



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, March 11, 2026
7 p.m.

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The 31st Legislature
Second Session**

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participants

Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
Hon. Tanya Fir, Minister

7 p.m.

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

[Mr. Ron Wiebe in the chair]

**Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Well, good evening, everyone. I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everybody in attendance. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2027.

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

We will begin with introductions to my right.

Mr. Wright: Well, good evening, everyone. My name is Justin Wright, MLA for the charming constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Ms de Jonge: Hello, everyone. I'm Chantelle de Jonge, MLA for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mr. van Dijken: Good evening. Glenn Van Dijken, the MLA for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. Bouchard: Hi, everyone. I'm Eric Bouchard, MLA for Calgary-Lougheed.

Ms Fir: Tanya Fir, Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women and MLA for Calgary-Peigan. I have with me David Link, Carmen Vidaurri, Kim Capstick, and Kindy Joseph.

Ms Hayter: Julia Hayter, the MLA for Calgary-Edgemont.

Member Ceci: Good evening. Joe Ceci, MLA for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Ip: Good evening. Nathan Ip, MLA for Edmonton-South West.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

The Chair: Thank you.

There are no members participating remotely, so we can skip that.

I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record: Member Renaud for Member Dach as deputy chair.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of this meeting can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website.

Members participating remotely are encouraged to turn your camera on while speaking and mute your microphones when they are not speaking. Remote participants who wish to be placed on the speaker's list are asked to e-mail or message the committee clerk. Members in the room should signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the main estimates for the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women shall be considered for two hours. Standing order 59.01 sets out the process for consideration of the main estimates in the legislative policy committees. Suborder 59.01(7) sets out the speaking rotation for this meeting. The speaking rotation chart is available on the committee's internal

website, and hard copies have been provided to the ministry officials at the table. For each segment of the meeting, blocks of speaking time will be combined only if the minister and the member speaking agree. If debate is exhausted prior to two hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotment in the main estimates schedule, and the committee will adjourn. Should members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please e-mail or message the committee clerk about this process.

Ministry officials who are present may, at the direction of the minister, address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to the microphone in the gallery area and are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commencing.

Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and individual speaking time will be paused; however, the block time of speaking and the overall two-hour meeting clock will still continue to run.

Any written material provided in response to the questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

Finally, the committee should have the opportunity to hear both the question and the answer without interruption during the estimates debate. Debate flows through the chair at all times, including instances when speaking time is shared between a member and the minister.

I would now like to invite the minister to begin with your opening remarks. You have 10 minutes.

Ms Fir: Well, thank you, Chair. I'm happy to be here tonight to discuss the 2026 budget estimates and business plan for the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

I would like to start, again, by introducing the people joining me here tonight. On my right is Kim Capstick, my deputy minister, and next to her is assistant deputy minister for status of women and creative and community development, Kindy Joseph. On my left is Carmen Vidaurri, acting ADM of financial services and senior financial officer, and assistant deputy minister for heritage, David Link. Other officials from my office and the department are also with us in the gallery.

Mr. Chair, I know many of you have heard me say this before, but I must start by saying again what an honour it is to serve as Alberta's Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women. For those unfamiliar with my ministry, we have a vast portfolio of programs and services. We champion and support the nonprofit community across the province. We support and profile Alberta art and artists through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the AFA, enhancing Albertans' quality of life. We help drive continued economic growth for our film, television, music, and publishing industries, sharing Alberta culture with the world. We preserve, protect, and profile Alberta's story at our 21 world-class provincial museums and historic sites, at our provincial archives, at the two Jubilee auditoria, and through supports for various heritage organizations and smaller museums and historic sites across Alberta. We ensure our growing francophone community has access to the French language services they need, supported by our advisory council on the Francophonie.

We work tirelessly to address gender-based violence to continue building safer communities for everyone, strengthening accountability measures, and ensuring supports and services are available when

and where Albertans need them. We support women's advancement in our society and champion women's vital social, cultural, and economic contributions in our province, encouraging them to take up their rightful place as drivers of our economy and so much more.

Mr. Chair, through Budget 2026 Alberta's government is continuing to support all these important programs and services that help make Alberta the best place to live, work, and raise a family. Allow me to share some of the highlights. Last year we proudly released building on our strengths, Alberta's 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence, the most comprehensive plan of its kind in Canada. With over 100 concrete actions, we are working towards a future where gender-based violence is a rarity, not the norm, and all Albertans recognize the signs and know how to respond safely. Our strategy was informed by more than 500 service providers, experts, Indigenous leaders, front-line workers, and survivors. We have already begun implementation on nearly 50 immediate actions across our government, making investments that will empower Indigenous communities, enhance women's economic empowerment, support men and boys, and prevent family violence before it starts.

This work is being supported by almost every ministry in government, which is reflected in how we have distributed the final year of federal gender-based violence funding. This year funding has flowed directly to Advanced Education, \$1 million; Children and Family Services, \$7.3 million; Indigenous Relations, \$1.2 million; Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration, \$1.6 million; and Justice, \$2.1 million. I need to reiterate that while the funding has moved between departments, our funding commitment has not changed. I also remain committed to advocating for future funding from the federal government to fund the final six years of the 10-year national action plan to end gender-based violence.

I know you will all agree when I say that women are a critical part of shaping the long-term success of our province, from the Famous Five to the incredible women in our agriculture industries that we celebrate in this Year of the Woman Farmer. Women continue to be pillars in our communities. They build strong families, lead innovative businesses, share bold ideas, and break barriers for future generations of women and girls who will help drive our province forward.

That is why my ministry continues to support programs like the women in STEM, Persons Case, and women in technical and applied arts scholarships, which we launched last year and is the first and only kind of its scholarship nationally. These scholarships exist to make education more affordable and accessible for women in Alberta so that they are empowered to explore education in all fields and pursue their career goals. I will also be establishing an economic advisory council made up of brilliant Albertans to help inform our continued efforts to help women succeed.

Budget 2026 also continues our work supporting a strong nonprofit sector. Our community grant programs support a wide variety of nonprofit organizations, offering important programs, operating public facilities, hosting community events, providing services, and more. Since 2019 our government has awarded nearly 5,700 grants to nonprofit organizations across the province, delivering real results and helping communities grow stronger and more united.

7:10

Budget 2026 continues our ongoing commitment to supporting these important community grants and other nonprofit programs with an investment of \$70 million this fiscal year. This includes \$25 million for community infrastructure projects through the community facility enhancement program, or CFEP program, to create new, welcoming public spaces across Alberta, and over

\$13.6 million into the community initiatives program, the CIP program, to support essential services and bring vibrant events to communities in every corner of our province.

We recognize that funding and training are not the only challenges facing the nonprofit sector. More than half of the more than 28,000 nonprofit organizations in our province are run exclusively by volunteers contributing their time and talents to causes important to them. Volunteers play an essential role in our communities, and we are grateful to each and every one of them for the incredible impacts they make every day in the lives of Albertans.

Our business plan includes developing a volunteerism action plan to help increase volunteerism across the province in partnership with our nonprofit sector. By supporting organizations in recruiting and retaining volunteers, we will help them grow their operations, expand their impacts, and reach more Albertans.

Our business plan also profiles our ongoing commitment to responsible investment in the arts. Budget 2026 allocates over \$40 million to the arts in Alberta with plans of growing to almost \$45 million in 2027. This growing investment, which includes \$38.1 million for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the AFA, allows us to continue supporting local artists and art organizations to expand programming and showcase Alberta's talent and culture. The AFA is a champion for Alberta's arts, and our investments are helping them continue making important impacts on the sector and our economy.

Last year the AFA studied the economic impact of their operating funding program, which showed that for every dollar invested by the AFA, it generates a direct economic return of \$1.76. Every \$1 million spent by the AFA's operating clients creates 195 full-time jobs, and between 2018 and 2023 the estimated total economic output by arts organizations funded by the AFA was \$2.4 billion. These are not small numbers. They represent the local communities and local economies that are enriched by the arts every day as a result of our investments and hard work at the AFA.

We're also maintaining historic investments in key cultural infrastructure projects, including the Winspear theatre here in Edmonton, the Werklund Centre, formerly known as Arts Commons, and Contemporary Calgary.

Just as the arts in Alberta are growing, so are our cultural industries. Budget 2026 continues the momentum in this area with \$8 million for the Alberta media fund, further diversifying our economy, creating jobs, and sharing our culture, perspective, and stories with readers, listeners, and audiences around the world.

Since 2020 provincial support for our cultural industries has brought over \$1 billion in spending in our province and through our Alberta Film Commission, we're continuing to make sure that film and television producers globally know about our tax advantages, competitive financial incentives, breathtaking locations, world-class studios, and exceptional crews and creative talent right here in Alberta.

Mr. Chair, much like the film and television sector, Alberta's music sector is primed for growth. This spring I will be releasing the Alberta music action plan built on industry feedback to champion Alberta musical talent and support the music industry for long-term growth.

My ministry also prioritizes telling our province's stories at our provincial museums and heritage sites. The Royal Tyrrell Museum welcomed over half a million visitors last year and celebrated its 40th anniversary with a roar. The Royal Alberta Museum opened its newest travelling exhibition, *Death: Life's Greatest Mystery* set to run from February to September, after the enormous success of *Orcas: Our Shared Future*.

To continue encouraging Albertans and visitors to visit our government-owned heritage facilities and to support our other heritage programs, Budget 2026 invests \$55.1 million to our heritage division. This increased investment is supported in part by a slight increase in admission fees at select facilities to support the delivery of services and care of our provincial collections. We've maintained our explore Alberta history pass which offers affordable, year-round access to all of Alberta's provincial heritage sites and museums. This summer we will once again offer free or discounted admission for guests under the age of 25 through the Canada strong pass program and will continue to offer free admission throughout the year during events like Family Day, Seniors' Week, Alberta Culture Days, and more.

Before I close, Mr. Chair, I would like to recognize the important contributions of francophone communities across our province. Our government has declared 2026 the Year of the Francophonie in Alberta in recognition of the long-standing impact of French language and culture across the province. We're also celebrating Alberta Francophonie Month with a range of events. I hope you'll all take the time to celebrate French-speaking communities across our province. Budget 2026 also recognizes their impact, maintaining \$4 million in funding for the Francophone Secretariat to continue expanding and improving French language services.

Mr. Chair, this is just a snapshot of how our ministry is working to support the province. We proudly tell Alberta's story and ensure that the place that we all are so proud to call home continues to be the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

The Chair: Well, thank you, Minister, and thank you for your opening remarks.

We will now begin with the question-and-answer portion of the meeting. For the first 50 minutes members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Hon. Members, you will be able to see the timer for the speaking block both in the committee room and on Microsoft Teams.

The question to the member who will speak first. Hon. Member Ceci, would you like to combine your time with the minister? If yes, Minister, do you agree to combine your speaking time with the member?

Member Ceci: Whatever the minister wishes.

Ms Fir: Let's do blocked.

The Chair: Blocked time it is. Member, go ahead.

Member Ceci: Thank you. I'd like to begin with acknowledging that we are on the traditional lands referred to as Treaty 6 territory and that the city of Edmonton and all the people here are beneficiaries of this peace and friendship treaty. Treaty 6 encompasses the traditional territories of numerous western Canadian First Nations, including Cree, Dene, Stoney Nakoda, Sioux, Saulteaux, and Ojibwa.

Thank you, Minister, for your staff, for being here and preparing. I have some specific questions about the decision to cut funding from the three provincial heritage organizations shortly. But, Minister, first I wanted to thank you for your recent letter to me that regards the importance of the Old Y in Calgary's Beltline wherein you recognized that this building, initially built as a single women's hostel in 1911 and since designated a provincial historic resource, is an important piece of Calgary's heritage that must be sensitively stewarded and that government grant opportunities exist to partially fund rehabilitation so that this structure can be reused for the benefit of all Albertans for generations to come.

The first question I have is on the repatriation framework, the key objective 2.1, business plan page 27. Objective 2.1 proposes to "implement a new Repatriation Framework to support the return of Crown-owned items . . . to their communities of origin . . .". Direction to work with First Nations for artifact repatriation was also given to you by the Premier in your mandate letters of July 23 and September 25. My questions are: would the minister please explain the process the ministry used to create the new repatriation framework and outline how your ministry consulted the leadership of First Nations and Métis and incorporated their proposals to ensure this framework will be an improvement on the old one?

Next, Minister: how many objects have been repatriated in the past year? Next: how many FTEs are dedicated to realizing the goals of this new framework, and how much new or additional funding is available to achieve this function? Was any capacity or engagement funding provided to support First Nations and Métis participation in the development of this framework?

The next question I have is on sports and recreation, the strategic plan page 24, priority 2, objective 7. Page 24 of the strategic plan notes that \$9 million will "build or enhance sport and recreational facilities through the Active Communities Initiative" for projects like hockey rinks, sports fields, and courts. I point to this objective in the strategic plan to highlight the clear imbalance. Young Albertans have established entry points into sports through well-funded facilities, programs, and tax incentives, yet aspiring artists lack comparable access to early learning opportunities. Far more Albertans are likely to work in the creative sector than in professional sports as a professional athlete, for instance, but government investment continues to favour sports infrastructure and programming at much higher levels.

My questions are: what is the ministry doing to build, enhance, and support small and neighbourhood theatres, studios, and other places that could permit arts-related education outside of schools or similar classroom experiences? From a public access lens there's a failure to support Albertans and new Albertans to access arts education and the social benefits that come with it. What is the minister doing to support families whose children want to explore artistic expression through theatre, dance, music, and other creative activities?

On the AFA, page 30 of the ministry's '26-27 business plan. My understanding of the ministry's proposal for AFA funding was that levels would reach \$43 million by 2027-2028; however, the proposed funding to AFA for the '26-27 fiscal does not meet the targets laid out previously. It's nearly \$1 million short. My questions are: with funding levels not keeping pace with the ministry's previous commitment, can the minister explain what her plan is to meet the targets for this year and for the next fiscal year, '27-28? This year, again, most of the increase to AFA is going to one cultural organization, the Glenbow museum. How does the ministry justify leaving out individual artists and smaller organizations in Alberta from the bulk of the less-than-promised increase to AFA?

7:20

On community and voluntary support services in the statement of operations, business plan page 30 and the fiscal plan tables, schedule 22, FTEs. There is a \$23.9 million cut to the ministry's operating budget, a 14 per cent real cut if population growth and inflation are taken into account, according to the statement of operations on page 30 of the ministry's business plan. Community and voluntary support services is cut by \$26.7 million, a 31 per cent cut when adjusted for population and inflation. Cultural industries is down \$825,000, an 8.3 per cent cut to their budget line. My questions are: will the minister please describe the expected impacts

from these cuts in the ministry's statement of operations? Are there plans in place to manage these cuts so that the arts, culture, creative, and community sectors are protected as much as possible?

Schedule 22 of the fiscal plan shows a cut of seven FTEs from ministry staff. Will the minister identify which sectors, either community and voluntary support, cultural industries, Francophone Secretariat, heritage, or status of women will be impacted by these cuts? What is the expected impact on Alberta's communities, the volunteer organizations, and the creative sector from having fewer staff delivering the ministry's mandate over the next year?

On to the music action plan. On page 26 of the business plan under key objective 1.3 the document references a music action plan. You referenced it. Alberta's music sector continues to rebuild and restructure after the pandemic. In 2025 the release of the music city strategies for Calgary and Edmonton demonstrated that the Alberta music sector continues to need and ask for music-friendly policies that are found in other provinces and cities. The music sector also requires investments in venues, infrastructure, and audience rebuilding. My questions include: at what stage of development is the ministry's music action plan? What is the minister's objective in developing this plan? Will the minister explain when Albertans might see or hear what this music action plan is? How much did the ministry invest in supporting Alberta's music sector in '25-26?

The music industry research started several years ago, we know, with West Anthem and supports the idea of stronger centralized leadership for the music sector such as a music commissioner. Alberta currently has no music commissioner, unlike many other jurisdictions. I've asked the minister several times when a music commissioner will be appointed, and her response to Albertans has always been to stay tuned. Minister, will we see the music commissioner, as part of the music action plan, established before the end of March – you said spring – 2026? This is important because of the recent pressures on small and mid-sized venues, including venue closures brought on by increasing land-use conflicts between long-standing cultural spaces and new residential developments, rising rents, and the slow rebounding of audience engagement since the pandemic. It all highlights the urgent need for co-ordinated action in the form of a music action plan and an independent music commissioner to protect Alberta's live music ecosystem.

Minister, the questions are: as the minister advances a music action plan, will your ministry work with municipalities to safeguard culturally significant venues such as the Ship & Anchor in Calgary from development pressures and noise-related conflicts? Will the province consider adopting tools like the agent of change principle, which protects long-standing community spaces from displacement pressures and has been adopted in the UK and other jurisdictions to ensure that new developments are responsible for mitigating impacts on existing music venues?

Will the new music action plan recognize the importance of moving artists along the venue ladder from smaller venues to soft-seaters to larger halls and touring opportunities? And how many grants did the ministry provide to support Alberta's music sector in terms of infrastructure and venue rebuilding last year? In last year's estimates I brought up the complex funding rules that can sometimes block recording projects from being completed. For example, some musicians have told us that if they prerecord a single using one grant, they're not allowed to include that same track on an album funded by a different grant. Does the ministry – I'll stop there.

The Chair: Thank you, Member. I'll now turn it over to the minister for her 10-minute response.

Ms Fir: Thank you for those questions. Thank you for acknowledging the YWCA in Calgary. I know, as we discussed about that, that is a city-owned building and I encourage continued work with the city of Calgary on their issues and challenges that they're dealing with.

For repatriation, working with Indigenous communities to repatriate objects that belong to them is a key step and continues to be a key step in Alberta's reconciliation efforts and a top priority for my ministry. As the first province with legislation on repatriation, we have remained a national leader on repatriation of sacred and ceremonial objects for 20 years. In that time we have processed nearly 45 repatriation requests, representing about 2,000 objects that have been returned to active ceremonial use. We know there is more work to be done, which is why we are working with Indigenous partners to develop a new framework to guide us on further repatriation efforts. The new framework will enable Indigenous communities to exercise more autonomy over the care, display, and stewardship of these cherished objects. To date our government has engaged 36 First Nations and Métis settlements across the province about repatriation of Indigenous cultural objects, and the efforts have been largely positive.

With respect to your questions around arts for children, I know that with respect to, for example, the every kid can play program, that program does include in the category of activities dance, as an example, through our many CIP and CFEP grants. Those fund a wide variety of community and local organizations, often that have arts and cultural opportunities for children. The Jubilee auditoria have the Jube School. The Winspear in the funding that we provided to them a few years ago: a lot of that will be used to have more educational opportunities for children in classrooms.

Since 2019 our government has invested over \$5 million to help more children across the province engage with the arts through the AFA. That includes \$3.5 million through the artists and education program, which helps over 300 schools host nearly 450 artist residency projects that give students interactive, hands-on experience. Just some examples of that would be Trickster Theatre's holidays around the world at Chief Aranazhi school in Glenevis and night of storytelling with elders at Anzac school in the Wood Buffalo region and more than \$1.8 million through the summer school project funding grant for 33 resident-based arts programs, giving kids even more access to the arts, like Theatre Alberta's 65th anniversary of the Artstrek summer theatre program, where students put on a production of *Come From Away* in 2024.

As I mentioned, the every kid can play program – not under my ministry – does support dance registration costs with over 900 registrations for dance supported last year alone. The province also supported dance projects with every kid can play program's community-level organization funding.

7:30

With the Alberta Foundation for the Arts funding Budget 2026 reflects the need to make responsible choices while continuing to invest in the arts. In Budget 2024 government committed to increasing arts funding by \$4.5 million annually over three years. While we have reduced this by \$1 million in budget 2026-27, our government is still providing the highest level of arts funding in Alberta history. Alberta's government was clear in Budget 2024 about its intention to grow arts funding, and that commitment has been delivered. While this year's increase is lower than originally planned, as I say, it still represents the highest level of arts funding in Alberta's history.

Okay. Regarding the Glenbow, they're getting their funding now provided through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and the amount that they've received is consistent with the previous year,

maintaining what they're getting. It made sense to have the Glenbow under the AFA as it relates to the work they do and how it relates to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

It does not take away from artists. The work the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is doing for supporting individual artists, as an example: in 2024-25 a \$4.5 million increase in funding allowed the Alberta Foundation for the Arts to increase individual project grant amounts from up to \$15,000 to up to \$18,000. It also allowed the AFA to increase the number of grants awarded by 42 per cent, for a total of 446 artists supported. This level of individual support was maintained in 2025-26, ensuring more Alberta artists could develop and advance their work across the province.

Just one example of a success story there. One of the individual artists supported by the AFA is filmmaker Ashley Laurenson from Fort McMurray, who received an individual project grant to develop her documentary *Rendering Visions*. The funding allowed her to commission work from 18 regional artists, demonstrating how individual grants support both artistic development and broader local economic and cultural activity.

Another example would be Secondhand Dreamcar, a blues soul band based right here in Edmonton, a true superband of veteran musicians who cut its teeth on an ensemble in a nine-month residency at Edmonton's legendary Blues on Whyte club. Touted as one of CKUA radio's favourite artists and acts, Secondhand Dreamcar's debut album *Answer the Call*, previously funded in part by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, landed at number six on the station's top 100 albums of 2024. *Answer the Call* has been nominated for a 2026 Juno award and has received three 2026 Canadian blues music award nominations. This year Secondhand Dreamcar received \$18,000 in funding and support.

On to the music action plan, something that we're very excited about. The creation of the Alberta music action plan builds on several years of engagement and research, including the 2020 music ecosystem study completed by the sector with our government's support and regional strategies for Edmonton, Calgary, and smaller municipalities. These regional strategies outline actions for the province, and our plan responds to that input. My department has continued to work with the sector to refine our plan, including an industry round-table in February 2026 to ensure the plan reflects current realities and sector feedback. We look forward to that plan being released here in the next two to three months.

Alberta's government invests significantly in the music sector, approximately \$14.8 million per year on average. The funding is maintained, and the funding for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts has increased by \$8 million over two years in this budget. The focus of the action plan is not new spending. It's about ensuring existing programs are optimized, modernized, and support a broader range of businesses. Having a music commissioner, similar to our Alberta film commissioner, provides that one-stop main contact for individuals in the music industry.

The two round-tables we had, as I mentioned: the one we had just recently invited back the same stakeholders we had about a year ago for a round-table when we initially sought input, then developed the plan and were able to get their feedback before it was released to make sure we heard what they said, and the plan was covering the feedback that they had provided us.

Our government recognizes that venues play a critical part of a vibrant music scene. Venue sustainability is one of the issues being considered through the Alberta music action plan, and venues were well represented throughout our engagement. It's also fantastic that our current Alberta artist in residence here this year, John Wort Hannam, is a musician from Lethbridge. That just ties in wonderfully with the Alberta music action plan.

With respect to CIP and CFEP programs our government invested \$70 million through Budget 2026, if passed.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now go back to Member Hayter for the next round of questions. Member, do you want to share time or block time with the minister?

Ms Hayter: Minister, would you like to share time or do block?

Ms Fir: Block, please. Thank you.

The Chair: Block time it is. Go ahead, Member.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here today, and thank you to the ministry's staff for all the hard work you do. In the 2026-27 strategic plan on page 22, priority 2, objective 5, supporting vulnerable Albertans, it states that the government is "preventing gender-based violence through awareness, education and community engagement. [The] government is supporting the implementation of the Alberta 10-year Strategy to End Gender-based Violence and support survivors." Within the 2026-27 business plan outcome 3, key objective 3.1 is correlated to implementation of that Alberta's strategy to end GBV. Within the plan on page 6 the report states that to improve the quality of life for all Albertans is to share a reflective commitment across the government to end GBV.

I appreciate the co-ordinated approach of the implementation of this crossministry strategy. I'm wondering, if we refer to page 28 of the 2026-2027 business plan, if we could get a breakdown by ministry of all the ministries and the initiatives that they are doing and the type of funding and the amount of funding that is going into each one. I'm hopeful that the minister can table a single, consolidated GBV budget ledger for 2026-2027 showing every minister's GBV-related allocation. I'm hoping to be provided with a public crossministry funding table so we can track the implementation annually. If this is not possible, I'm wondering why. I'm also wondering where I can find consolidated reporting. Does one exist? How much money went in to the creation of the Alberta 10-year strategy to end GBV, and can you point to where in the budget documents does it show the total cost to implement and pay for this plan?

On page 24 within the ministry's annual report for 2024-2025 there was a key objective 2.4 that stated that the minister will "develop a 10-year [strategy] to end gender-based violence and support survivors." It goes on to say that "as part of the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, the federal government committed to providing Alberta with \$54 million in funding over four years." On page 28 of the 2026-27 business plan initiatives supporting key objectives indicate that \$15.7 million will be allocated to the ACSW and partner ministries to implement the Alberta 10-year strategy to end GBV. How much has been spent on the creation of the Alberta 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence? Where can I find it in the budget documents and tables? If it's not in the budget, where can I find it publicly? Was any of the federal funding for prevention used to create the 10-year strategy? How much of the \$15.7 million will be allocated to support survivors? How much was allocated for prevention?

Women's shelters are still waiting on the \$19 million in additional funding that was promised them last year in the budget. Many stakeholders are wondering where the money went. I don't see it referred to at all in the ministry's '26-27 budget or business plan. When they asked the Ministry of Children and Family Services, they were told that it was this ministry that would have the allocation breakdown for themselves. If the funds went to

support the strategy across ministries, how is this directed to shelters? Will we be able to get an allocated breakdown? How does the ministry monitor and track how the funding is spent? How is the funding directed to women's shelters? Will you provide an allocation breakdown? With all the consultation and work what was funded by the Alberta 10-year strategy? Was any funding allocated to women's shelters? If yes, how much? Was it allocated to program renewal? Has the entire \$19 million allocated over three years been spent? What did the funding go to, and what were the tangible outcomes?

7:40

We know, through the ministry's reporting, that \$54 million of federal funding would reinforce ongoing work to support new GBV prevention programs and extend Indigenous-led services. GBV funding goes towards grants and ends up being typically one-time, one-year projects. This is extremely challenging for organizations and does not result in sustainable ongoing efforts. Currently we have \$2 million in one-time prevention grants to address root causes and prevent violence from occurring in the first place. What are the metrics required for funding these grants? If the applicant is successful with the previous year's grant, how does this ministry support them with continued funding in future years? How many Indigenous-led recipients are receiving these one-time grants? What is the average grant size?

How many organizations are currently on one-year agreements versus multiyear agreements like other ministries? When we know that organizations are asking for multiyear funding and one-year grants are not working, what is the plan and timeline to shift essential services to multiyear operating funding? How much funding is coming as stable operating funding as front-line GBV organizations versus short-term project grants? Organizations are constantly improving models and programming while still having to fund raise programs that go beyond operational funding. How do we expect these organizations to make systematic change off one-year, one-off grants?

We know that Indigenous women face disproportionate rates of violence. On page 17 of the 10-year strategy one of the five strategic priorities is to support Indigenous-led solutions. How is the ministry supporting Indigenous women as a result? What services are accessible to them?

Transfers from the government of Canada to the ministry in 2025-26 and '26-27 related to the federal agreement for gender-based violence prevention and related social policy funding. The federal gender-based violence prevention funding peaked in '23-24, and the federal funding is now declining as the federal agreements expire. Page 30 of the ministry's business plan is related to federal cost-shared agreements for gender-based violence and the related social policy funding. I'm hoping that the minister can confirm the total amount of funding received from the government of Canada for GBV prevention.

Can the ministry outline actions taken to identify additional funding or other funding sources to ensure the continuing of funding for prevention of GBV after the federal funding ends? What provincial dollars are being spent to end GBV? How much GBV funding is delivered through Indigenous-led organizations? What portions go to rural, northern, and on-reserve adjacent service delivery?

In '25-26 and for '26-27 Alberta received \$7 million each year from the federal government allocated to GBV prevention grants and women's shelters. What contingency has the ministry accounted for should federal funding be lost either through the separatism question or other reasons? Would the minister outline what actions her ministry is taking to identify alternative or

additional sources of funding to ensure continuity for the prevention of GBV funding should federal funding cease to exist?

I searched the ministry business plan for a performance indicator in regard to gender-based violence, and I couldn't find one. Page 36 of the annual report has only one performance measure, 2(b), the rate of police-reported intimate partner violence for Alberta women. Do you acknowledge that this measure does not capture unreported violence, barriers to reporting, coercive control, and other metrics? Given those limitations, why is this the primary outcome indicator for the GBV strategy, which is funded through this ministry's budget? What additional indicators are you using to measure whether survivors can access safety and supports beyond police-reported intimate partner violence? What is being done to measure impacts not captured in police reporting? How much funding in the '26-27 budget supports survivors with economic barriers to leave, transportation, emergency supports, legal navigation, housing strategies? Which ministry lines fund these?

On page 54, estimates, line 7, and on page 30 of the ministry's '26-29 business plan funding for status of women dropped in the '25-26 budget allocation of the \$19.8 million down to the forecast of \$7.9 million. This year in the budget the allocation for status of women is again cut down to \$6.6 million and over the next two years is projected to be cut even further to \$4.1 million by 2028. This decrease in the \$13.2 million in funding from March 2025 to March 2026 is shocking. It concerns me, and it should shock and concern women across Alberta.

What is the explanation for this significant cut to the status of women file? Why was the status of women's budget allocation cut so significantly from last year's budget and estimates to this year's estimates? Can the minister explain how this total budget sum is broken down to address the economic status of women, domestic violence, and gender equality? What programs and services are impacted by this decrease? How much of a difference was due to funds transferred to other ministries, reprofiled funding, funding that was simply not delivered? What is the overall implication of this reduced budget?

To me, this shows a major shift of the government to deprioritize initiatives related to supporting women. Can the ministry truly meet its mandate to develop and promote strategic policies and solutions that improve women's economic security, address gender-based violence, and support diversity and inclusion?

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

We'll now go to the minister for her response.

Ms Fir: Well, I thank the member for those many questions. Let's talk a little bit about what's included in the status of women budget. My focus is on ensuring that women across Alberta can access the programs and supports that deliver real results. The status of women budget for 2026, if passed, is \$6.6 million, including \$2.5 million to support implementation of Alberta's 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence. There is no change in funding for status of women priority initiatives in Budget 2026, including the 10-year strategy. Our commitment to women's economic empowerment has not changed. We continue to prioritize initiatives that reduce barriers and support lasting economic and social outcomes for women and families.

With respect to investments, the \$6.6 million: is that all the government of Alberta invests in women? No, absolutely not. The status of women budget represents only part of government's overall investment in women. Support for women and girls spans multiple ministries and sectors. This includes \$450,000 for two manufacturing sector projects examining barriers faced by women, including women with intersectional identities. It also includes

\$250,000 for a partnership with Canadian Women in Communications and Technology to connect women, including newcomers and underemployed women, to jobs in the tech sector. Alberta is investing almost \$7 million over three years in Skills Canada Alberta to support programs, such as the girls exploring trades and technologies program, which helps high school girls discover diverse career pathways. And last year we invested more than \$188 million in gender-based violence prevention awareness and survivor supports across the ministry. That's in addition to the \$54 million in the gender-based violence funding over four years.

The government also provides millions in grant funding to organizations such as Women Building Futures. In addition, \$1.3 million was allocated to a women's entrepreneurial grant program to support financial literacy and long-term economic security and then also funding for a women's shelter, which I would defer to Children and Family Services.

The government remains fully committed to our 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence. We're simply shifting to measures for the business plan that track the progress of our specific programs like scholarships, that provide women with the economic independence needed to leave or avoid violent situations. Other statistics like reported cases will be tracked as part of the 10-year strategy implementation. The 10-year strategy is a whole-of-government approach, and implementation will be measured in a variety of ways, well beyond one ministry's business plan. As noted in the plan, we will report regularly to Albertans on implementation, and for the ministry's specific business plan we're focusing on the pieces that we can control directly: co-ordination, advocacy, economic empowerment programs for women, as examples.

7:50

Reducing gender-based violence is going to require sustained, long-term action across government and our community partners, and we're committed to reporting publicly on progress against the actions in the strategy with initial results to be released later this year. We're so appreciative of the over 500 stakeholders that were part of the implementation and gathering feedback and input into the strategy. We're committed to make sure that we're reporting back on that.

The 10-year strategy is a long-term crossgovernmental approach focused on prevention, awareness, and support for survivors. It's designed to align policy funding and service delivery across ministries and community partners. What we're so proud about with the action plan is that it has immediate short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions to ensure that we're addressing immediate issues and then planning for the future to where we can get to a place where gender-based violence is a rarity and not a norm. Progress will be measured through improved co-ordination, increased access to supports, and strengthened prevention efforts, recognizing that reducing gender-based violence requires sustained, multiyear action in addition to short-term efforts as well.

In Budget 2026, if passed, federal funding is allocated directly to partner ministries, which changes how the amounts appear compared to the 2025-2026 budget. Funding was allocated to Advanced Education in the amount of \$1 million; Children and Family Services, \$7.3 million; Indigenous Relations, \$1.2 million; Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration at \$1.6 million; and Justice at \$2.1 million. In 2025-2026 this funding was allocated after the budget was developed. Unfortunately, while work continues on our strategy and the 10-year national action plan to end gender-based violence, federal funding was only provided for four years, but we'll certainly be advocating to the federal government to fund the remaining six years of the plan.

Where did the three years of federal funding money go? Alberta received \$7 million in 2023-2024 and \$15.7 million in both 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 to prevent gender-based violence and support survivors. This funding supported violence prevention, Indigenous-led services, and the expansion of existing programs right across our government. Some of the investments included prevention grants, women's shelter modernization, postsecondary awareness campaigns, Clare's law awareness, mandatory law enforcement training, elder abuse prevention, workplace safety research, and justice support systems.

Speaking a little bit about how the strategy reflects Indigenous perspectives and what actions are being taken to support Indigenous-led approaches, as I mentioned, we engaged more than 500 stakeholders in the development of this plan across 11 communities, including Indigenous-specific engagement sessions in every location. The sessions included Indigenous facilitators, elders, and ceremonial practices to ensure culturally appropriate engagement.

My ministry also worked directly with the Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit Plus People and continues engagement through a nonvoting ADM role on the council. Some specific actions that are under way include aligning government actions with Alberta's MMIWG Roadmap, which guides provincial work to improve safety and economic security for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA-plus people in response to the root causes of violence identified in the national inquiry; funding and partnering with Indigenous-led organizations to expand culturally appropriate violence prevention programs, victim supports, and community-based healing initiatives; supporting friendship centres and Indigenous women's organizations that provide front-line services, community outreach, and safety planning grounded in cultural traditions; and continuing engagement with Indigenous communities to ensure implementation remains culturally informed, responsive, and aligns with community priorities.

I also want to touch a little bit on rural sexual assault supports. Through the rural sexual assault supports initiative Alberta's government is improving access to sexual assault care for survivors in rural and remote communities. It's absolutely devastating for a survivor to have to deal with something like this, but then to imagine them being in a rural location where there are not supports available immediately to them and the thought of having to travel long distances after having endured something so horrific is something we wanted to try to help and address.

Our program trains rural and remote medical providers in trauma-informed sexual assault forensic care, allowing survivors to receive comprehensive, timely support close to home rather than travelling to urban centres. To date nearly 750 health care professionals across Alberta have completed the training both virtually and in person. This includes rural providers and students who attended in-person sessions in 23 communities across the province. In 2025-2026 our government invested \$200,000 to expand . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now go back to the Official Opposition. Member Ceci, would you like to combine or block time?

Member Ceci: Oh, I think we're doing block.

Ms Fir: Block, please. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Member Ceci: At the minister's request.

The last question on the music action plan: does the ministry have updated job or GDP estimates for the provincial music ecosystem? If yes, when will they be made public?

I'd like to be moving on to outcome 1, key objective 1.5. I think that's in the business plan. It says to "stand up for Albertans by advocating for equitable federal funding for Alberta's [artists] and culture sectors." It's on page 26. For the arts and culture sector the federal government provides funding through the Canada Council for the Arts, the Canada cultural spaces fund, Canada arts training fund, Telefilm Canada, the National Film Board, and building communities through arts and heritage to Alberta-based organizations to develop and deliver arts and cultural activities across our province. Examples of the kind of recipients for this federal funding in Alberta include arts organizations, festivals, and events; film, television, digital projects; cultural industry festivals and community cultural events; heritage programs; and indeed, Alberta-based artists and creators are recipients.

In 2025-2026 publicly available information says that approximately \$243 million in federal grants were provided to Alberta's creative arts and culture sector. The federal government plans for an additional \$14.6 million starting in '26-27 fiscal, and the recipients for that \$14.6 million are the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton and the Siksika Nation feasibility and design work for the Piikshapi Memorial Arbour and many others. Additionally, major federal infrastructure supports have funded upgrades to the Banff Centre and have participated in funding the renovations in the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, or SAAG, in Lethbridge.

Questions are: would the minister please outline the specific steps she's taken to advocate for more equitable funding for Alberta's arts, culture, creative and community sectors from our federal partners? Minister, has your ministry calculated the potential financial impact on Alberta's arts, cultural, and creative sectors if federal funding was interrupted for any reason? Would your ministry be able to backfill the 96 Alberta arts organizations, the 233 Alberta artists, and the 25 Alberta cultural groups with grants, prizes, touring support, and Indigenous arts funding that the Canada Council for the Arts grants annually now?

Moving on to other revenue, CFEP, statement of operations, page 30, would the minister outline what falls under other revenues on page 30? Regarding CFEP, while the ministry is investing in large-scale projects like Werklund and Glenbow,

8:00

Alberta's thriving arts community also requires support for additional facilities and cultural infrastructure to continue growing. The CFEP program is often a key source of support for many smaller and rural volunteer-run organizations, and it's been reduced from \$50 million to \$25 million for the 2026-27 budget. The budget documents describe this support as temporary three-year top-up in the years '23, '24, and '25. With the return to the pre-top-up baseline it is now \$25 million again. A question: would the minister outline what is in this budget to support the myriad of facilities and cultural infrastructure needs across Alberta, and what will not get done now that CFEP has been significantly cut? The needs for small, volunteer-run organizations that typically utilize these funds haven't gone away. Does the minister have a plan to increase the available funding for facilities and cultural infrastructure to all of Alberta's arts community?

I want to talk about the elimination of funding for the provincial heritage organizations on page 54 of estimates. Minister, there was a reduction of approximately \$150,000 on line 6.8 on page 54 of estimates that led to the elimination of three of the six provincial heritage organizations, which all operate on a shoestring and whose efforts are powered by volunteers. The cuts to these three PHOs will

have disastrous consequences for the preservation of Alberta's heritage and promotion of Alberta's culture. Minister, you mentioned in your opening that there is a volunteerism action plan to increase volunteering across the province. The action to cut the three PHOs is in opposition to that.

The 2026 budget projects a \$9.4 billion dollars deficit and adds new tourism taxes and levies, yet it eliminates all provincial funding for these three key heritage organizations, including the Historical Society of Alberta, founded by Premier Alexander Rutherford and central to Alberta's heritage governance. At the same time your office – your office, the deputy minister's office, and corporate services, items 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 on page 54 in estimates – is increasing by over half a million dollars. Given that the Historical Society of Alberta and the Alberta Genealogical Society and the Archaeological Society all provide the historical integrity and archival and infrastructure that your government relies on to support its, quote, higher ground tourism strategy, how did the ministry determine that it could not even find \$150,000 to sustain these high-return-on-investment, volunteer-driven institutions?

Minister, thousands of volunteer hours go into these societies to maintain, preserve, and promote Alberta culture and heritage. Will you commit today to restoring this modest funding before critical archives and volunteer networks are irreparably lost? Minister, can you explain why half a million dollars is going into your office, the DM's office, and corporate services while \$150,000 is being cut from these valuable PHOs? One of the PHOs puts in 25,000 volunteer hours annually. That's the Historical Society of Alberta. The Alberta Genealogical Society has 650 members in 10 branches across Alberta: Brooks, Calgary, Camrose, Drayton Valley, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Wetaskiwin.

Just going on to the business plan, key objective 2, page 27. \$55 million is allocated to support stewardship of Alberta's heritage resources and provincially-owned heritage facilities, including the Royal Alberta Museum and the Royal Tyrrell. I have heard directly from dozens of volunteers from the historical, genealogical, and archaeological societies of Alberta that these funding cuts will mean their efforts to protect Alberta's culture and heritage will cease to exist. The work of PHOs, whose funding was cut, directly benefits the overall work of the provincially-owned heritage facilities and the province's archives and the museums I mentioned.

In outcome 2, key objective 2.2, the ministry endeavors to work with the community partners to develop a plan to increase volunteerism across the province. It would seem that 25,000 hours of volunteer effort and 650 members and their volunteerism efforts will be lost. This is going in the wrong direction, Minister. Again, how does the ministry justify cutting necessary resources out of these societies?

Further to concerns already mentioned at the PHOs whose funding was eliminated, we also know that heritage organizations are struggling to maintain historic site operations today. The Ukrainian Village near Elk Island park, for example, was unable to run any programming last summer because of a wildfire that burned down the main building. They have plans for reopening but require support from the ministry, and I will get into that further after.

The Chair: Well, thank you, Member.

That concludes the first portion of the questions for the Official Opposition. We will now go to the government side, the government caucus for the first 20 minutes. Member Wright will be speaking.

Member, do you want to combine your time or block time?

Mr. Wright: Well, we'll stick with the setting that's already been placed with the block time.

The Chair: Okay. Member, go ahead.

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you to the minister.

Minister, I'm going to be talking about estimates line 2.6 on page 55 around community infrastructure and local impacts. As you know, I am a very strong advocate for the community impacts that we can make as MLAs, especially with supporting organizations within our communities.

On the CFEP grants and CIP grants, you know, it's been a great program to really support organizations across the province. In my riding we've been fortunate enough to support the Special Olympics that's happening this year in Medicine Hat. We've been able to support the Medicine Hat Skateboard Association with their Beat the Heat competition, which is Canada's largest amateur skateboard competition. We've also been able to support the Monarch Theatre, which is Canada's oldest purpose-built theatre, and other community organizations such as the Rotary Club. But one that I'm most thankful for with these programs was the Medicine Hat Women's Shelter. We were able to secure \$1 million to help support their renovation and upgrades to really service women who are fleeing domestic violence and giving them a place with wraparound services where they can start to heal and get away from the situation that is absolutely terrifying and frankly unacceptable in our society today.

On this, you know, for the community facility enhancement program Budget 2026 commits \$25 million to this program. Through the chair, can the minister provide examples of how these funding dollars are supported in the budget to make sure community facilities in rural and mid-sized communities are looked after and what the minister is looking for when assessing these projects?

I also just want to take a moment to say that it doesn't just stop at the community side of things. You've made significant investments through these programs on veterans-related initiatives such as supporting the Legion branches across the province, No Stone Left Alone, Valour Place, and very thankful for the creation of Canadian Armed Forces Day in Alberta coming in.

Minister, I'll turn it over to you just to talk a bit about how Budget 2026 is going to continue to support community initiatives like this.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, go ahead with your response.

Ms Fir: Thank you, and thank you to the member for the questions.

I would be happy to provide more information about the community facility enhancement program, or CFEP. As noted, the program provides matching grants to nonprofit organizations to build, renovate, repair, or purchase community infrastructure. It has the two streams: the CFEP small, which provides grants of up to \$125,000 for things like roof repairs, window and door replacements, new flooring, mechanical upgrades, or playground replacement. These important investments help keep older rural facilities functional, safe, and open to the public. CFEP large provides a matching grant of up to \$1 million, making more significant rural infrastructure projects more affordable, including construction of new community or recreation facilities, major renovations or expansions, or redevelopment of sports fields, arenas, or parks.

8:10

When it comes to ensuring, we want to make sure we've got equal access to CFEP across Alberta. Applicants are assessed against criteria such as organization capacity, project vitality, project benefits, economic impact, and community need. Both streams also take into consideration regional equity throughout the province. Last year urban areas represented about 68 per cent of the successful projects versus about 32 per cent for rural areas. The member brought up some excellent examples in his area of an incredible impact that they have, whether it's smaller or relatively larger dollar amounts. But some great CFEP examples include the Alberta Birds of Prey Foundation in Coaldale. They received a million dollars to assist with constructing their environmental learning centre, including outdoor spaces, access road improvements, landscaping, and outdoor lighting. The project will include barrier-free paths and water feature crossings to improve accessibility for people with mobility challenges.

The Chiniki First Nation received a million dollars for construction of the Chiniki Cultural Centre. This is a multi-use facility that will include an indoor gym, daycare, multipurpose rooms, and an outdoor playground. It will host regional and provincial events, support cultural and wellness programming, and could serve as an emergency shelter during a nature disaster.

The Prairie Tractor & Engine Museum Society – that's another example I'll give – in Picture Butte received a grant for \$51,294 to construct an early 20th century replica general store at Coyote Flats Pioneer Village.

With respect to supports for veterans, I just want to thank the member for recognizing the support Alberta's government provides for veterans and military families. In 2024 we were proud to declare the first Sunday in June as Canadian Armed Forces Day in perpetuity. Since then our ministry has provided funding to dozens of community organizations that support military members and their families. The investments we make are really focused on recognizing the incredible contributions of our veterans. As mentioned, our ministry also provided \$60,000 in funding to No Stone Left Alone Memorial Foundation to support hosting of their Beechmount live-stream events.

That's just a few examples.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll turn it over to Member de Jonge for the next questions.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you so much, Chair, and thank you so much, Minister, for being here today and for your department as well. I just want to start off by saying that the programs and the work that your ministry does have such a huge impact on the lives of people across province. I've seen that first-hand, so I just want to thank you for the work that you and your great team do but also want to recognize that the care and attention and love you bring to your work is really felt and really noticed. I really appreciate it, and so do my constituents. Thank you very much, Minister, for the great work you do.

I want to talk a bit today about women's economic empowerment and I think being a woman in politics – and I think the other women here can understand that – and just, like, the importance of encouraging women and girls to step into leadership positions in their communities or maybe to step into or pursue education in what's traditionally considered a male-dominated space and ways that we can, through programs in your government, support those women and girls. I've seen first-hand in my constituency just the incredible impact that women have in building strong families and strengthening local organizations and driving our local economy.

We know that women are underrepresented in STEM programs. They're underrepresented in STEM employment. You know, I know you're working towards this, and you've got several programs that are targeting this. It's mentioned in your business plan, page 28, outcome 3, key objective 3.2. It mentions this specifically and the work that you're hoping to do. My question to you, Minister is, you know: what programs are offered through your ministry to encourage women's participation in the workforce in these underrepresented fields? You know, we need to meet our labour market needs and support women.

Then performance metric 3(b) on page 29 of the business plan shows that the number of women enrolled in STEM has actually grown, which is great news. I'm wondering how you'll continue to support that growth.

Then if you can talk about some key strategies that are going to be utilized to ensure that women that are holding these positions will, you know, be supported through the long term.

Finally, you know, if we look at economic growth more broadly, looking at the arts, looking at the film industry that's taken off in Alberta and these other creative fields, what are you doing to increase women's participation in these fields as well?

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

We'll turn it over to the minister for her response.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for that, and thanks to the member for her questions and her passionate support of women's economic empowerment. You know, our government continues to invest in programs, training, and scholarships that help women build strong, fulfilling, and high-paying careers in every sector of our economy. Within my ministry we recently awarded \$275,000 in scholarships to more than a hundred students through the women in STEM, Persons Case, and women in technical and applied arts scholarships, creating opportunities for students to study in fields where their gender is underrepresented. Budget 2026 maintains these programs in my ministry, but of course supporting women's economic empowerment is a priority across our government and across industries.

In manufacturing our government provided \$450,000 through Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration to the Wood Manufacturing Council to identify barriers women face entering, staying, and advancing in that sector.

In the tech sector we invested \$250,000 through Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration in a mentorship initiative led by Canadian Women in Communications and Technology. It connects employers with diverse female talent and helps women grow their networks and advance their careers.

Across government we continue to support the important work Women Building Futures does, with more than \$14.2 million in funding to help unemployed and underemployed women start careers in the skilled trades and transportation. Another example would be Skills Canada Alberta. We invested nearly \$7 million over the past three years through Advanced Education to support programs like girls in trades and technologies, which introduces girls to opportunities in these key sectors.

As promised in our 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence, I'll also be establishing an advisory council on women's economic empowerment, and this council will do important work to help guide policy and ensure women have access to economic opportunities and resources.

You talked about the importance of STEM and getting more girls involved in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. I appreciate you highlighting how important it is but that there is still

work to do. While it's encouraging to see the total number of women enrolled in STEM programs increasing, it's clear that our task is not complete. In addition to the scholarships I mentioned, my ministry also recently provided \$200,000 to NorQuest College's 1000Women4STEM bursary program to help remove barriers and create opportunities for women pursuing higher education in STEM.

As you noted, it's not enough to just get women into the underrepresented fields. We need to ensure that they feel safe and secure and that they stay there and can advance their careers. That means ensuring that those workplaces are safe, that equipment fits properly, and that opportunities are equitable. That's why we're partnering with other ministries to invest in research to understand the impact of things like ill-fitting PPE and to improve access to properly fitting protective equipment for women on work sites.

Our 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence also specifically recognizes workplace harassment as a challenge that we must address and commits to specific actions to raise awareness of harassment and what to do when it occurs. We've come a long way in that area, but of course, again, there's still work to be done.

Our government remains committed to ensuring all parents, women and men, have access to quality, affordable child care, especially consideration for things like women and men who work shift work, and you know, the lack of available 24-hour daycare is important as well.

Thank you for your questions.

8:20

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I understand that Member Pitt has the next question, but before you do, could you please introduce yourself for the record.

Ms Pitt: Yes. I'm Angela Pitt, MLA, Airdrie-East.

The Chair: Thank you. You may proceed.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here. I first just want to say thank you for some of the CFEP grants that have come into my community. While these are often not large amounts, they are wildly impactful to the people that live in the community of Airdrie. We were able to build a really neat veterans memorial on Veterans Boulevard in Airdrie – I encourage everybody to come and see the installations that have been put in there – on top of different grants to local sports organizations. BMX is coming to mind. We just presented a cheque to the local museum, which has some really cool old Airdrie history, and of course supported the Rocky View Handi Bus association. They were able to purchase a new van to get people in and around the Rocky View area to the places that they need to go. So thank you. I know you know these things, but from the people of Airdrie to you and to your ministry: thank you so much for just enhancing our community.

I'm actually here specifically with one question because I had a constituent send me an e-mail. He said: I want you to show up to this estimate meeting that is happening on this day and ask this question. The question revolves around the Historical Society of Alberta funding, which he is very passionate about. He asked me to come here today to talk about the reduction in funding in this budget but also what our government is doing to support these various organizations and historical landmarks across this province.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, go ahead.

Ms Fir: Yeah. Thank you to the member for that. I appreciate your enthusiasm for Alberta's heritage. I share that same passion and

recognize the importance of preserving and sharing Alberta's history. Although we face a tough budget, our government is committing over \$55 million to Alberta's heritage in addition to funding for provincially operated museums and heritage sites as well as the Provincial Archives of Alberta.

Budget 2026 maintains current funding for the Alberta Museums Association and Archives Society of Alberta, supporting the heritage sector with training and programs and services. The Alberta Museums Association, as an example, provides grants and bursaries to other smaller museums as well as offering targeted resources that benefit the whole sector, which is why our government is maintaining support of almost \$1.4 million. Application-based grants will also continue to support the preservation and presentation of historic resources through the heritage preservation partnership program and the historic markers program.

Your question about grant funding is a very important one. Following a review of annual operational grants provided to third-party heritage organizations, we determined that funding needed to be focused on organizations that provide extensive services to the sector versus nonprofit organizations. The organizations no longer receiving operating grants – the Historical Society of Alberta, the Alberta Genealogical Society, and the Archaeological Society of Alberta – are eligible to apply for funding through our CIP program. That's something really important to note.

The annual funding may be ending in Budget 2026, if passed, but these three organizations are all eligible to apply for our community initiatives program, which provides funding of up to \$75,000. In the cases of some of these organizations, they could actually be eligible to receive more funding if they did apply and were successful with their CIP applications. I want to stress that it's not like there are not funding opportunities available. Absolutely, we'd be happy to sit down with these organizations and make sure that they understand how these programs work.

Back to the comments. While unconditional operating funding has ended, again, these important organizations will be able to apply for funding to support their work, like other valuable heritage organizations across the province. In many cases the funding available through the community grants, as I said, meets or exceeds the operational funding previously provided to groups like the Historical Society, the Archaeological Society, the Genealogical Society. Budget 2026 invests \$25 million in the community facility enhancement program and \$13.65 million in the CIP, the community initiatives program. These groups do such important work. I understand their disappointment that annual operating funding has concluded, but I look forward to working together with them to find ways that their important work can continue as they seek funding through other mechanisms, like so many other nonprofit organizations, historical societies, and heritage organizations.

As you noted, our community grants support the broad nonprofit sector, and I can share just an example or two of some that received funding this year. The Lacombe and District Historical Society receives \$14,503 through CIP to organize and host an antiques show. The Millet and District Historical Society received almost \$50,000 through CIP to hire a community liaison to review volunteer recruitment, onboarding, and public programming.

Again, I want to thank the member for her interest in Alberta's history and the organizations that work so hard to support it and reiterate that it wasn't a decision made lightly. It was made knowing that while this source of funding may be ending, other sources of funding are absolutely available.

Ms Pitt: Perfect. A follow-up?

The Chair: Sure.

Ms Pitt: I just want to say really quickly that I'm actually very confident in the change in how this funding is going, and on behalf of my constituent who's very concerned about this particular area I'm very confident that the CFEP and the CIP grants will fill that gap.

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

We will now move to the second round of questions and responses. The caucus rotation going forward will be the same as the first round, starting with the Official Opposition, followed by the members of the government caucus. However, speaking times are now reduced to five minutes for the duration of the meeting. We will begin this rotation with the members of the Official Opposition, who will have five minutes for their questions and comments, followed by a response from the minister, who may speak up to five minutes. After both individual caucuses have had the opportunity to speak once, we will move then to the next caucus in the rotation. If the member and the minister agree to share time, we will proceed with a 10-minute segment during which neither member or the minister may speak for more than five minutes. Members are reminded that they may not share any unused portion of their five minutes with another member.

Member Ceci, do you wish to share or block time with the minister?

Member Ceci: Either is fine.

The Chair: Minister?

Ms Fir: We can continue with block, please.

The Chair: Continue with block time. Go ahead, Member.

Member Ceci: Minister, because of the way the rotation worked, you didn't have an opportunity to answer some of the questions that I posed. Maybe I'll just quickly go over those so that you have the opportunity now. I asked about advocating for equitable federal arts funding, and I asked you: could you outline the specific steps you've taken to advocate for more equitable funding for Alberta's arts, culture, and creative community sectors for our federal partners? I asked: has your ministry calculated the potential financial impact on arts in Alberta cultural and creative sectors if federal funding was interrupted for any reason? I asked: would your ministry be able to backfill the 96 Alberta arts organizations, 233 Alberta artists, and 25 Alberta cultural groups with grants, prizes, touring support, et cetera if that annual Canada council funding went away?

The next question I had was with regard to the community facility enhancement program. It's often a key source of support, and you mentioned it along with CIP just a minute ago. It's been reduced to \$25 million now, where it was \$50 million for three different years. I asked if you would outline what's in the budget to support the myriad of facilities and cultural infrastructure needs across this province, and the fact that some of them won't get done now: how are they going to address those? I asked also: does the minister have a plan to increase and preference the available funding, whether that's \$25 million, for arts facilities and cultural infrastructure to all of Alberta's arts community?

The next thing I brought up was just what you were talking about, the elimination of funding for the provincial heritage organizations. Minister, you mentioned in your opening that you've developed or are developing a volunteerism action plan to increase volunteering

across the province. I referenced the number of volunteer hours and number of volunteers across the province that do this work. My question is: how did the ministry determine that it could not find \$150,000 to sustain these high-return-on-investment, volunteer-driven institutions? You said that – I'm paraphrasing – extensive services to the sector weren't part of what they do, though I'm looking at the 30 letters I tabled in the Legislature today and the additional ones I'll table tomorrow, and they talk about providing extensive services to citizens across this province and elsewhere who are interested in history, genealogy, and archaeology.

8:30

The next thing I brought up was the Ukrainian Village near Elk Island. For example, it's unable to run programming right now because last summer the wildfire burned down its main building. What are your plans to support this Ukrainian Village? Does the ministry, through the provincial archives, have a list of artifacts that can be shared with the Ukrainian Village so that they can create a clear record of what was lost in the fire and determine whether they can make replicas? Also, the Ukrainian Village is a cultural hub for many Ukrainian newcomers who have come here through the war in their country, and while the village received a small increase to their budget last year, they're concerned about increased costs to identify the lost artifacts and to make replicas.

Minister, in the last minute of this I'd like to talk about page 52 of estimates, point 3.1 under cultural industries, and of course, it is under jobs, economy, and trade as well. There's a \$35 million reduction to the film and television tax credit. It's a major tool for attracting production to Alberta. You've referenced that yourself, yet industry stakeholders continue to raise concerns about the lack of co-ordination between your ministry and jobs, economy, and trade. Given the clear overlap between cultural development and economic growth in the screen industry, can the minister explain why there isn't more active collaboration and why we are not doing as well as others in terms of being able to attract productions to this province because of our ability not to have the best-in-class tax credits for that industry?

Minister, I have several other questions, and I will address those in the subsequent follow-up.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

We'll now go to the minister for her answer.

Ms Fir: Well, thank you very much. I'll note that the member had also asked some questions further about the Alberta music action plan, so I just would like to provide some stats there. The industry supports more than 23,000 jobs across live performances, sound recording, audiovisual, and interactive media. We know globally that the music sector is growing. In 2024 Canada's music sector was the eighth largest in the world, growing by 8 per cent to just over \$834 million, compared to the US market growth of only 4.8 per cent. Again I want to give a plug for our current artist in residence. John Wort Hannam is an award-winning Lethbridge-based folk singer. Another stat: the West Anthem ecosystem report found that in 2020 the music ecosystem contributed a total of \$1.7 billion to Alberta's GDP and more than 20,000 jobs.

To touch on the member asking about what we're doing to advocate for federal arts funding, certainly no indication that the Canada council is going away. We're demanding more. I've met with the Canada council to demand fair funding. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts has done the same. The Canada council has, in fact, added Alberta staff intended to keep pushing for a fair share. I had met previously with the previous culture minister, minister Guilbeault, and have reached out to the new cultural minister,

Minister Miller. We've heard back from his office and are setting up a meeting with him. I also will advocate to him in the upcoming summer federal-provincial-territorial meeting on culture and heritage ministers.

Jumping now to: the member had pointed out about heritage sector funding, which I touched on previously, but I want to reiterate that it was a tough budget. Despite that our government is still committed to over \$55 million to continue supporting provincial archives, historic resources, and heritage grants. The budget, if passed, maintains current funding levels for the Alberta Museums Association and Archives Society of Alberta, supporting the heritage sector with training programs and services. Again, I want to reiterate that the reduction in funding for the three societies does not mean or indicate that there's not other funding options available. The community initiatives program are grants that would be available to the societies to apply for that, as I mentioned, because the funding of these grants is up to \$75,000, in some cases getting a grant like that could result in significantly more than, for example, the Alberta Genealogical Society or the Archaeological Society of Alberta received. So I stress again that we will be happy to reach out to those organizations, and if they're not familiar with the CIP program, make sure that we communicate it to them, make sure that they understand the guidelines, the deadlines so that those potential options for funding opportunities still exist.

Just to talk a little bit more about – the member also had previously talked a little bit about increases to the minister's office and deputy minister's office are due to salary increases following recent contract negotiations.

I also wanted to touch on the member's mentioning of the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village. Yes, that was certainly a devastating fire last year, and it's very promising to know that that Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village will be opening up in May. It is one of the 21 provincial historic resources that we own. Our government owns that. That falls under my ministry, so we've been able to be very involved in making sure that the recovery progresses and that we want to make sure we continue to see that growing and thriving. It's certainly one of Alberta's most popular provincial historic sites.

Since April our government has engaged with several consultants and contractors to clean up the destroyed visitor centre and repair and restore the site's utilities affected. Some utility work is expected to continue into May of 2026, but again, we're very hopeful and pleased to know that it's going to reopen in May. It's an incredible site that people from around the world come to visit and excellent programs for children. Again, we as a government own it, and we run it, and while no historic building . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now turn it over to the government caucus, and Member van Dijken is up next. Do you want block time or shared time?

Mr. van Dijken: Block time works fine.

The Chair: Go ahead, Member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister and your department staff that are here to go over the budget estimates of '26-27.

I am going to focus my questions on support for nonprofits and volunteers. I think it's really applicable. We're moving into the month of April in a few weeks and volunteer month, and the invitations are coming into my e-mail from the many towns that I represent. In my constituency of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock the nonprofit organizations and all the volunteers provide vital programs and services that our communities, my communities,

many people in my communities rely on. The volunteers who do this work with genuine compassion and care.

Key objective 2.2 on page 27 of the Arts, Culture and Status of Women business plan notes that the minister will “work with community partners to develop a plan to increase volunteerism across the province.” It sounds like a great initiative to help more Albertans get involved in volunteering and to ensure volunteer-run organizations can remain strong and sustainable. I know in the communities that I represent there is already very much a volunteer spirit in those communities, but it’s sometimes where we are lacking incentive and lacking some support to keep these organizations strong. I would appreciate, Mr. Chair, if the minister could provide more details on the strategies that will be implemented through Budget 2026 to support this important sector of the volunteers. Can the minister outline how Budget 2026 supports volunteer-led nonprofit organizations in the nonprofit sector?

8:40

Small nonprofits in my community are often unsure what programs are available for them. We help them a lot in the constituency office just to help them understand what’s available, but many times they are too intimidated to apply for grants because they think the process will be challenging. We are able to walk them through that. What steps is the minister taking to ensure the application process is accessible to these organizations? How does the ministry recognize and support volunteers who contribute their time and expertise in local communities? I think of volunteer appreciation month, the month we can set aside and ensure that volunteers understand how important their role is. Are there initiatives in place to help nonprofits remain sustainable in the face of rising operating costs and declining volunteerism?

Those are all my questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Member, and off to the minister for her response.

Ms Fir: Thank you. Thank you to the member for the questions about how my ministry supports nonprofit organizations. I know I’ve spent some time in the member’s riding over the past couple of years and can attest to what he’s saying about the importance of volunteers and how some of the folks in some of the smaller communities or more rural communities are some of the hardest working volunteers that we have in this province. I appreciate his comments.

As mentioned, Budget 2026 provides \$61.4 million for nonprofit organizations through our various community grant programs, including, as I’ve mentioned many times, CFEP and CIP, community facility enhancement program and community initiatives program. Through these programs we’re supporting thousands of organizations. We hear feedback regularly from Alberta nonprofits that they appreciate the program supports and services delivered by my ministry.

I hear regularly from stakeholders and people at events just a shout-out to ministry how much they appreciate how accessible and helpful that the folks in my department are in helping these individuals with these applications and answering their questions. These folks want to spend their hard work and time volunteering, not filling out applications, but filling out the application is a necessary part of getting the funding. We want to find that right balance between making sure that the applications are thorough and we get the information we need but they’re not taking up too much time for the folks, and my ministry does a great job of answering questions and helping people through that process.

One of the supports that is offered is our grant search tool. This user-friendly tool on the alberta.ca website outlines all the grants provided by my ministry, including the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, in one place so organizations can find the best match for them. The nonprofit listing dashboard is another online tool available to Alberta nonprofits, and it contains information about all Alberta nonprofits, including type, current status, date of incorporation, location, and organization name. The dashboard helps organizations find potential partners in their community and identify similar organizations in other parts of the province; alberta.ca also includes resources for nonprofits at every stage, whether they are starting out, managing an existing program, or looking for funding. We also offer training online for Albertans involved with nonprofits to access whatever they need. We’ve also recently reviewed our grant guidelines to make sure they are clear and understandable. Finally, we have, as I mentioned, wonderful staff that are available to assist nonprofit groups over the phone, by e-mail, or with in-person training.

The member also asked about volunteers. Our ministry runs several programs to support and recognize volunteers through our volunteer screening program, which is in partnership with Volunteer Alberta where participating nonprofits and their volunteers can get subsidized access to vulnerable sector checks to support public safety. We also partner with Volunteer Alberta to deliver the National Volunteer Week grant, which provides funding to community and nonprofit groups to recognize volunteers and volunteerism during volunteer week, which is the third week of April. Our ministry administers the government of Alberta’s annual Stars of Alberta volunteer recognition awards, and through that program extraordinary Albertans are honoured at an awards ceremony in early December, celebrating the impact these amazing individuals have had on their respective communities. Nine awards are presented to youth, adult, and senior nominees and for volunteers just making extraordinary contributions. It’s one of the highlights of the year for me for sure. Another program my ministry runs is in the northern lights volunteer recognition program, an ongoing online program to recognize the everyday heroes in Alberta’s communities.

Even with all these programs in place Alberta is seeing declining volunteerism rates, as is the rest of the country. This is significant because all 28,000 nonprofits in our province depend on these extraordinary volunteers. As I imagine we have all experienced, volunteers can be a make-it-or-break-it factor for community organizations, which is why my department will be working with the sector to better understand why this decline is happening and what can be done to reverse this trend. I definitely look forward to sharing details on our volunteerism action plan in the future. As I meet with volunteer organizations, again, at events, I hear about some of the challenges that they’re facing with declining participation, and we want to make sure that we’re addressing those causes and as a government making sure that we’re doing what we can do to help because their input and what they offer is extraordinary, and we don’t want to lose it.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now go back to the Official Opposition, with Member Hayter for the next block of questions.

Ms Hayter: Block time?

Ms Fir: Block, please.

Ms Hayter: Perfect. Continue with that.

Outcome 3 of the ministry business plan is that all Albertans feel welcome, supported, and included. This ministry creates and

supports opportunities to celebrate the experiences that unite communities and make the province uniquely Albertan. Key objective 3.3 lists supporting and engaging the 2SLGBTQA-plus community. On page 22 of the strategic plan priority 2, objective 5 is supporting vulnerable Albertans. There are no clear outcome metrics identified that were monitored. I'm wondering what funding is going towards supporting, engaging, and celebrating.

As well, what is the 2026-27 operating cost within this ministry to implement, monitor, and respond to gender identity related policy changes affecting gender-diverse Albertans? Would the ministry please break down the staffing, communications, training, and the grants? What is the total amount of direct funding for the 2SLGBTQIA-plus organizations provided by the ministry? How many recipients? How many agreements are multiyear?

We know that the ministry has publicly stated that it's here to promote the inclusion of Alberta, where culture, heritage, language, sexual orientation, and gender are valued, respected, and supported. Within that language, it's also stated in the objectives of the strategic plan. In the last year this government has used the notwithstanding clause four times, effectively rolling back fundamental rights of women, girls, transgender, and gender-diverse people. How many people will access these services when they don't feel safe? Within the Alberta 10-year strategy plan to end gender-based violence on page 10 the framework states that the "LGBTQ+ people often face higher rates of gender-based violence" like hate speech and threats of violence. On page 11 of the same report it notes that 24 per cent of hate crimes reported to police in our province "specifically targeted sexual orientation."

What was the cost to Albertans for the government to implement the various policy changes impacting the 2SLGBTQIA-plus individuals through bills 26, 27, and 29? Specifically, what was the cost to Albertans for fees relating to the requirements for school forms to confirm gender, for example? Can the minister give me a running total of the court and legal fees arising from the legal challenges to use the notwithstanding clause on Bill 9, which specifically impacts gender-diverse people? Has this ministry other responsibilities for implementation of these bills considered the personal, financial, and emotional costs of the serious health-related outcomes for Albertans affected by these policies?

The government says in the strategic plan for the budget on page 22 that they are protecting girls in sport. Is there a performance metric to measure relating to girls sport? Is it around funding, and where can it be found in the budget documents?

I have concerns about the implementation of these policies and their impacts on Alberta's economy. In terms of the government's stance on girls in sport we have seen national organizations opt out of participation in Alberta. Can the minister confirm if any other organizations have followed suit, and will we see an analysis of revenue lost from those decisions? Stakeholders note that to advance gender equality, all communities must be included.

8:50

The annual report on page 5 states that the "government remains driven to support women's participation in Alberta's economy." I'm grateful that within the government's strategic plan we're wanting to ensure that women also have the advantage here. It's also crucial, though, for promoting that, you know, we want to make sure that women are financially independent, that we do have gender equality, and that we are preventing gender-based violence. As Alberta still struggles with the gender-based wage gap, with women earning only 82 per cent on the dollar by men, what is the ministry doing to address the gender-based wage gap? Raising minimum wage is one concrete way we can narrow the gap today.

What is the ministry doing to advocate for Alberta women, who are making the lowest minimum wage in all of Canada?

It's not a secret that women in the workforce face unique challenges, and this includes health-related barriers. The Menopause Foundation of Canada reported that unmanaged symptoms of menopause can cost the Canadian economy an estimated \$3.5 billion per year and \$237 million in lost productivity. How does the ministry work to help women continue to be active participants in the labour force? What type of work are you doing to ensure women's health doesn't inhibit their ability to contribute to the workforce? When will the government cover menopause medications and birth control like the governments do in Manitoba and B.C.? What work has the ministry done to raise awareness for preventative health for women so we can continue to participate in society with ease?

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, would you like to respond. Five minutes.

Ms Fir: Thank you. Thank you to the member for the questions. Just some examples of support that we offer to the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community. I've spoken before about our online resource hub that provides information on government services and supports available to 2SLGBTQIA-plus Albertans. It's an excellent source, a one-stop shop for the various resources and programs and tools that we have available.

Another thing that is great is our Stars of Alberta volunteer awards that I'd mentioned previously. There's a category for celebrating 2SLGBTQIA-plus champions advocating for inclusion.

I also want to give some examples of financial support. Last year our government was the single largest funder of the Edmonton Pride Festival, with an investment of \$75,000. We also supported the Grande Prairie Pride Society a couple of years ago with \$30,000, and over the past decade we'd also provided funding to Calgary Pride. Over the last decade they received \$242,000 through the community initiatives program. So support exists both in terms of resources and tools, with awards like the Stars of Alberta, and with financial support as well.

Also, as it relates to our gender-based violence strategy, our 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence includes actions to support all at-risk communities, including the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community. Priority 2 includes initiatives to explore prevention and programming for disproportionately impacted groups and continued support for early intervention programs for 2SLGBTQIA-plus people and families. We engaged with numerous representatives in the 2SLGBTQIA-plus community and leaders from across Alberta to help inform our strategy and ensure that actions will make meaningful changes for these communities. Some examples of those engagements are that I've met with numerous folks and representatives in the community and leaders from across Alberta to listen and learn and better understand community priorities, and again, those groups were active participants in helping to inform Alberta's 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence.

I also wanted to touch on women's economic participation and the importance of that and what we're doing to ensure that we continue to close the wage gap and support the economic participation of women in Alberta. Ensuring women have access to good-quality jobs and fulfilling careers is essential to Alberta's economic success, and we're helping reduce the wage gap by supporting women to enter and advance in high-paying fields, where they remain underrepresented. Across government we fund high-impact initiatives to support women in manufacturing,

technology, science, engineering, transportation, and the skilled trades, including trades and technology within the arts and culture sectors. Our supports also extend to entrepreneurship. I'll mention again that I'm establishing an advisory council on women's economic empowerment to help guide policy and promote equitable access to opportunities.

Just to tie in women's economic empowerment and participation and success to the gender-based violence strategy, one of the main pillars and one of the main priorities I'm most passionate about in our gender-based violence strategy, although it's all important, is helping women achieve economic empowerment and independence. It's heartbreaking and devastating when a woman has to return or feels forced to return to an unsafe situation because she does not have the financial or economic means to provide for her and her children. Having to make the choice between returning to an abusive situation or being in a homeless shelter is devastating; I can't imagine.

That's why I'm such a fan of organizations like Women Building Futures, who I've toured many times. Just another reason why our government proudly supports that organization: not only does it provide training in skilled trades and transportation, but it provides wraparound supports from career building and resumé writing, helping these women be successful, learn trades that allow them to be able to be economically independent and successful and not have to return to the cycle of violence.

Quickly on women's health research. You know, last year we committed a total of \$20 million to Alberta women's health . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go to the government side. Member Bouchard for the final block of questions.

Mr. Bouchard: Final hurrah, hey?

Ms Fir: We can go back and forth for these final few minutes.

Mr. Bouchard: Okay. Love that. Yeah. Perfect.

Well, thank you, Minister, and thank you, Chair. As a father of four with three proud young musicians in my house I know firsthand how important the arts and how music has played in their lives and continues to this day. Just, I guess, a quick question, through the chair: if the minister can share how important it is investing in the arts and how it impacts all Albertans and our provincial economy.

Ms Fir: Sure. I mean, we're so proud of all of our cultural industries: books and magazines, film and television, and the music sector. Again, speaking a little bit more about – this is why we've developed the music action plan. We have amazing resources for the music industry in our province, but it was important to create a

co-ordinated approach, to look at hiring a music commissioner that can be that one point of contact, and really looking at ways through the action plan that we can amplify – pun intended – the music industry and make sure that we have more opportunities for young and aspiring musicians, established musicians, or those that are struggling. How do we make sure that we have opportunities for them so that they can not only stay in Alberta but have successful, meaningful, well-paying careers in the industry?

Mr. Bouchard: For those who may be unfamiliar, can the minister explain what the AFA is mandated to do and how this funding increase will be used to advance the mandate?

Ms Fir: The AFA is mandated to support and contribute to the development of all the arts in Alberta. It provides funding to artists and art organizations, promotes the arts, and manages an extensive provincial art collection featuring work from artists all over the province. In 2025 they supported more than 290 arts organizations and nearly 370 individual artists from every corner of the province. With our \$3.5 million boost to the AFA this year, which represents a historic level of investment, they're going to be able to help those organizations expand their program and bring even more inspiring experiences to more Albertans.

Mr. Bouchard: I'll go quickly, I guess. I don't know if you'll have enough time. What steps is the ministry taking to balance support for major institutions with opportunities for local artists and community-based organizations?

Ms Fir: Yeah. The AFA I think do a really good job of trying to make sure that we're doing just that, that we're supporting the local individual artists, but the larger arts organizations we provide funding to as well because in doing that, they have opportunities to build and provide programs for all Albertans, for schools, for children. I think in the arts and culture ecosystem it's most successful when you're supporting the everyday artist to the huge organizations.

The Chair: Well, thank you, Minister and members, for this awesome meeting. I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded.

I would also like to remind the committee members that we are scheduled to meet on Monday, March 16, at 7 p.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned. Have a good evening.

[The committee adjourned at 9 p.m.]

