitals to say: "Hey, I've got a win-win solution here. Let's invest a little bit in this department because it's going to help you in this other department. You won't have to spend as much

money trying to recruit perfusionists back once they've left and gone to another province or other jurisdictions in other countries. We can do this training right here at home." Nope. No request for anything in that area.

Then another one I'll touch on is Education and Childcare. There's \$1 million for information technology for the development of the parent payment portal. Again, this is government responding to the fact that they refused to reach a negotiated deal with teachers. Teachers went on strike; government decided to spend \$1 million to create a website or a software system for parents to have to navigate to be able to get the money that the government promised when the teachers went on strike to help with child care costs for those who had children who were under a certain threshold. It all could have been avoided if we would have actually sat down and reached an agreement rather than forcing teachers out onto the streets and then imposing terms in a contract upon them. I hesitate to even say "contract" when it's imposed by the employer. Usually contracts imply that two parties have entered into something consensually, but that certainly wasn't the case here.

There are many, many more questions. Certainly welcome any of the ministers responsible for those areas to be able to respond so that we can have a greater understanding of whether they did indeed take these issues forward to cabinet and failed to get support for them or if they even failed to advocate to cabinet for these areas that could have been resolved in their budget today. We are at an important time in Alberta's history, and I think transparency and some answers would go a long way to helping increase confidence.

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any others wishing to speak?

Ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 20 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

**The Deputy Chair:** Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** Any opposed? That is carried.

### Bill 19 Appropriation Act, 2026

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered? The Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 19, the Appropriation Act, 2026, that being the budget bill. You know, there was criticism of a budget. To quote: they think all they have to do is wait out the relative weakness in oil prices, hope they can get the pipelines built, hope that the bitumen royalties will continue to grow with an increase in production, and hope that oil and gas prices bail them out again. It goes on: after promising during the last election to balance the budget and stay out of debt, short-sighted and reckless spending will have lasting impacts on future generations and no doubt cause long-term pain as we deal with the debt we're taking on today. You know who said that, Mr. Chair? That was the Premier, just over a decade ago, criticizing the budget from the Progressive Conservative government of the time, I suppose just before she crossed the floor to join them.

Those words spoken by the Premier, much like her criticism of the arrogance and the entitlement of the Redford era in accepting lavish gifts and looking after themselves far more than the people of Alberta: well, that's all come back around again. The Premier's

own criticisms of that government at the time have come back and apply to her because what we see in front of us with this budget, Mr. Chair, is a government that has massively increased debt and has no plan to stop increasing that debt, a government that managed to waste a boom in the midst of a boom.

**4:10**

Columnist Rob Breakenridge, a principled conservative, Mr. Chair – some of those still exist in the province; I'm not sure how many in this House, but some still exist – has written many columns talking about his concerns with this government and their approach, their arrogance, their entitlement, and their incredibly poor fiscal management. In an article he wrote last August, at that time he was looking ahead and noting that the province's haul of non-renewable resource revenue was clocking in at about \$22 billion. Now, that's a little higher than what ended up coming in. But he noted that if you subtracted the surplus from that, it revealed a \$14 billion budgetary reliance on energy revenues, and that was a far greater reliance than any budget tabled in the last decade. So this government that preaches competent fiscal management and stability in fact has put us in the most unstable position with their budgets in the last decade. "For perspective," he says, "the largest total ... amount of resource revenue recorded during the Notley ... years was \$5.4 billion." Considerably less.

Now, "the expected deficit," he said, was nonetheless "quickly ballooning." To quote Mr. Breakenridge: "A government that has preached fiscal conservatism and the need to get off of that roller coaster and bank those windfalls for future generations." Well, they're barely making it. In fact, they're not at all. He noted that their current fiscal year's planned spending, \$79 billion at that time, "represents a 41 per cent increase in overall spending from the last NDP budget" and that "the NDP took four years to increase spending by \$10 billion," but the UCP doubled that. Twice as fast for the same increase.

You look around, Mr. Chair. As you've heard many of my colleagues say and as I'm hearing many Albertans say: where'd the money go? We've never seen a government spend so much to deliver so little. Albertans are looking around and they're seeing the state of our health care system. They're seeing the rising and soaring wait times. They're seeing our overcrowded classrooms. And they're asking: where did the money go? This government has recklessly ramped up spending, but we know that they are not spending it where Albertans need it to be spent. They are wasting it on sweet contracts for their friends and supporters, on ideological attempts to privatize lab services that had to come all the way back and be brought back into the public service, on quadrupling bureaucracy in the health care system while failing to improve it for anyone.

A \$9.4 billion deficit this year, projected debt of \$137 billion, coming close to doubling current debt, Mr. Chair, while benefiting from near historic resource revenues at \$13.2 billion. After seven years under this government, four years under this Premier, they are projecting a deficit with no path to balance. They've squandered a near-record resource wealth. They will have accumulated so much debt that the cost of carrying that debt will be the same as what they currently spend on public safety, mental health and addictions, and all environmental projects combined.

Now, Mr. Breakenridge wrote another column in which he notes that this government amended a bill called the Taxpayer Protection Act back in 2023 to include a requirement that any future personal or corporate income tax increases would be required to go to a referendum. They were very proud at the time of saying that no government could raise taxes, cost Albertans more, without actually going to Albertans for a vote. This government did, Mr. Chair. They are raising taxes for Albertans in this budget. They are raising costs

for Albertans in this budget, and they did not consult them. In fact, they did everything they could to try to hide it from them.

The Premier declared at the time, "Promise made. Promise kept. Bill 1 has passed in the legislature, ensuring families and businesses are protected from future tax hikes without a referendum."

Now, Mr. Breckenridge says:

That will come as news to the families and businesses hit with tax increases in [this government's] budget. The Taxpayer Protection Act, of course, does not cover increases in the province's share of property taxes, which is what this budget delivers in spades.

He notes that

the numbers vary for communities [across] the province. For Calgary, the increase is especially substantial, representing an annual \$339 tax increase for the typical single-family home. [The mayor of Calgary] says it's the largest property tax jump in the city's history.

Again, to quote Mr. Breckenridge:

The UCP pose as fiscal conservatives when [they're] railing against consumption taxes or trot out symbolic legislation [like] the Taxpayer Protection Act. Then the government cranks up spending, blowing through its own fiscal framework in the process . . .

It's cynical politics to begin with, made all the worse by the attempt to camouflage the tax increases by lumping them in with the municipal property tax bill.

But that's precisely what this government did, Mr. Chair. You know, they will spend taxpayer money sending out flyers bragging about all the wonderful things they did, but they will hide when they raise Albertans' property taxes by one of the largest amounts we've ever seen in the city of Calgary.

This budget does nothing to make life more affordable for Albertans; it does a lot to raise costs. We talked about the property taxes. I have talked in here – I shared a member's statement – about what they are doing to seniors. They're raising fees for seniors in continuing care. They're pushing seniors off the seniors' benefits in the province, seniors who are barely making minimum wage. They're raising vehicle registration costs. They're raising registration costs for small businesses. They like to brag about being a government that supports businesses. No, Mr. Chair. They charge small businesses more. Charging more fees for trade workers to get certified: the government of the working man. That is what this budget does.

This is not a budget for Albertans. This is a budget, Mr. Chair, where the government is trying to cover up its own mistakes, its reckless spending on the wrong priorities, its waste of Albertans' dollars. While the Premier enjoys swanky flights in Saudi Arabia, five-star-plus hotel rooms, her staff with her . . .

**Mr. Haji:** Seven.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Seven stars – wow – says my colleague, who actually knows that area. He's aware, from someone who's visited that part of the world, that there are commercial flights available for much of what the Premier took. We know that from experience. We've tabled it here in this House. They weren't able to figure that out, Mr. Chair. [interjections]

Now, the fact is, Mr. Chair – I hear the government members are upset, and I would be, too. I'd be awfully embarrassed if this was my Premier. If I was putting a budget like this out and charging these costs to Albertans while my Premier and my leader was showing that level of arrogance and entitlement while we were taking higher salaries for ourselves, more money for our accommodations, giving salaries to our friends who are parliamentary secretaries while raising the property taxes of everyday Albertans, yeah, I'd be upset, too. I'd be embarrassed. I'd be ashamed. But the fact is that what we have

often seen is that this is a government that seems to know no shame, arrogance and entitlement that far eclipse what we saw from the previous PC government, which took over 40 years to get there and this government rocketed to in a handful.

As I said, this is not a budget that serves Albertans. This is a government that serves a government that is arrogant and entitled and woefully out of touch. Albertans deserve far better. I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that we are ready and waiting to deliver that better.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Any other members wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

**Member Boparai:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today to speak on behalf of hard-working people of Calgary-Falconridge and all Albertans who feel betrayed by what they see in Bill 19. We were told that this was a government of fiscal restraint. We were told that they were the steady hands on the wheel. But looking at this budget, the only thing steady is the UCP's descent into deep, dark red ink.

The UCP has managed to do something that should be mathematically impossible in a province as rich as ours. They have wasted the boom during the boom. While our rigs are turning and our resources are flowing at near record levels, this government has handed Albertans a \$9.4 billion deficit. They are projecting a mountain of debt reaching \$137 billion. This isn't a fiscal plan; it's a fiscal fire sale. Today I'm here to ask the question every Albertan is asking at their kitchen table: why are we paying more for the UCP to deliver so much less?

4:20

Mr. Chair, let's call this budget what it really is, the incompetence tax. The UCP was handed the strongest economic conditions in a generation. They were gifted resource revenues that would make any previous government envious, yet after seven years of UCP management, four of those under this Premier, they have no path to a balanced budget. They tell us to tighten our belts while they loosen theirs. They're squandering Alberta's wealth on experiments that nobody asked for. They're breaking their own fiscal laws. They're blowing past their own spending rules. They're treating the provincial treasury like a personal credit card with no limit.

Who pays interest on that \$137 billion debt? It's not the cabinet ministers. It's the Alberta families trying to afford a bag of groceries. It's the senior choosing between heating their home and buying their medication. The cost of just carrying the UCP's debt is now equal to what we spend on public safety, mental health, and many more services. That is the UCP advantage: paying billions to bankers because this government can't manage a budget during an oil boom.

Mr. Chair, why is the money gone? Because while Albertans were looking at their bills, the UCP was looking out for their friends. We see it in corrupt care: hundreds of millions wasted on Turkish Tylenol that sat in a warehouse, the DynaLife lab fiasco that cost us a fortune and left patients waiting for weeks, the firing of an AHS CEO who tried to blow the whistle on insider procurement. This government has turned the provincial budget into a buffet for their well-connected lobbyists. We see the reports, PR firms and corporate owners getting exclusive access while Albertans get the bill. They're privatizing surgeries and handing out planning funding like candy. But when it comes to actually building a bed or hiring a doctor, the cupboard is bare.

They are distracted by sovereignty acts and separating from Canada, distractions designed to keep Albertans from noticing the UCP is picking their pockets to pay off their insiders. Albertans didn't vote for a government to play politics with their pension. They voted for a government to fix the hospitals.

Mr. Chair, the UCP claims to care about affordability. If that's true, why does this budget read like a price list for a luxury resort? Every time an Albertan turns around, the UCP has their hand in their wallet. Under this budget property taxes are going up, insurances are skyrocketing, fees for seniors in continuing care are going up, vehicle registration is going up, even the cost for a tradesperson to get certified is going up. They're taxing the very people who built this province: our red seal trades, our small-business owners, our apprentices.

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

In Calgary-Falconridge my constituents are struggling with the highest utility rates and insurance premiums in the country. Does Bill 19 fix that? No. It adds a 6 per cent tax on rental cars and increases tourism levies. It's a nickel-and-dime strategy from a billion-dollar deficit government.

Madam Chair, let's talk about the bricks and mortar of our province. In Edmonton and Calgary our hospitals are bursting at the seams. What does this budget offer? Planning funding? You can't perform surgery in a plan. You can't put a hospital bed in a feasibility study. There is no funding for new beds at the Grey Nuns. There is no funding for a new hospital in the cities where people are actually moving.

Education? It's a disgrace. The UCP only hired half the teachers they promised in 2025. They forced a contract on teachers by violating their rights, and now they expect us to believe they will fulfill their new commitments. Madam Chair, look at the record. The NDP built or modernized 244 schools in four years, and the UCP: 92 in seven years. That's not a record to be proud of. That's a failing grade.

Madam Chair, why is the UCP so obsessed with separation and picking fights with the federal government? It's a smokescreen. They want you to look at Ottawa so you don't look at the \$9.4 billion hole in the basement. They want you to talk about sovereignty so you don't talk about the fact that no new investment is coming because the world sees Alberta as unstable under this Premier. Investment follows stability. It doesn't follow chaos. It doesn't follow a government that breaks its own laws. By chasing their separatist fantasies, the UCP is chasing away the very jobs Albertans need to survive this deficit.

Madam Chair, Albertans deserve a government that uses our economic strength to better their lives, not the lives of UCP insiders. Alberta's New Democrats are ready to manage this budget properly. We aren't interested in new taxes. We are interested in competence. We want a budget that builds a school our kids need today. We want a health care system that focuses on patients, not corrupt care scandals. We want a fiscal plan that respects the law and protects the next generation from a \$137 billion mountain of debt.

This budget is a confession. It is a confession that the UCP has failed. They have failed on fiscal management, they have failed on affordability, and they have failed on the basic services Albertans rely on. If the UCP won't do the job they were elected to do, it's time for a government that will. Madam Chair, I oppose Bill 19 because Albertans shouldn't have to pay for the UCP's failure.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there others to speak to Bill 19 in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Haji:** Thank you, Madam Chair. My colleagues have explained the overall picture of Bill 19, Budget 2026, a budget that has a \$9.4 billion deficit, a budget that shows no recovery of a debt that goes over \$137 billion despite benefiting from all the revenues that we

have seen. The process is that we take the opportunity to go and spend some time on the specific ministries so that we could understand and then come back to this House and see if there is a possibility and a rationale to vote in favour of the budget. I will explain to you why we have a problem of voting with it in a specific example of one ministry.

I've talked to my colleagues. Most of them had expressed the same experience. With a bit closer look into the Ministry of Primary and Preventative Health Services, outside of the physicians' compensation, the ministry's budget appears to have reduced by roughly \$1 billion. This is a time when the government itself is repeatedly talking about population growth, but the reduction of that, without taking into consideration inflation of our population growth, is an over \$1 billion reduction.

Then I will go into the programs. Support for program support like, for example, administratively or bureaucracy has increased \$60 million in one budget line. Within that budget line, there are cuts to direct program deliveries. You will expect, when you see a \$60 million increase on program support, that specifically relevant adjacent programs that are direct delivery will also show some increase. Instead, Madam Chair, \$1 million is cut on protection and prevention and wellness. That includes injury prevention, the third leading cause of death in the province.

4:30

Close to \$2 million is cut on cancer research, screening, and prevention at a time when projections show an increase of 50 per cent in cancer-related deaths by 2040, 50 per cent of incidences by 2040. Here is the other one: \$326 million is cut from public health services. Again, I will remind the House and the members who will be favouring this in terms of voting for this budget, this is only one piece of the ministry.

Taken together, this amounts to close to \$400 million in cuts, so we have made all the efforts in the House and in committee to understand why. There's no answer to that. It leaves us with: how will you support such a budget, Madam Chair?

Let me dive into cancer screening, prevention, and early detection. It remains the leading cause, as I said, Madam Chair. Despite this, the budget reduces funding for cancer research, screening, prevention at a time when Alberta's population is both growing in population size but also an aging population that comes with complexities. Under these conditions one would expect investment be maintained and increased to meet the rising demand; however, how about a government that takes the opposite direction and makes cuts? How will anyone support such a budget when you're cutting funding to budget lines of cancer screening and early detection initiatives?

The government should explain questions that have been raised in committee and in the House, Madam Chair. Has it assessed whether these funding reductions will lead to changes in the screening eligibility? Some people who are eligible now will not be eligible down the line. How many fewer Albertans will be expected to access cancer screening and early detection services as a result of the proposed budget cuts? You would expect that some explanation and rationale would be given that we could understand, but no. Yesterday was the last time that I have asked the minister responsible in the House, and the only thing that I have asked was: can you commit that Albertans will not have difficulties in accessing cancer screening? The minister could not commit to that.

Protection and prevention and wellness programs like injury prevention, as I mentioned, school health promotion, and other public health initiatives are critical. You cannot address the suffocating and congested hospitals if you don't address the upstream interventions, which are prevention and promotion. But once you cut that, regardless of how many bed towers you talk about, which you haven't budgeted for in terms of construction in

this budget, you will not be able to provide relief at the hospital beds and with the congestion that we're experiencing, that the medical community is raising a concern about, that the emergency doctors are raising and saying that this is a crisis, and the government needs to do something.

If the government is cutting budget lines of these initiatives, that will relieve with specific prevention and wellness programs, that are being reduced or eliminated – you cannot have the existing programs continue at the same level if you are making cuts without explaining. Then one would wonder what is going to happen with those.

What criteria were used to decide which programs will be eliminated? I asked if the minister can provide some sort of explanation to that, but as many of my colleagues have experienced, the answers that we were getting were basically reading numbers from the spreadsheet of investments. Yes, you need to explain the investments, but if your outcomes are being impacted, those investments would lead into questions that have been raised in the House today multiple times, which are: where is this money going?

Cutting prevention, Madam Chair, may save money on paper in the short term. You will see the numbers have changed on your spreadsheet, but it creates larger costs elsewhere in our system later. That is what we are already experiencing in our hospitals.

In the House we have heard multiple times the ministry speak about that we are investing \$140 million in immunization. Yes, but what you don't hear is that it was \$153 million last year despite population growth, despite outbreaks, despite all the challenges that are being faced in terms of outbreaks that we see; \$13 million was cut. We have asked: where will this lead to, and what are the scenarios and the reasons that have led to these cuts? What assumptions did the ministry use to justify reducing vaccine supply? Does that mean that the coverage will also go down? Does that mean that the costing has changed? None of those explanations were given to us, Madam Chair.

As we remember, last year this government announced self-referral and private pay for diagnostic imaging services that include MRI and CT scans. We looked into the budget during the estimates, Madam Chair. The ministry's estimates show a reduction of more than a billion dollars in diagnostic and therapeutic services compared to the previous year: one billion dollar reduction in diagnostic. Is it coincidence that last year the government announced that it will be privatized, there will be self-referrals, you can pay by yourself out of pocket, and you find now a billion dollar reduction in the budget. What has reduced?

The question that comes is, well, do you expect to recover the billion dollars that you have reduced in the budget line from Albertan's pockets? My answer is yes; the minister's answer is no answer at all because I have not received any response to that. Will this self-referred mammogram screening remain fully insured? I asked the minister yesterday; the minister will not commit. So with that case, then, how will you support a budget that – the government has a problem with transparency – will not explain where the billion-dollar recovery will be made?

Let's talk about the fiscal risk and the federal transfers that this budget comes with. It's the timing that it comes in with when there could be a referendum that could significantly affect Alberta's relationship with the federal government. The government should be able to explain whether this has been considered in the financial explanation context, which still we don't know and there is no answer to that. Based on such context I asked during the committee, I did not get the answer, and I will still ask again: has the government developed risk scenarios outlining short-term, medium-term, and long-term impacts on the service delivery in this situation that this referendum leads to something? Has the government worked with Treasury Board or other departments within Treasury Board and crossgovernment planning for these fiscal risks that come during this budget period? Will

the government commit to transparency by releasing any scenario planning? There must be some scenario planning that has been done to share with us so that we will be able to take the risk of voting for this budget, but none of those were provided, Madam Chair.

At every level this budget raises the same concerns: major reductions are being proposed without clear explanation of what services will be cut, what access will be lost, or what long-term pressures will be created elsewhere in our systems. The government is incapable of explaining that.

If the government expects support for this budget, it must do more than present top-line figures from the spreadsheet. There has to be some justification or explanation that comes with the budget lines. It must explain in detail what these cuts mean for public health cancer screening, immunization, rehabilitation diagnosis, and other overall systems of the overall health care. Without that transparency, there is no reasonable basis to support this budget, Madam Chair, from this side of the House as well as from any member on the government side because this government lacks explanation of those budget lines. It carries a deficit that is \$9.4 billion. It provides no path of recovery from the long-term \$137 billion in deficit.

In my conclusion, Madam Chair, I ask every member in this House to vote against Bill 19, which is Budget 2026. Thank you, Madam Chair.

4:40

**Member Hoyle:** Madam Chair, many of us should know and I hope we do know that a provincial budget is a road map for our future and will impact the lives of all Albertans in a very direct way. Albertans are facing real challenges right now, and in uncertain times we need to be coming together to protect good-paying jobs, keep people working, maintain a strong quality of life, and build a more prosperous province. But this budget is leaving thousands of Albertans behind. After seven years of UCP government and four years under this current Premier Albertans are staring at a \$9.4 billion deficit and a projected debt of \$137 billion, and that's despite benefiting from near-historic resource revenues. To put that more plainly, during some of the strongest economic conditions in a generation this UCP government has managed to produce one of the largest deficits in recent history.

This budget is a failure of basic financial management; so much wasted money and so little to show for it. We all want to know: where has the money gone? This government will try to blame the federal government, Justin Trudeau, who's not even Prime Minister anymore, and global conditions, pointing to declining energy prices. But where is this government accountability? Madam Chair, Albertans know better. This government was handed a boom, and they've wasted it. They've squandered Alberta's near record resource wealth, and now when the cycle shifts, there is no cushion, no plan, and no credible path back to balance.

The numbers tell the story clearly: a \$9.4 billion deficit this year, followed by a \$7.6 billion deficit, and a \$6.9 billion deficit in the years ahead, expenses rising to \$83.9 billion and debt climbing to \$137 billion. Perhaps most alarming of all, the cost of servicing that debt alone is set to rival what this government spends on public safety, mental health and addictions, and environmental protection combined. Not only is this grossly irresponsible; it is unsustainable.

Albertans deserve a government that is good with money – this government is not – a government that understands that prosperity must mean a better quality of life for everyone. Instead, Albertans get a budget that makes life more expensive at a time when families are already stretched by inflation. This government is increasing property taxes, fees, and hiking up a wide range of user fees. Seniors in continuing care will pay more. Families will pay more to register their vehicles. Small-business owners, who are already navigating rising

costs, will face higher registration fees. Tradespeople, the very workers we need to build our economy, are being asked to pay more just to get certified. At a time when Alberta needs skilled labour, when we should be removing barriers, opening up the door and encouraging people into trades jobs, this UCP government is putting up new barriers. At a time when entrepreneurs are trying to stay afloat, the government is adding costs. At a time when some of our most vulnerable Albertans deserve dignity and stability, this government is asking them to pay more. It's disgraceful, Madam Chair.

Budget 2026 misses the mark on nearly all fronts, and it shows that the UCP government isn't interested in listening to what really matters most to Albertans. Our health care system is truly in a poor state. Emergency rooms are under strain, wait times remain too long, and families are still struggling to find a family doctor, yet this budget includes no direct new funding for additional beds at the Grey Nuns or Misericordia hospitals despite well-documented pressure in Edmonton's acute-care system. Primary care remains underresourced with virtually no meaningful investment to stabilize or expand access. There's no capital funding for a new hospital in Edmonton or Calgary, and as much as this government wants to deny or ignore it, we desperately need a new south Edmonton hospital to serve one of the fastest growing areas in our province and surrounding communities.

Since 2023, when I became an MLA, I have been continuously asked, e-mailed, phoned by residents about a south Edmonton hospital. In 2017 I was proud to join the former NDP government as a private citizen to announce the intention to build a south Edmonton hospital because I knew as a local resident, as a local publicly elected community leader in Edmonton-South, as a mother, as a caregiver to an elderly parent how vital it would be to have a hospital close to home. Back then our hospitals were overcrowded, back then our front-line health care workers said we needed a new hospital, and back then a plan and business case was set to see that hospital built by – when? – 2026. That's right, Madam Chair. The hospital would exist today.

Albertans are not asking for miracles. They're asking for access to basic needs and for a system that works when they need it. This budget doesn't deliver that. Alberta is one of the fastest growing provinces in Canada, and when we look at K to 12 education, we see there's no construction funding for a single new school in the next three years. In this budget 100 per cent of the increase in education funding is for honouring the collective agreement which was forced on teachers through the violation of their rights. Much of the classroom work done by teachers is done on their own personal time after school hours with little to no help. Teachers are still feeling burnt out, which directly impacts the quality of education and student learning.

Another 27 schools are at 100 per cent capacity, having the same number of students enrolled as they were designed to hold, and dozens more sit between 97 and 99 per cent full, in some cases only a few new students away from running out of room. The above stats are not something to be proud of, Madam Chair. I know overcapacity in schools is a huge issue in Edmonton-South as a parent whose kids attend local schools in my riding, and I have been witness to this for years. Young children in Edmonton-South, some only in kindergarten, are being told they need to commute 25-plus kilometres or more round trip because there's no room in the catchment school in the riding. All of the surrounding schools are full as well.

This government promised to hire 1,045 teachers in 2025. Instead, they hired just 522, half of what was promised. Even the increase in education funding tells a troubling story, every dollar going toward honouring a collective agreement that was imposed on teachers after their rights were violated. There is no real

expansion here, no operational investment, no plan to meet the needs of a growing province. Madam Chair, the contrast couldn't be clearer. The previous NDP government built and modernized 244 schools in just four years. This government has managed 92 in seven years.

All of this is happening while this government talks about the Alberta advantage, but what good is the advantage if families still are struggling to afford their lives? What good is the advantage if you can't find a family doctor? What good is the Alberta advantage if your child is in an overcrowded classroom, if your costs keep going up while services fall behind? This government wants credit for revenue it didn't create, but it refuses to take responsibility for how that revenue has been managed. This government talks about growth but not about outcomes. It talks about the Alberta advantage but not about affordability.

4:50

Madam Chair, better is possible, and Albertans deserve better. They deserve a government that uses economic strength to improve their quality of life. Albertans deserve a government that understands that affordability is not just a talking point but a daily reality for families across this province. And above all, they deserve a government that is much better at money than this current government. Right now this government is spending more, delivering less, and asking Albertans to pick up that tab. If the UCP will not use Alberta's prosperity to build a better future for all Albertans, then it's time for an Alberta New Democrat government that will.

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll take a couple of moments to respond to some of the comments that we've heard this afternoon in debate from the members opposite talking about the budget. Now, there are a number of things that I have scratched down in my notes, so I'll be referring back to them a little bit, but I do want to talk, first off, about this fiscal situation that the NDP claims they left when they left office in 2019.

Madam Chair, it could not be further from the truth. Even if the members scream it as loud as they can into that strong southern Alberta wind that I enjoy often down in my neck of the woods, it doesn't make it true. Even if it's on the record of *Hansard* for the rest of time, it doesn't make it true. The members are saying things that are inaccurate. While they were in government, they literally drove away investment. They told residents to leave the province to find employment elsewhere and, in doing so, changed the brand of our province from being a job-creating, wealthy province to one that is rejecting investment opportunities and more than happy to capitulate to the will of Justin Trudeau. That's point 1.

Let's talk about Justin Trudeau for a moment. While the former Prime Minister has only been out of office for a little over a year, his legacy and the impact he has left on this country will not be forgotten and for all the wrong reasons. Madam Chair, this is a Prime Minister that – if you sat down with anyone else and asked them to create a road map that would destroy Alberta's advantage, create a road map that would destroy investment interest and destroy our interests, tell me what you or that person would have done differently than what Justin Trudeau did to this province. Two Trudeaus have wreaked havoc on this country, and their legacy will last forever for all the wrong reasons. And the members opposite say: "Well, he's gone. He's out of office. Why do you keep talking about him?" Because the damage that he has done will take decades to fix – decades – if ever. If ever. The reputational damage that Justin Trudeau has inflicted on this country and on this province may never be fixed.

Now, for the leadership of our Premier and members of the government caucus it is our task every single day to try to fix that, to fight back, to defend Alberta's best interests. In seven years in government, seven years – the members love to talk about the seven years that we've been in government. They're right. We've been here for seven years, and we're still fixing their mess after four years of being in government because of the moronic decisions made by the members opposite while they were in government. Phasing out coal too quickly: we face higher electricity prices. Albertans are saddled with the bad decisions, and they're paying the price.

Now, somehow they want to throw that back on the government as though we created that damage. Madam Chair, I can tell you that if the members opposite are concerned about some of the affordability measures and the affordability issues in our province, they should have a long, hard look inward. They damaged this province to the point that we are taking years to fix it, much longer than one mandate. [interjections] Now, the members opposite have some nonsense to talk about. I hear them heckling me across the aisle. Frankly, they know I'm right. They know I'm right. The fact is that they don't have the gall to stand up here and face their own record from 2015 to 2019. It's one of debt, of deficits, and – say it with me now – dumb decisions.

Now, Madam Chair, talking about the budget here for a moment, there are a lot of things in this budget that are catered directly to the best interests of Albertans. Let's talk particularly about health care spending, the largest line item in this budget, understanding that the pressures that we're facing are a result, again, of the legacy of Justin Trudeau that he has created with completely bungling the immigration file to the point that we were at growth patterns that were so unsustainable that some people couldn't even have a place to live in other jurisdictions. Now, because of the leadership of our minister for seniors and social services, we're building thousands of houses.

Let's go back to health care. We must meet the demands put on our health care system. That's why, under the leadership of the minister of hospitals, we're creating another 8,700 hospital beds.

**Mr. Jones:** We have 8,700; 300 under construction.

**Mr. Schow:** We have 8,700 hospital beds; 300 under construction, Madam Chair. There's a whole lot more coming. Do you want to know why? Because we have to meet those challenges.

Now, under the opposition they didn't have these problems. When you're in government as a socialist party, a Marxist party, your job is ultimately to push people away if they don't conform to your thought process, your way of living. That's exactly what they did. But we have record spending in health care and education. Members talk about how many schools they built. What a crock. Madam Chair, what a crock. Again, you can scream it in the wind all day, but you can't make it true. On this side of the House we're investing record money, billions of dollars in building schools and supporting education. So I ask the members: are you willing to vote against this budget? Are you willing to vote against this budget?

**The Chair:** Hon. member, please direct your comments through the chair.

**Mr. Schow:** I'm a bit of a wanderer, Madam Chair. I look all over the place because it's important to take in this beautiful Chamber in which we sit.

I can say through you to the members opposite: are you willing to vote against the budget with record spending on education and health care? If you are not, why don't you propose a plan? I have not seen a single shadow budget from the members opposite. No

plan. This is so characteristic of what I would call as a sports guy an armchair quarterback. Someone screams at the TV because they're not running the play that they should run but without even a modicum of expertise to even comment.

Now, Madam Chair, this is an appropriate characterization of the members opposite because they have no plan. Lobbing insults at the government is not a plan. Heckling members of the government and the Premier is not a plan. Chasing your tail down an endless story about a copper cat is not a plan. I would encourage the members to come back down to planet Earth and recognize that we face real fiscal realities in this province that they didn't have any issues with because they drove away investment. We're doing much better than all the other jurisdictions around Canada under the leadership of our Premier and the Finance minister and members of this government caucus.

Now, talking about that fiscal situation, Madam Chair, I would not call six credit downgrades the strongest fiscal position of this province in decades. Count them out. Six. That is indefensible.

**Member Ceci:** Ask Toews how many he had.

**Mr. Schow:** I'm hearing from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who is also the worst Finance minister in the history of this province, who led the charge with those six credit downgrades. Now, on this side of the House, Madam Chair, with this budget we're investing in education. We're investing in health care. We're investing in building schools. We're investing in seniors. We're investing in compassionate care and intervention. We're doing it all. We can chew gum and walk at the exact same time, and we're also attracting investment.

5:00

Now, as the minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration I have a number of programs that we use to support investment attraction that allow us to maintain this reputation, or rather I should say regain the reputation, as an attractive place to do business after four years of the devastating effects of the NDP. What I hear as I go around to different jurisdictions in the world: they know where Alberta is. They know who our Premier is because we've spent the time building the relationships. We've put the time in. Ultimately those relationships translate into trade negotiations. They translate into businesses right here in Alberta expanding their footprint around the world and companies around the world looking at Alberta as a place to invest their own money. That's the work and the legacy of this United Conservative government.

Now, you compare and contrast that with the members opposite, it is one of failure in investment attraction. Madam Chair, if you just give me a moment here while I look for something. I'm looking for the NDP's plan on tourism. I'm looking for the tourism strategy. You know what? It doesn't exist.

**Ms Hoffman:** That's a prop.

**Mr. Schow:** If you go back – I'm sorry, did I use anything in that? Did I use anything as a prop? If the Member from Edmonton-Glenora has something to say, the member is more than welcome to stand up in this Chamber. Now, I would ask the member to keep it germane to the conversation here because what I've only heard recently is just off-the-cuff heckles that absolutely made no sense. In this instance, there is no plan. There is no tourism plan, and I would not call the Order Paper a prop. It's an important document of this Assembly.

You go back to the election, and we talk about economic development and tourism: that's exactly what it is. We're setting records every year under the leadership of the Minister of Tourism and Sport, billions of dollars every year, leading the charge in

economic development, attracting new dollars in this province, export dollars, Madam Chair. Money coming from outside of Alberta or outside of Canada. Money, new money, injected into the province because they want to come visit. This is the plan, and we've created a plan to attract those visitors from around the world.

Look at the NDP. Again, this is on brand for the members opposite. They have no plan. Not a single plan. Not a single word about tourism in their campaign platform because they don't care. Under the NDP nobody wanted to visit Alberta. Madam Chair, under the NDP nobody wanted to visit Alberta, but now that we're here, we're developing new products. We're hosting world-class events like the new World Cup of Hockey. That's right. The leadership of the Minister of Tourism and Sport and the Premier: the World Cup of Hockey is coming right here to Alberta.

While the Leader of the Opposition appears to throw insults at professional sports organizations, foreign dignitaries, and foreign governments, our government, our Premier, is more focused on building relationships, and because of that, Madam Chair, we're seeing record investment in tourism, and we're going to continue to see that right to our goal of reaching \$25 billion by 2035.

In conclusion, I hope that my remarks have shined a light on the lunacy that was the four years of government of the NDP and the reality that our government is taking real steps to build the economy and support the most important sectors in our province, like health care and education, spending record dollars in those areas. If the members opposite think that they have a better plan or a better path forward, I would love to see a shadow budget. We just spent two weeks doing estimates. They know what real budgets look like. They read them. They looked through them. They should know what they look like. They've been doing estimates now for seven years in opposition. Not their first rodeo, Madam Chair. I would love to see a shadow budget. Put it on paper. Let's see what it looks like. Let's see what that looks like. Let's see what kind of nonsense comes out of the members opposite and how they would spend Alberta taxpayers' money . . . [interjections]

Now, the members opposite again are heckling complete, utter nonsense. I'm saying: put forth a plan. Let's see your plan. The armchair quarterbacks opposite have no plan, and that is characteristic of the members opposite because if they did, they would be exposed. They would be exposed for all the horrible decisions that they would make if they were in government, and that would utterly tank what is already a tanking party. Like, it's hard to put into words how bad it is.

Madam Chair, I'll simply finish by encouraging all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of this bill, to vote in favour of this budget, to vote in favour of the fact that we are spending record dollars on health care, education, addiction recovery, tourism, investment attraction, and the list goes on and on.

If they choose not to, Madam Chair, I caution members at their own peril, political peril, to vote against this budget and then go back and face your constituents and tell them why they voted against record spending in these sectors. I said it today in question period and I'll say it again: vote against this budget at your own risk. I dare you.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

**Member Eremenko:** I think that's a double dare, Madam Chair. That wasn't the first time that we've been dared today. We do dare. We do dare to hold this government to account. We do dare to question where the decisions have been made.

I find it ironic that for many days now we have been hearing the members opposite espouse the value of direct democracy, the petitions, the referendum, as though general elections don't have a place in terms of actually electing the voice. Here I am duly elected

by the good folks of Calgary-Currie, just like all of my other members here were elected by their representatives, and I'm being called an armchair quarterback for doing my job. That is precisely what we're all doing here, Madam Chair. We are doing our job as His Majesty's Official Opposition to hold government to account. I am no armchair quarterback. I'm the proud representative of Calgary-Currie, and I am doing my job.

Now, there's a lot to unpack from what the minister just offered, so I have some important comments here, but I think that there were just a couple more references, many references, to the fiscal situation.

I think it's worth bearing that we need to point out that the fiscal situation from this government is so great that they had to break their own laws to pass Budget 2026. The fiscal framework and the legislation that this government passed said that they would not run deficits, continual deficits, to the extent that they have here. Today we are talking about Budget 2026 that has a deficit of \$9.4 billion, and there is no plan to come back to balance for three years. Up until the end of fiscal year 2028-2029 we are going to be looking at deficits that are far greater than what their fiscal framework had ever permitted. Speaking of fiscal situations and legislation that applies to the government, they are breaking their own laws.

A vote for Budget 2026 is a vote for waste, Madam Chair. So much money spent, so little delivered. The members opposite have shown great enjoyment in listing off the big figures allocated to various programs and services in Budget '26, and indeed it is a big spend. It is \$84 billion in operating expenses.

It can be a lot to ask Albertans to follow all the ins and outs and the twists and turns from this government and the Premier. It is exactly my job and that of all of my colleagues here to try and decipher the thousands of pages of documents to be able to speak to Albertans about how Budget 2026 affects them and their families.

How did the UCP squander a boom of such massive revenue and unprecedented royalties? How did they spend so much and have so little to show for it? How are we facing down a deficit of \$9.4 billion and a debt of \$137 billion? It's waste, Madam Chair. That's how. That's how we accumulate a deficit of almost \$10 billion. It is waste, it is lack of a plan, and it is lack of forethought. I want to know from any of these members opposite: where's the prairie pragmatism that I think we all can espouse to or at least would claim to? Where's the pride in the work, in saving, in stretching a dollar to make life better for the next generation? There is nothing less pragmatic than waste, and this budget is full of it.

**5:10**

Let's look at some examples of waste from this government that has put us in the position of looking at a \$9.4 billion deficit. Number one, the Auditor General found that the money wasted as a result of the DynaLife debacle totalled \$180 million; \$180 million dollars that we have nothing to show for. It is absolutely down the drain. Delays in lab services and false results have created a bottleneck in our health care system that we are now paying for. Eighty million dollars in Tylenol that was unusable and is now expired and being destroyed: the ministry of hospitals and surgical services cannot account for \$50 million paid for this medication, and they've provided no solution for how that money will be returned. Fifty million dollars: that's not noteworthy? It certainly is for Albertans who are putting their kids on a bus for an hour and a half every day to get to school because they can't have a school built in their community.

The Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction will spend nearly \$400 million on an initiative that forces people with substance use or addiction issues into involuntary treatment. Four hundred

million, Madam Chair, for a program for which there is no evidence of impact. There is no data about who needs the program and who's going to be subject to it, no information about how many people need it. Worst of all, there is an abundance of evidence that shows that it doesn't work. Almost half a billion dollars spent on a program for which there is no evidence: it is decision-based evidence-making at its finest.

Number four, the UCP's reorganization of health care has been an exercise the cost of which we may never know. We have certainly asked for figures related to severance packages, legal counsel, and consulting fees, but government has not been forthcoming. That doesn't include branding exercises, labour negotiations. Furthermore, where there was one ministry, there are now four. Where there was really just one health agency, there are now 10 or more. So much for small government. Right, folks? So much for red tape reduction. There is more bureaucracy and lower access. How is that not wasteful?

The UCP's blind insistence to destroy Alberta's booming renewable industry chased away billions of dollars' worth of investment, hundreds of jobs, and eliminates tax revenue for municipalities. Imagine what that would have been for the next three-year period had they not cut the industry off at the knees. The UCP is flip-flopping on coal mining in the eastern slopes. Perhaps they didn't hear Albertans the first, second, or third time that they did not want coal mining in the eastern slopes. Yet they continued putting us at tremendous legal liability. In the supplementary supply document: \$95 million alone for payout just in this year. We've recently heard about a \$2 billion lawsuit as a result of this government's flip-flopping. More waste, Madam Chair.

The ongoing failure of the UCP government to address orphaned wells has put us at risk and has eliminated tax revenue for municipalities. They have to make up that money somewhere. The Ministry of Justice is pursuing multiple legal proceedings with the federal government because they're more interested in picking fights than they are winning. How about the pursuit of an Alberta police force? You know, the one that the UCP didn't campaign on. In the previous term under Premier Kenney, the estimated annual operating costs were \$735 million with transition costs of \$366 million over six years. Unfortunately we don't have more current numbers because the UCP is not making those public, but suffice it to say it will come at significant cost to Albertans.

There's nothing more the UCP like to do than insert itself into the decisions made by a duly elected city council.

As an aside, for a government that loves direct democracy so much, they sure love to intervene in the decision-making powers of mayors and councils. How much waste has there been as a result of plans ticking along at the city until the UCP gets wind of something that they don't like so they interfere, delay, and cancel? Just look to their unpopular plan for the green line in my hometown of Calgary. All of the planning, all of the engagement down the drain. Somebody is left on the hook for that cost and those delays.

The office of the Chief Electoral Officer has doubled for Budget 2026, Madam Chair; \$25 million more so the UCP can pursue its anti-immigration referendum in the fall.

Lastly, I'd love to hear how the UCP government talks to voters about the conservative values of small government. How's that going so far? This cabinet is anything but. It is the largest cabinet in Alberta's history. Each minister has their own entourage, replete with a personal driver and a company car. Five parliamentary secretaries got a raise this year, leaving fewer than five private government members who are receiving the base salary for an MLA. It makes me think that we are all having to pay for the Premier's management of her own caucus. How many other Albertans would have loved to have had a raise for being parliamentary secretary, for a job which nobody can really explain?

It's time for some humility, Madam Chair, and it is time for some pragmatism. Time to step down from their tower of privilege and walk in the shoes of Albertans who are struggling to make ends meet, Albertans who cannot afford a modicum of the waste on display by this government because it would mean destitution. Albertans deserve a government that uses its economic strength to better their lives, not their own and not their friends'.

The examples of waste I've provided here are worth billions. Perhaps somebody at home can add them up for me. It is time that the UCP are held to account for the waste and the entitlement that sacrifices the well-being of Albertans and their future generations.

**The Chair:** Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my honour to stand today to express my support on Bill 19. I would like to thank the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance for this significant bill that focuses on what matters. It delivers on the commitment made in Budget 2026, which establishes the financial foundation needed to support Albertans and ensure essential services continue operating throughout the upcoming fiscal year.

As we recently considered the main estimates related to Budget 2026, it is now important to view the tables in total, not merely as line items but as a statement of priorities and a plan for a growing province. This budget is more than a calculation. It is a road map that answers a simple question: how will we meet the needs of Albertans today while preparing responsibly for tomorrow?

Alberta is welcoming record numbers of new families and workers who choose this province for opportunity, community, and the promise that hard work leads to a better life. Growth brings strength, but it also brings responsibility. It places pressure on emergency rooms and clinics, on classrooms and school hallways, on housing supply and public infrastructure. Budget 2026 recognizes these realities and responds with targeted investments in the services Albertans rely on most.

Madam Chair, in Calgary-East I have seen first-hand the impacts of growth and families. New residents arrive regularly, bringing skills, ambitions, and desire to contribute. Our hospitals, schools, and community centres must grow alongside these families, ensuring that every Albertan receives the services they need without delay. Budget 2026 ensures that growth is met with opportunity, not overcrowding or uncertainty.

5:20

Madam Chair, health care is the largest responsibility in this budget, and it is treated as such by putting patients first. Total health spending reaches \$34.4 billion, the highest in Alberta's history, alongside \$1.9 billion in new funding to strengthen access and capacity across the system. To shorten wait times and get people the care they need faster, the budget funds 50,000 additional surgical procedures over three years supported by targeted investments and partnerships that aid operating capacity while protecting publicly funded care.

This funding, Madam Chair, is matched by structural reform. Alberta's health delivery has been reorganized into four specialized provincial agencies – Acute Care Alberta, Primary Care Alberta, Assisted Living Alberta, Recovery Alberta – each focused on getting results within their mandate and supported by a shared services backbone to reduce duplication and improve system performance.

Investments also modernize our health care system facilities. Over the next three years \$4.9 billion is allocated to health infrastructure, up from last year, to upgrade equipment, expand

capacity, and improve patient flow with dedicated envelopes for surgical suites, diagnostic imaging, laboratory services, and, of course, rural hospital enhancements. This includes projects such as ICU capacity improvements at Medicine Hat regional hospital and hospital planning and replacement work for health care centres. In Calgary hospitals like Peter Lougheed Centre, Rockyview general, Foothills medical centre are critical to our community. The recent expansion at the Peter Lougheed Centre has added new beds, more operating rooms, and upgraded emergency services.

These improvements are not just numbers; they are the differences between a patient waiting weeks for surgery and a patient receiving care promptly. Every nurse, every physician, every support worker benefits from these investments, and the patients see the results. Budget 2026 builds on these successes, ensuring that Calgary's families continue to have access to timely, world-class care.

Madam Chair, none of this works without people. Front-line professionals, physicians, nurses, licensed practical nurses, health care aides, and support staff show up for Albertans every single day. While structures matter, capital matters as well. Care is delivered by people. Budget 2026 reinforces the truth with resources for clinical capacity and workforce measures embedded across the agency's mandate.

We can be candid about the challenges. Emergency departments are busy. Wait times for some procedures are still long, but Budget 2026 is designed to make measurable progress, more procedures, better flow, targeted capital, and clear accountability so the patients in Calgary and across Alberta can access timely, reliable care. Mental health and addiction care is integral to that effort. Through Recovery Alberta related initiatives, including compassionate intervention centres, this budget expands treatment capacity, recovery supports, recognizing the realities faced and the need for services that meet the people where they are when they are ready.

Madam Chair, Calgary-East residents have shared with me the challenges of accessing mental health services. Parents want their children to have counselling available to schools, adults need community-based supports, and seniors require programs to help them maintain independence while receiving the care they need. Budget 2026 responds directly to these concerns, providing more front-line staff, expanding clinics, and ensuring treatment programs are available locally. Recovery is not just a promise; it is a tangible outcome that this budget funds.

In August of last year, Madam Chair, the Calgary Recovery Community opened in Calgary-East with 74 long-term treatment beds. It is capable of supporting up to 300 people every year in their pursuit of recovery. The Calgary Recovery Community will include increased critically needed bed-based addiction treatment in one of the province's major urban centres. Like all publicly funded addiction treatment in Alberta, recovery communities are free for clients facing long-term addiction and helping them rebuild every aspect of their lives. Our government believes recovery is possible for everyone and is proud to support Albertans facing addiction in their pursuit of recovery.

Madam Chair, classrooms are where Alberta's future begins. Budget 2026 provides a record \$10.8 billion in operating funding for K to 12 education, reflecting enrolment growth and classroom complexity. It also supports the staff by funding more than 1,600 new teachers and 800 support staff in the 2026-2027 school year. In fast-growing communities families need schools close to home. This budget delivers 14 new school projects in Calgary, a mix of new builds, additions, replacements, and a charter expansion so that neighbourhoods can keep pace with growth. In addition, 12 Calgary schools are slated to open in the 2026-2027 school year, moving from plan to ribbon cutting and welcoming students into modern

spaces. Province-wide the capital plan commits billions to school spaces, including our dedicated \$600 million modular classroom program over three years to add seats quietly where they are needed most. These investments reduce crowding, shorten bus rides, and ensure students can learn in safe, well-equipped classrooms.

Education investments are never just about walls and roofs. They're about the teachers with the time and support to teach, education assistants who make inclusion real, and students who leave school ready for success, be it in trades, technology, health, business, public service. Budget 2026 keeps that promise. These school investments are transformative. A child who once had to travel a long distance can now attend a nearby modern school. Teachers can dedicate more time to instruction instead of managing overcrowded classrooms. These new schools are more than buildings. They're community anchors where parents, teachers, and students come together to build the next generation. Budget 2026 recognizes that growth must be met with opportunity. Many students will benefit on that commitment.

We acknowledge, Madam Chair, that Alberta families are working hard to manage the cost of living. While global pressures are beyond any provincial government's sole control, Budget 2026 brings a fiscal plan that continues Alberta's focus on core services, a competitive environment, and lets families keep more of what they earn and businesses invest with confidence.

### 5:30

It is a budget oriented toward value for taxpayers and stability for the services they depend on. For Albertans who need a hand on income supports, housing stability measures remain an important part of social safety not delivered through multiple ministries and community partners. These supports are essential to helping households stabilize, reconnect to work, and maintain dignity, especially during periods of transition.

In Calgary-East I have spoken with families who are feeling stressed by rent, utilities, and day-to-day expenses. Budget 2026 provides targeted relief through income supports, rental supplements, rent measures for those earning under \$60,000, which started last year, ensuring that working families are not left behind. These supports are designed to complement the strong employment opportunities Alberta provides, making sure that growth and affordability go hand in hand.

A growing province must also grow its housing supply. Budget 2026 continues to align capital planning, municipal partnerships, and community-based initiatives to help expand options across the housing industry, from market supply to targeted support so that more families can find a safe, affordable place to call home. Stable housing supports better outcomes in health, education, and employment. This budget's approach integrates housing with the broader goals of community safety and well-being, including mental health and addictions recovery supports that are critical in many neighbourhoods.

New, affordable housing projects are helping families remain in their communities. Seniors can age in place with the supports they need. Young adults entering the workforce are finding rental options that allow them to build financial independence. This investment in housing is also tied directly to health and education, creating stronger, more resilient neighbourhoods across our province.

Madam Chair, responsible fiscal management is about balancing today's needs with tomorrow's obligation. Budget 2026 sets out the government's fiscal strategic plan for the coming three years, prioritizing core services, targeted capital efficiency and delivery. It also underscores the importance of long-term savings, prudent stewardship for resource revenues, a commitment reflected in Alberta's approach to the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and tools that protect the next generation.

This is not budgeting for its own sake. It is budgeting with purpose: health care that works, schools that welcome students, communities that are safe and supported, and a province that lives within its means even as it invests for growth.

Through responsible fiscal management the Alberta heritage savings trust fund has grown from \$15 billion to \$32 billion, ensuring Albertans today and for decades to come benefit from the province's natural resource wealth. This growth is a testament to careful planning, fiscal discipline, and long-term commitment to Albertans. It provides the financial foundations to making investments that matter while keeping taxes comparatively low and the province stable.

Madam Chair, Calgary is central to Alberta's economic and cultural life, and Budget 2026 reflects that reality, from major investment in school capacity to system-wide health funding that supports the city's hospitals and care teams, facilities that Calgaryans rely on every day. Foothills medical centre, Rockyview general hospital, and Peter Lougheed Centre benefit when the system is better staffed, better organized, and better equipped to move patients efficiently to the right level of care. That is the work this budget advances.

In Calgary-East we see the results of growth first-hand with new families settling down roots, small businesses thriving, and community organizations stepping up for neighbours in need. The education builds announced for Calgary and the province-wide enhancements to health capacity are not concepts; they're the new classrooms for our kids and faster care for us and our family members, our parents, grandparents, should the need arise.

We also know that mental health and addictions challenges touch many families. Through Recovery Alberta and expanded treatment pathways, Budget 2026 works to ensure help is easier to find, recovery is easier to sustain. Every life has value, and every community is stronger when hope is within reach.

Behind every line of this plan is a person: a patient whose surgery is scheduled sooner because capacity expanded, a student who can walk to a brand new school because seats were added in a growing neighbourhood, a parent who finds stability because core services are financed responsibly and delivered efficiently. Madam Chair, it's just so amazing to see the . . . [Mr. Singh's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

**Ms Hayter:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I stand today to voice my objection to Bill 19, the Appropriation Act, 2026. This is a bill that gives the government the authority to spend money set out in budgets and in estimates. It's also where the government's priorities move off paper and into real life. It's where we see this government has chosen to fund and where they've chosen to delay that funding, who is expected to deal with the consequences when the basics are left out. This is not a small bill. It authorizes more than \$62.4 billion in expenses, more than \$4.76 billion in capital investment, more than \$1.445 billion in financial transactions, and \$2 billion in contingencies.

No one can say that this government lacks the power to move public money. The question is whether Albertans are getting the value they should be getting with spending at this scale. This government has tabled a \$9.4 billion deficit with a projected debt around \$137 billion. This comes after near historic resource revenues. Alberta has been told for generations that strong resource wealth puts our province into a strong financial position. Instead, we're seeing a government spending billions while making essential services harder to access, slower to respond, and more expensive to work with. This is not the record of a government that

can lecture anyone about fiscal responsibility. It is the record of a government making poor choices with a great deal of money.

I want to be clear about my opposition here. The issue is not that the government needs to spend more across the board. The issue is that this government is already spending at a huge scale, and their priorities are not what they ought to be. This comes down to priorities, allocation, and whether public dollars are being used in ways that reduce pressures or create costs down the road.

Albertans are being asked to carry more of those pressures themselves. This budget includes increases to public property taxes, fees for seniors in continuing care, vehicle registration costs, small-business registration costs, certification fees for trained workers. People are being asked to pay more at the same time as they're being told to wait longer and expect less. That is a hard sell for any government claiming to be prudent with finances. When costs rise and services are over capacity, that burden gets downloaded on to families and communities.

Women are still more likely to be tasked with stretching a household budget, managing appointments, following up on wait-lists, taking time off work to do so, co-ordinating care for children, supporting aging parents, and doing the unpaid labour to keep daily life together.

Seniors on fixed incomes are looking at balancing those fee increases with additional costs they're paying for medications. Small-business owners and workers feel, too, when fees and costs go up in the community, that infrastructure gets weaker. When this government makes choices that download these costs, these costs don't disappear. They just get shifted on to the people that are already carrying a lot right now.

5:40

The real economy we should be looking at is not just the revenue tables and the headline numbers. It is whether someone can get a family doctor, whether a child has access to support at school, whether a senior can afford their care, whether someone can get treatment early instead of waiting until there is a crisis, whether communities have the housing and mental health supports that keep problems from escalating. Those are the economic questions, too, because when those systems are in crisis, the cost shows up somewhere else in money, time, stress, worse health, missed work, and more demand on our systems. That's why the health care choices in this budget are concerning to me.

This budget fails to allocate immediate funding to urgent priority areas. There is no funding in new hospitals in Edmonton or Calgary. There's virtually no increase in primary care funding. Alberta is growing. Pressures on the system are growing, and patients are waiting. Health care workers are asking for help, yet this government keeps asking Albertans to be patient while offering planning in place of delivery.

Recent cancer numbers make these choices even harder to accept. In 2023 53 of the five most common cancer surgeries were completed within the medically recommended time frame. We now look at Budget 2026 and it includes millions of dollars in cuts to cancer care prevention and research. These are not smart saving choices. Another way of looking at right now is that we're looking at pulling back the way it may – part of it looks smaller for a year, but the cost shows up later and it has worse outcomes and it's more expensive care. There is poor judgment disguised with financial discipline.

The same problem is showing up in education funding. This budget includes no construction funding for a single school in the next three years. The government also fell short of its own teacher hiring target. Classrooms are getting fuller. Parents, teachers, and students all know exactly what that means. It means less support, less time, more strain, and more work pushed back on the families. When a child starts struggling in an overcrowded classroom, someone has to follow up, rearrange work, attend meetings, chase

supports, and help manage the stress that comes home at the end of the day. In many households that falls mainly to mothers. Women make up much of the education workforce so much choose affect them as workers and as caregivers.

Again, this is not a side issue in a budget debate. This is part of how these choices are lived experiences. When housing, mental health supports, addiction care, and other stabilized services are left short, the cost does not disappear. It shows up later in our emergency responses, in neighbourhood strain, in crisis care, in policing, and in more pressures on systems that are already over capacity. Albertans pay either way.

This government has a choice. They can deal with the problems earlier when people have a better chance of getting support with lower costs, or later when the harm is greater and the response is more expensive. Albertans can look at the record in front of them. This UCP government had strong revenues, produced a multibillion dollar deficit, added to debt, left key services under immersed strain, and is asking people to accept higher costs and weaker access as proof of financial competence. Now who's really bad at money here? The cost of carrying the debt also matters. Money spent on interest is money that is not going to care, classrooms, or community supports. Albertans should be seeing better results from this money that had already been gone to authorize.

Again, listen to my words: do not get misconstrued. I am not arguing for spending for the sake of spending. I'm not arguing that this government should just spend more everywhere. I'm calling for better choices with the public money already being spent. That is a reasonable expectation. People should be seeing progress in primary care. They should see movement in school capacity. They should be able to see decisions that . . .

**The Chair:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) I must now put the following question: does the committee approve the following bills, Bill 19, the Appropriation Act, 2026?

[The voice vote indicated that Bill 19 was approved]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:45 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Pitt 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	Rowswell	Yao
Hunter	Sawhney	Yaseen
Johnson		

Against the motion:

Calahoo	Stonehouse	Haji	Kasawski
Ceci		Hayter	Kayande
Dach		Hoyle	Shepherd
Eremenko		Irwin	

Totals:                      For – 43                      Against – 11

[Motion carried]

**The Chair:** Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) the committee shall now immediately rise and report on Bill 20 and Bill 19.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**Mr. van Dijken:** Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 20 and Bill 19.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Any opposed, please say no. So carried.  
The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 10 tomorrow morning, March 26.

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

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