



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 12, 2025

Day 84

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
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Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
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Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
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(UC)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 37

Independent: 1

Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my great pleasure to introduce some very, very important guests to you. Now, I understand that these important guests may be introduced more than once today, but rules are rules, and if you're a guest in the Speaker's gallery, you ought to be introduced by the Speaker. Joining me today are five of the brightest young minds in Alberta. They also happen to be the children of the hon. Minister of Education, and I invite them to rise as I call their names and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Ellie, Sophia, Vivienne, Christina, and Olivia, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has a school group to introduce.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and on behalf of the Official Opposition House Leader and leader, I would like to introduce 85 students from Meyokumin school in Mill Woods. I believe they're in the public gallery, and I'll ask them all to stand and receive the warm welcome from the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you my constituent Catherine Behl, a local senior who recently stopped by my office to ask for an Alberta flag. In the face of the recent rhetoric from the President of the United States, she wanted the opportunity to show her pride in both our province and our country, so we were happy to provide that to her. She's here in the House today. I ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ms Iryna Sotulenko. She is actively engaged in both social and political spheres while continuing her work as a business owner in Ukraine. She's a lawyer, a psychologist, and an image-maker. She's a true example of resilience and empowerment. I ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Joining us in the gallery today, I have Marjorie, Catherine, Najia, Orianna, Emily, Leanne. They're all educational support workers who are still on strike

because this government is too cheap to give them a raise. I ask that the Assembly give them the warm welcome that they deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. With them are members from Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Okotoks, and Peace River chambers of commerce and my friend Dana Severson. Thank you for all your hard work advocating for and representing businesses and strong communities across the province. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some amazing guests here in the Legislature: Corinne Ofstie and Haley Scott from the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services. We had a great meeting this morning to discuss ways that we can help women and families that are fleeing sexual violence. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for introducing my special guests, but of course I want the opportunity to do that as well. So I want to recognize these five incredible, special guests; my amazing girls. I ask them to rise when their names are called – Ellie, Sophia, Christina, Olivia, and Vivienne – and I ask that the Assembly welcome them again.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, followed by the Minister of Health.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly and the House a constituent of mine, the outgoing president of the chamber of commerce, a dear friend and a true community builder and also a very strong hockey dad, someone who loves the community of Peace River. Layne Gardner, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Chamber.

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce through you and to you Mr. Paul Rossmann, the COO of the Calgary Health Foundation. I thank him and the foundation for the great work that they do in helping health care become even greater in this province.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has a statement to make.

Education Budget 2025-2026

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2025 is meeting the challenges facing Albertans and our province. I'm proud to see that this United Conservative government is taking decisive action now to ensure every student in Alberta continues to receive the world-class education our province is known for. Just

this morning the Minister of Education announced how Budget 2025, if passed, will help address the challenges facing our schools due to growing enrolment. For example, this budget would invest almost \$1.1 billion over the next three years to hire additional teachers and classroom support staff. This funding will help school boards hire more than 4,000 teachers, educational assistants, and support staff over the next three years. This is a critical investment at a critical time.

If Budget 2025 is passed, Alberta's government will also be providing \$55 million in classroom complexity funding in 2025-26. This is a 20 per cent increase from the previous year. This funding would ensure school boards have the resources to deliver our world-class education to students with specialized learning needs. Overall, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is committing more than \$1.6 billion to support students with specialized learning needs.

Alberta's government continues to make generational investments into our education system that have never been seen before in this province. Last year we announced a school construction accelerator program to build more educational spaces for our children. Now we are investing in the staff and support needs to fill those spaces. Budget 2025 would fund Education's budget to the tune of \$9.9 billion in 2025-26, an increase of over \$400 million from the previous year. Mr. Speaker, this government is funding education, building more schools, and ensuring every student has the space and resources they need to succeed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Health Services Procurement Process

Ms Ganley: The allegations in the corrupt care scandal are against UCP cabinet ministers. They are allegations of awarding inflated contracts in the hope of getting some personal perk in return. That is about as serious as allegations can be in public office, that a minister abused their position, overspent taxpayer money in the hopes of getting something for themselves. Yes, they are only allegations, but at absolute best it speaks to stunning incompetence, to spending more money on fewer surgeries while the people they are supposed to serve wait in pain. That is why we need a public inquiry.

A judge in a public inquiry gets to decide what questions can be asked, what documents can be called, what witnesses can be examined. When a judge calls you to a courtroom, you have to show up, you have to give evidence. If you don't, the punishment can be jail. But the UCP's 'sham investigation,' the one the Minister of Justice keeps trying to pretend is the same as a public inquiry: the judge wasn't given those powers. The UCP set the terms of reference. That means they decide what questions can be asked. In a courtroom the facts drive the outcome, and the facts are based on the evidence. But in the 'sham investigation' the UCP decides what questions can be asked, and that means they decide what evidence moves forward.

Imagine for a moment that this was a criminal trial, that the accused was a thief. Would you let the accused thief decide what witnesses you could call, what questions you could ask? Would you call that justice? Of course not.

The UCP cabinet ministers stand accused of corruption. They cannot be the ones to decide what the investigation can and cannot ask. That is why we deserve a public inquiry. And those ministers, the ones pretending that this is a public inquiry, well, they ought to be ashamed of themselves.

1:40 Federal Oil and Gas Emissions Cap

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, today the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a report on the federal oil and gas production cap. For years provinces, businesses, industry leaders along with numerous independent reports have found that the federal government's proposed oil and gas emissions cap will hurt Canadians. It will damage our economy and cost jobs. Over and over the federal government has dismissed and ignored these concerns. But this report vindicates and confirms the position of Alberta, our Premier, and our government.

Just like what we saw in the response to the carbon tax, the independent Parliamentary Budget Officer's scathing analysis shows beyond a doubt that this cap will hurt Canadians. It will cut oil and gas production by 5 per cent or over 245,000 barrels a day. It will eliminate 54,400 jobs from Canada's economy, and it will cut \$20 billion from our GDP by 2032, all while global emissions increase at the same time. The federal government cannot claim to support the energy sector and highlight its importance to trade with the United States while undercutting it at the same time.

You know who else can't claim to support the energy industry and jobs of Albertans across our province in Canada? The NDP, Mr. Speaker, whose masters in Ottawa continue to support this out-of-touch and economically disastrous federal government. Alberta is working to diversify our economy and trade partnerships and get more barrels to tidewater to maximize the value of our exports, but this policy is blatant hypocrisy at a time when Canadians are uniting to support a stronger energy sector.

This cap must be scrapped immediately for the good of the country. The evidence is clear. The federal government's proposed emission cap is unconstitutional, it's bad for the economy, and it's bad for Canadians. Mr. Speaker, it's time to call an election.

Government Caucus

Member Tejada: Mr. Speaker, the amount of internal drama to be found within the UCP is positively Shakespearean, so it is fitting to paraphrase the bard by suggesting something must be rotten in the state of this government. Just before session began the former Minister of Infrastructure, the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, quit the cabinet. He said that he can't stand by while the government takes so little action to get to the bottom of major corruption allegations. He is now on probation. The Member for Lesser Slave Lake, who dared to share on Facebook his concerns with the budget, was booted from his own caucus. In a recent podcast appearance the member did not mince words. He said of this government: it reeks of the same entitlement we've seen with, you know, the PC dynasty. He said that a member of the public approached him and said, quote, you know, you probably have more time with the Premier if you're a lobbyist than if you're an MLA.

These are big accusations from someone who served as this Premier's hand-picked parliamentary secretary just a few days ago. If a UCP parliamentary secretary can't get time to speak to the Premier about concerns with the cuts, chaos, and corruption in this government and likens it to the PC dynasty, it's no wonder this government is knee-deep in accusations of corruption. To quote Shakespeare again: "The lady doth protest too much."

Albertans simply deserve better. They can start with a fully independent judicial-led public inquiry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Alberta Francophonie Month

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. March is Francophonie Month, and I'm pleased to stand in the Chamber today to highlight Alberta's important French community. In my riding, Leduc-Beaumont, there is a strong and thriving francophone population. I am excited that Alberta's government is supporting the French community in my riding and across the province.

Last year, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government released the French policy action plan. This action plan has set out a road map to ensure the French language and French community have the supports they need within the province. The action plan has over 100 initiatives aimed at increasing access to supports in areas like early childhood, education, health, justice, and social services. It will ensure the French community has support and will help ensure French culture and heritage thrive across the province.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to this well-rounded action plan, Alberta's government successfully negotiated a new French-language services bilateral agreement with the federal government. This agreement will increase support by more than \$2 million per year for French language services in Alberta. Under the new agreement Alberta's government will double its annual investment in the Francophone Family Resource Network to \$2.1 million.

Alberta's francophone population has contributed so much to our province over the years. Today approximately 10 per cent of Albertans have French or French-Canadian heritage. In addition, there are four municipalities who are recognized as bilingual, including Beaumont. From the early fur trade to today's classrooms, French language and French culture have been a fundamental part of Alberta's history. I'm happy to continue honouring this history and celebrate Francophonie Month, ensuring that this heritage is recognized for years to come.

Thank you.

Budget 2025 and Cost of Living

Mr. Haji: Albertans are working harder than ever, yet they are being crushed under the weight of skyrocketing costs. Rent is rising faster than anywhere else in the country. Auto insurance remains the highest in the country. Albertans pay the highest utility bills, forcing families to make impossible choices between heating their homes and buying groceries, between covering the cost of gas to go to work or rent.

Mr. Speaker, the cost of living is worsening, tariff impact threat looms, yet the UCP's so-called affordability measures amount to just \$2 a day. They have no plan to make life more affordable, none at all. What does \$2 a day really mean for Albertans? It barely is enough for a cup of coffee, let alone relief from rising costs. It won't help on auto insurance rates that have skyrocketed by hundreds of dollars a year. It won't come close to covering rent increases that have pushed families to the brink, and it certainly won't off-set electricity bills that have quadrupled for some households. It certainly won't cover all the new taxes and fee increases, including an unprecedented 14 per cent hike in education property tax. That's not how you govern when Albertans face an affordability crisis. That \$2 a day is eroded every time Albertans are forced to pay higher property taxes and skyrocketing fees.

Albertans deserve better. They deserve a government that truly understands the cost-of-living crisis and takes meaningful action, not a Mraiche government that throws pennies at the problem but millions on a corrupt care scandal.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Bill 41 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 41, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2025.

My ministry regularly reviews Alberta's hunting and trapping regulations to ensure our rules align with modern technology and practices. Bill 41 will enhance wildlife management tools and improve clarity for Albertans active on the landscape, maintaining hunting and trapping as central parts of our province's cultural identity. Proposed changes to the Wildlife Act support effective management of Alberta's wildlife populations and the ecosystems they inhabit.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I hereby move first reading of Bill 41, Wildlife Amendment Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with section 20(1) of the Auditor General Act it's my pleasure as the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to table the following reports from the office of the Auditor General: School Authority Compliance with Annual Reporting Requirements; Report on Postsecondary Institutions 2024; Progress Report, Primary Care Networks; four, Assessment of Implementation Report, Treasury Board and Finance: Economy and Efficiency of Cash Management; Transportation and Economic Corridors: Procurement Processes. Here are the copies.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the five requisite copies of an article detailing out the trade-based money laundering happening between Chinese authorities, Mexico, and Canada.

Member Irwin: I rise to table copies of an e-mail sent this morning by Jessie Cadman. Jessie is a volunteer at SACE, the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton, and a survivor of sexual violence. She's writing to express her outrage over the reckless decision to cut \$1.8 million in funding from SACE, and she's demanding, like so many other Albertans, an immediate reversal of this funding cut and a commitment from this government to properly . . .

The Speaker: I'm sure members look forward to reading it as well.

The time is now 1:50, and we will return to tablings at the conclusion of Oral Question Period.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Unused Personal Protective Equipment

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are on the hook for hundreds of millions of dollars for bloated contracts with alleged kickbacks and useless product. This is at the heart of the corrupt care scandal. Taxpayers are also on the hook for a shady land deal that stunk so bad that the former Infrastructure minister quit the UCP cabinet over it. New documents reveal that the government has written off expired PPE bought from the same company that's at the heart of all of this. To the Premier: how much has the government spent writing off expired PPE from MHCare, and how much per month are Albertans paying to store the rest of it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the members opposite are asking if Alberta Health Services, during a global pandemic, actually procured PPE and then stored it during a time when no one could find PPE in the world, the answer is yes. They did procure it. They did store it. Alberta Health Services was doing the responsible thing, making sure that Albertans had the products that they needed at a time that they needed it. The members opposite should be thankful to AHS for doing that.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, to clarify, we are asking about this government buying unusable, overpriced PPE from contacts that are now tied up at the heart of the corrupt care scandal. Leaked information shows that this Health minister has written off 1.5 million packages of medical and nonmedical gowns. That means vaporizing \$57 million because of shoddy products that Sam Mraiche sold this government. We're now warehousing thousands of skids of garbage. How much is this costing?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite are well aware that there had been many unknowns in the early weeks and months of the COVID-19 pandemic. [interjections] They scoff, but we were in a global crisis, as was every other province across this country. In an abundance of caution AHS did purchase a significant volume of PPE at a time when there was a world-wide shortage of PPE and possibly these items would be difficult to procure in the months ahead. They did the responsible thing. They have stored that product when it wasn't used.

Ms Gray: This government sure likes to try to skate away from accountability. I wonder where they learned to be slippery as ice.

While the UCP have been enjoying unethical gifts, Albertans are left paying the tab for their garbage PPE. They bought it by the shipping container, they knew it was poor quality and that we didn't need it, and now endless boxes of expired PPE sit in warehouses with no value, yet we're still paying for it. The best way to get to the bottom of this and all the related concerns in corrupt care is to call a public inquiry. What is this government afraid of that they won't call a public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? While the NDP want to continue to play politics with people's lives, we on this side were actually doing the job that needed to be done during a global pandemic when there was a shortage of PPE right across the world. AHS did the responsible thing, and they procured PPE and they stored PPE; so did every other province. I recently read articles that Saskatchewan and British Columbia are facing the

same issue with product that they're not using. The NDP should figure ...

The Speaker: Oh, I look forward to such an opportunity where you can speak from a standing position. The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has a question.

Health Services Procurement Process

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've read some articles in the newspaper that apparently the minister is getting kickbacks from all these AHS deals. The former CEO alleges that an employee, Jitendra Prasad, was found via a forensic audit to have had an MHCare e-mail address while also working in AHS. This was so serious that when the CEO informed the board about it, they recommended going to the RCMP. Why hasn't the government followed up and taken all the evidence compiled by this forensic audit to the investigators at the RCMP?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak to the member's question. The allegations are completely false where they are concerning me. As far as the statement of defence, it will be out shortly.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: I encourage the members opposite to read it when it does come out because I think they will be quite enlightened. The members opposite are happy to constantly put forward allegations that have no merit and truth. Again, I am looking forward to that statement of defence coming out very, very shortly.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted by the hon. the Government House Leader at 1:56.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Mr. Speaker, what's taking the minister so long? We're all waiting to see the statement of defence. The evidence that was compiled about Prasad was compiled by a law firm. It was forensic evidence, and the AHS board when they saw it said that it was so compelling that it should be taken to the RCMP. My question is simple. What is the government hiding? What did the forensic audit find out about Prasad, who the Premier's chief of staff fondly called, quote, his guy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, absolute nonsense from that member. We are not hiding anything. The government has taken immediate steps to move forward and work with the Auditor General's office, to work with the RCMP, to work with the independent judicial-led inquiry and investigation into this. We are happy to continue to co-operate and work with them and provide all of the investigations with the material that they need. We'll continue to do so.

Thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, pro tip to the minister: an even more immediate step he can take right now is to confess to what was going on at AHS. When the deputy minister brought it up, she used the rumours of kickbacks. Now, we all know that kickbacks are illegal and kickbacks deserve an RCMP investigation, so to the Premier: when everyone seemed to know that there were kickbacks

going on and the AHS board was briefed on them and the allegations were this serious, why didn't they call in the RCMP?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the member has been for the past few weeks, but the RCMP is investigating, and we've committed to full co-operation with that investigation. We are working as a government to make sure that we co-operate as quickly as possible so that we can get the results of the investigation and hear and learn about what those outcomes are.

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

Unused Personal Protective Equipment (continued)

Dr. Metz: Mr. Speaker, front-line health care workers deserve the best for protecting us and our loved ones. They are heroes. That's why it's so offensive that money was wasted on inferior PPE. This government gave them shoddy PPE. It gave them rashes. I can still smell the horrible, stinky masks. And now the UCP is letting it collect dust in a warehouse. Can the Minister of Health please explain how much she's budgeting this year for expired PPE on hand in a third-party warehouse?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe I already answered this question, but I'm happy to answer it again. Alberta Health Services in fact is the one that in turn procured as well as . . . [interjections] I don't think the members opposite actually want to hear the answer.

Ms Sweet: Point of order.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. A point of order is noted by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning at 1:59.

Rarely does communication other than that who has the call deliver order. I encourage members to keep it in mind as they listen to the hon. Minister of Health, who does have the call.

2:00

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I reiterate that purchasing and storage decisions made by AHS were done in good faith in an expedited manner during a public health crisis with a focus on protecting Albertans from the coronavirus when it came out. Everyone knows that, and they did the right thing.

Dr. Metz: AHS contracted third-party warehouses for over \$100,000 a month to store expired PPE. Every month that goes by, Albertans get another \$100,000 bill. The government is very bad with money. The budget lacks resources for teams to support family doctors, for public surgeries, and ERs in rural Alberta flicker open and closed like an on-and-off switch. What's the limit to what this UCP will spend on warehouses storing garbage?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is making allegations on products that were procured by Alberta Health Services during a time of pandemic, when there was a shortage around the world. We didn't know how long the pandemic would last. The members opposite, I'm sure, were yelling at us at that time to make sure we had the proper amount of PPE for our health care workers, because they deserve it. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: I just want to be super clear, Mr. Speaker, that AHS followed the appropriate controls in full compliance with

Health Canada protocols to acquire the PPE, and they also have followed the proper protocols to store it.

Dr. Metz: Well, the storage fees for the expired PPE are still totalling over a million dollars a year, and the government spent nearly half a million dollars trying to dispose of it, but there's still a warehouse full of Sam Mraiche's PPE and Turkish Tylenol in northwest Edmonton. The only person who would be happy about that would be the warehouse owner, who's racking up the bucks from this government because we can't even throw things away, let alone order quality PPE in the first place. When will this government admit that Albertans deserve a fully independent, judge-led public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite can't take yes for an answer, because, in fact, there is going to be a judge-led, independent, third-party review. As well . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.
The Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well, we are not the only province grappling with unused PPE. Saskatchewan, for example, is also grappling with the same issue, as is British Columbia, as I dare say are all other provinces that worked with not only federal government but also provincial and municipal governments to make sure that we actually had the PPE required when it was needed the most.

Health Services Procurement Process (continued)

Member Ceci: The former AHS CEO fired by this UCP government says that she "was told that Doug Horner was unhappy about ASG services being 'capped'." Mr. Speaker, Doug Horner, a former Conservative Deputy Premier, is the Finance minister's relative, and he's a registered lobbyist for ASG. He's been helping Sam Mraiche and friends secure even more private surgical contracts. Did the Minister of Finance recuse himself of all decisions, cabinet discussions, budget choices when this government awarded Alberta Surgical Group contracts?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, Doug Horner is indeed a relative. I claim him most days. Not a bad guy, but I've never met with him on ASG or any of these, probably because as a former Finance minister he knows that it would have nothing to do with my file. We usually talk about the weather and family, Flames versus Oilers, a lot of things, but I've never been lobbied by Mr. Horner on this.

Member Ceci: Doug Horner is currently registered to lobby the Ministry of Finance on behalf of Sam Mraiche and ASG. As a lobbyist Doug arranges, quote, informal communications, presentations, written communications, phone calls, grassroots communications with the Ministry of Finance. To the minister again: in the interest of transparency please tell Albertans exactly what meetings perhaps your staff has had on behalf of ASG regarding the contracts at the centre of the corrupt care scandal and what future meetings are scheduled for your staff.

Mr. Horner: A pretty similar answer, Mr. Speaker, because it's a pretty similar question. Yeah. I'd say that I have never met with Mr. Horner, and to my understanding, neither has my department on anything regarding ASG or chartered surgical facilities because it

is not our space. He is a lobbyist for other things. I'm sure the department has met with him on those things, but to my awareness, nothing on this file . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Ceci: As the minister's family continues to lobby his ministry, his own deputy minister, the person responsible for helping to write the budget, Mr. Speaker, admits she was hearing rumours of kickbacks. On top of this, the minister has admitted to having gone to two hockey games on behalf of the businesses involved in the corrupt care scandal. With rumours of kickbacks and a lobbyist in the family, will the minister support our call for a judicial-led public inquiry, or will he continue to hide behind this sham?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I think that the members opposite should take yes for an answer. We already have appointed a judge from Manitoba to investigate and who will have access to anything and everything. But what I can say right now is that what I'm hearing from the opposition is the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, the worst Finance minister in the history of this province, calling into question the integrity of the Minister of Finance and the relationship with a relative. That is despicable, and the member opposite knows better. He's not a rookie in this Chamber.

Funding for Sexual Assault Centres

Ms Hayter: The Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton delivers crucial services to Albertans who have experienced sexual violence. This government has pulled \$1.8 million in funding, forcing SACE to turn away nearly 100 survivors who reached out for help. While the minister will point to future budget promises, survivors need help today, not theoretical dollars tomorrow that may never materialize. SACE CEO Mary Jane James said: it hurts my heart. Well, it hurts my heart, too, and all of our hearts to see survivors of sexual violence being turned away in their moment of greatest need. Will the minister stop hiding behind this one-time grant excuse and admit that this is a cut that harms Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. I value the work that sexual assault centres do throughout the entire province. They help women and children heal from horrific acts of sexual violence. That's why Budget 2025, if passed – and I never want to presume the will of the House – invests over \$88 million for the prevention of family and sexual violence, which includes \$15.3 million for sexual assault centres throughout the entire province. Every sexual assault centre here in the province is receiving an increase in their base operational funding. I know this is important to the member, and I look for her support in the upcoming budget vote.

Ms Hayter: Given that I'm talking about the one-time grant and given that the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton did exactly what this government asked them to do, reducing an 18-month wait-list down to just three months by hiring qualified professionals to meet the requirements of their grant, and now the reward from this government is yanking the funding away and given that the sexual assault centre was forced to lay off all these professionals, shutting down intake for adult counselling, child counselling, youth counselling, and therapeutic groups, can the minister explain to sexual assault survivors who no longer have anywhere to go why the UCP won't support them in their most important time of need?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Family Services.

Mr. Turton: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. The Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton receives nearly \$2.1 million in operational funding from the Ministry of Children and Family Services. This number has not decreased. All sexual assault centres across the province are receiving increases in their operational spending, and they have only received expansions of their funding over the last couple of years. We value the work that sexual assault centres do and that's why we have met the call that they have asked for in terms of increases to their base operational funding. We know this is making a difference. Women and children are being looked after, and I'm proud of our government's record in this area.

Ms Hayter: Given that I'm asking about the one-time grant and given that the government funding failures are spreading province-wide – for instance, Sendero Centre of Red Deer was promised increasing funding that never came, receiving just \$105,000 for a last-minute allocation – and given the increased pressure on the Saffron Centre as SACE has turned clients away and given that sexual assault centres across Alberta are desperately trying to keep their doors open while survivors are facing growing wait-lists, will this government step up and fulfill its commitment to sexual assault survivors or just watch as every centre in Alberta collapses one by one?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Turton: Yeah. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Again thank you to the member for that question. We are committed to meeting our mandate commitments of increasing funding for sexual assault centres by over \$10 million, and we've already taken huge steps into reaching that goal: \$1.5 million in additional funding last year, \$1.5 million in this year's budget. We were meeting the call and the ask from sexual assault centres throughout the entire province when they were wanting long-term, sustainable funding. We are doing that upon their request. That's why in Budget 2025 there are increases to help these valuable centres. Women and children are being looked after by our budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has a question to ask.

Wildfire Season Preparation

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last two wildfire seasons in Alberta have been some of the worst and the most challenging on record. While we've experienced our fair share of heartbreak, we've also witnessed Albertans' remarkable resilience of community spirit. Faced with tragedy, the province united to support affected communities. Albertans came from all corners of the province to help out displaced residents to combat fires. We saw this personally in Drayton Valley, Evansburg, Entwistle, and Jasper. We also saw the folks out in Valemont and Kamloops open up their doors to help the folks in Jasper. To the Minister of Forestry and Parks: could you share an update on our preparations for the 2025 wildfire season? What steps is the government taking to ensure that we're ready to respond to the challenges that may arise this year?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that important question. As the province enters the 2025 wildfire season, our government is focused on prevention,

mitigation, and readiness to respond. This year we are allocating a new historic high of \$160 million . . . [interjection]

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Loewen: . . . in base funding for wildfire personnel, equipment, training, and contracts for things like aircraft and night-vision helicopters. This also includes a \$50 million investment for the community fireguard program and nearly \$11 million for the FireSmart program. Through this renewed investment we are ensuring that we can take steps needed to protect our at-risk communities.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:12 by the Government House Leader.

The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the response. Given that it's clear that prevention, mitigation, and readiness are required or key to this and given that the important part of the prevention efforts is stopping wildfires before they start and given further that, as we know, human-caused wildfires account for most of the fires that we see each season, could the same minister tell the Assembly what steps the government has taken to proactively prevent human-caused wildfires?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct. The key part of prevention efforts is stopping wildfires before they start. Last year the province saw a significant decrease in human-caused wildfires. In 2024 there were 284 wildfires caused by residential and recreational fires. That's a nearly 30 per cent drop from 399 human-caused fires that we saw in 2022. It is more important than ever to continue building on that progress to further reduce the risk of future wildfires, which is why we are renewing our commitment to public awareness campaigns on safe practices while also enforcing fire bans when necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister for the response. Given that as we transition to the warmer months, the shoulder season here, and we go into spring, which is also fire season, it's crucial that we understand the ongoing risks that we face regarding wildfires. Given the vast remote areas of Alberta's forested landscapes, detecting wildfires as early as possible is crucial. Further, given that catching a fire in its early stages can mean the difference between a manageable situation and a full-scale disaster, can the minister expand on how our government is ensuring there is technology and systems in place to detect and respond to wildfires earlier, especially in these remote and hard-to-reach areas?

Mr. Schmidt: Eyes on the chair. Through the chair. Through the chair.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar wanted to be the Speaker, he could have run for it.

The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Ensuring we're up to date on cutting-edge technology is a key part to addressing wildfire challenges. That is why we're investing nearly \$1 million over the next three years into upgrading our weather monitoring satellite system to enhance our ability to detect fires early, especially

in remote areas. This year Alberta Wildfire is also launching a pilot project using hoist-equipped helicopters. These helicopters will enable rapid deployment of crews to remote, hard-to-reach areas and provide critical support for emergency evacuations if needed.

Thank you.

Health Services Procurement Process

(continued)

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, the corrupt care scandal keeps getting worse. The government fired the health system CEO, then the board. Then explosive allegations of sweetheart deals, kickbacks, and cover-ups orchestrated by the offices of the Premier and the Minister of Health: all allegations suggest substantial costs to Alberta taxpayers while diverting a money river to the Premier's friends and insiders. Now the RCMP is investigating. Can the minister tell Albertans what document protection orders she has made to ensure documents are preserved for the RCMP and for a future transparent public judicial inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question from the hon. member. We've made it absolutely clear that we would co-operate with the RCMP in that investigation. We will do everything required to make sure that the RCMP has the documents and materials that it needs to complete its investigation. As we've said with the investigation involving the Auditor General, as we've said with the investigation involving former retired Manitoba Chief Justice Wyant, we will continue to work with all of the investigative bodies looking into this because we want to get to the bottom of it as well.

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, given that the government has tried to put a lid on a scandal by gagging employees who may know the truth and given that that won't work even though the minister has admitted that he's not protecting documents at all and given that the cover-ups will fail, has the minister made it clear to their staff that failure to co-operate with the RCMP or shredding and destroying documents that may prove valuable in a criminal investigation is in and of itself a crime? Does he think that anybody involved in the cover-up won't roll over once law enforcement starts squeezing?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I'll make it absolutely clear to that member, who obviously wasn't listening to my first answer. We are going to co-operate with the RCMP in its investigation. We have not made any direction to shred any documents, hide them, or anything else as alleged. That's a ridiculous notion. That's a ridiculous allegation, and we're not going to entertain it. We are working with the RCMP. We will co-operate with them. We will make sure that they have everything that they need to conduct their investigation, and we'll do it with integrity and accountability. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Kayande: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister has just admitted he has not ordered the protection of documents, given that obstructing justice is a serious crime punishable by up to 10 years in prison and given that gag orders placed on the government and agency employees by the minister have no effect in the face of an RCMP investigation and given that an RCMP investigation doesn't replace a public inquiry, can the minister confirm that she will bring the full weight of her office upon the neck of anybody who is

accused of obstructing justice, that there will be no home for anybody who is caught destroying documents, ordering document destruction, or lying to the police?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, that performance deserves an Oscar. It's as ridiculous as it was. A standing ovation. Absolute nonsense once again.

Every single government ministry has been directed to comply with any and all investigations. We will work with all of the investigative bodies to provide all the materials necessary. We will provide full transparency and co-operation. Once again, Mr. Speaker, we will do everything necessary to get to the bottom of this.

AI Data Centre Project Approvals

Member Arcand-Paul: Albertans are wondering. In light of the taxpayer-funded trips of cocktail parties and speaking tours, the Premier's good friend Kevin O'Leary was able to leverage his own backroom deal. He has sowed so much doubt in our independent legal and regulatory processes that Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation raised red flags about consultation with the proposed wonder valley AI data centre. Was the Minister of Indigenous Relations pressured by the Premier to fast-track her Mar-a-Lago roomie's project so that he skipped the obligations of consultation?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear to everyone who's listening that we are open for business as a province. We welcome multibillion-dollar projects in the AI data centre space. It is true that Kevin O'Leary is interested in building the world's largest data centre in Alberta, but we've been perfectly clear. We have a process. We have a regulatory framework. It's one of the best in the country. We will not cut corners, we will not do anybody any favours, and we will make sure that everyone follows the same rules and the same process. That same goes for Kevin O'Leary and his team. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that Alberta's AI data centre strategy is silent on consultation being required for these projects and further given that the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation issued in mid-January, stating that no consultation had been completed after O'Leary made his pronouncements on Fox News, and given that according to that minister's own opinion piece in the *Sherwood Park News*, which I tabled in this House, he stated that his concierge staff has already helped O'Leary Ventures, to the minister that just answered, Technology and Innovation: should Albertans be concerned about potential corruption with this deal, just as Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation warned about? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

2:20

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, these allegations are ridiculous. The fact is Alberta is open for business, and the fact is, yes, Tech and Innovation has established . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. One thing I noticed is that the minister listened to the question. It's reasonable, despite what some people might think, that the Speaker can hear the answer.

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, these allegations from the opposition are ridiculous. The fact is, yes, we are open for business as a province, and that means that, yes, sometimes we set up concierge teams to work with private-sector project proponents to help them

navigate the regulatory framework. But the fact is that we will follow that regulatory framework to the letter. The fact is that everyone is going to follow the same rules. Everyone is going to follow the rules and do things the right way, and that includes consultation, so the members opposite have nothing to be . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Arcand-Paul: Given that Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation wasn't given that opportunity to also receive consultation but also given that the Premier is planning on using taxpayer dollars to fly to Florida to fund raise for the far-right propaganda machine PragerU at \$25,000 a table and given that on a previous taxpayer trip the Premier was at Mar-a-Lago with Kevin O'Leary and further given that he has indicated a fait accompli to Fox News in December of 2024 for natural gas among other approvals, to the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: can you assure Albertans that no one cut backroom deals with Kevin O'Leary?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, there have been no backroom deals, there are no kickbacks, and there is no subsidizing of these projects. We have been perfectly clear that Alberta is the best place in Canada and one of the best in North America to make these types of investments. We will not subsidize it. We will not give a tax credit because – you know what? – nobody needs that from us. What we will give them is the gift of time by helping them to navigate our regulatory framework in an efficient manner, and that is enough for anybody to want to invest in Alberta. There's Kevin O'Leary, and there are a dozen others just like him who are eager to do business in Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

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

Electric Power Prices

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a result of the federal Liberal-NDP coalition's inflationary spending, Albertans are struggling to pay their bills. This is directly impacting my constituents in Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul and their utilities. I have had many constituents come to my office over the last two years with heartbreaking stories about financial choices that they've had to make. To the Minister of Affordability and Utilities: please share some of the initiatives that your office and the government have taken to address the high utility prices, specifically for electricity delivery.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for your advocacy. We've taken a tremendous amount of action to lower electricity bills, including introducing the rate of last resort, which has helped lower the default rate of electricity by 63 per cent from its peak. We've stabilized and lowered access fees through legislation. This spring I'll be bringing forward further legislative changes to support the modernization of our electricity system and, with continuing work, manage the future cost of transmission and distribution through efficiency and optimization. We've done a lot of work fixing the mess left behind by the NDP, and we continue to work to serve Albertans.

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

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that a major concern that I've heard from my constituents

during my time as an MLA is the federal Liberal-NDP carbon tax, that was first introduced by this NDP government, and given that the NDP supports Ottawa's reckless clean energy regulations, that will negatively impact our electricity system, will the same minister please explain the harmful effects these regulations will have and why our government is standing against these harmful regulations? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to that member for that great question. Last week Alberta's Electric System Operator put forward an analysis on Ottawa's disastrous clean electricity regulations, confirming what we've already been knowing and we've already been fighting against, that these regulations will make our electricity grid up to 100 times less reliable, increase electricity prices by at least 35 per cent, and it will fail to deliver any meaningful emissions reduction. Unlike the NDP and their federal counterparts, we will not be putting our families at risk during the coldest times of the year, nor the hottest days of summer. We will continue to stand up against these unconstitutional regulations, fighting on behalf of Albertans and providing them the services and protections that they need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that utilities are just one of many financial pressures Albertans have faced and given that one of my constituents, a senior on a fixed income who has never relied on social assistance, now needs to utilize provincial programs just to keep her bills paid, could the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services please share what programs are available to support vulnerable Albertans who are in need of financial assistance?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have amongst the highest seniors' benefit in the country. We're investing almost \$600 million this year in direct senior grants and senior supports, a larger budget than the vast majority of ministries at this table, and of course the big item: we're investing \$3.8 billion directly in continuing care supports to be able to make sure that we help our elders as they go through that later stage of life inside the province. That is a larger number than every ministry but three at this bench, which shows the importance that we put on supporting our elders in our province.

Health Services Procurement Process (continued)

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, considering the recent revelations surrounding the corrupt care scandal and the 'sham investigation,' that seems will be about as thorough as a toddler's bedtime story, it's about time Albertans get a judicially led public inquiry from this government. After all, if we're going to uncover the truth, shouldn't it be done by someone who doesn't have a vested interest in keeping the skeletons firmly in the closet? The Premier's dog-and-pony show of a so-called investigation has all the credibility of a magic eight ball. To the Minister of Justice: how many more layers of this onion are going to be peeled back before Albertans get answers, and who's going to do the peeling if . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I don't know how much more independent you can get than a former judge of the provincial court of Manitoba. Justice Wyant will operate independent of government. He will lead an investigation that has nothing to do with government. He will continue to provide for his investigations. He will deliver an interim report and then a final report on June 30, 2025, that will appear on alberta.ca for that member and all Albertans to see and read.

Member Loyola: Given that transparency is the goal, why does it seem like this government has nailed the curtains shut? Given that the public, who pays for the health care system, have the right to know if their taxpayer dollars are being misspent, how many more red flags need to wave before this government will admit that this isn't just a storm in a teacup but a full-blown hurricane of mismanagement and potential malfeasance? When will the UCP call for the judicially led public inquiry?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, we have worked with the Auditor General in an independent investigation. We have worked with the RCMP in their independent investigation. There is a judicial-led independent investigation conducted by the former Chief Justice of the provincial court of Manitoba. That is as independent as it gets. We're looking forward to seeing the results. Those will be posted on alberta.ca on June 30, 2025. We all look forward to reading those findings.

Member Loyola: Given that this government, like their MAGA friends south of the border, wants to transform the universal health care system into big business, benefiting their party insiders and friends, and given the corrupt procurement practices along with kickbacks to UCP insiders and the Premier's own chief of staff, that are allegedly implicated, I ask: when will the government stop treating the corrupt care scandal like a PR problem to be managed and start treating it like the serious breach of public trust that it is? If they truly have nothing to hide, why not throw open the doors to a full judicial public inquiry and let the chips . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, from the very first day that the allegations were made, this government has treated this matter incredibly seriously. There are not one, not two, but three independent investigations happening right now. This government has committed to co-operating with all three of those investigations. We look forward to the findings. We look forward to the results, and they will be published for all Albertans to see. [interjections]

2:30

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Camrose has a question to ask.

Red Tape Reduction

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has been recognized by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business for three years running as the leading jurisdiction in Canada for red tape reduction. Since 2019 this government has successfully implemented over 700 high impact red tape reduction initiatives, amounting to a savings of \$2.9 billion for Albertans. But the work is far from over, which is why we recently announced the automatic yes framework. To the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction: could you explain this new framework and how it will deliver real, tangible benefits to hard-working Albertans? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, if you liked red tape reduction, you're going to love automatic yes.

An Hon. Member: Automatic yes to a public inquiry.

Mr. Nally: We're taking all the permits in this province and we're going to put them into one of three categories. The first two are code of practice and permit by rule.

Mr. Sabir: Automatic yes to corruption, bloated contracts, kickbacks.

Mr. Loewen: Point of order.

Mr. Nally: Now, these are going to be for routine low-risk permits, and guess what? We're getting rid of the permit; it's gone.

Mr. Sabir: What about kickbacks?

Mr. Nally: We're going to focus on the more complex approvals . . .

Mr. Schmidt: How about public inquiries?

Mr. Nally: . . . which is the shot clock. Every permit will have a different time frame . . .

Mr. Schmidt: What's the time frame for public inquiries?

Mr. Nally: . . . and if the proponent has not heard "yes" or "no" in the appropriate time frame, then it's deemed approved. [interjections]

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

A point of order is noted by the hon. the Minister of Forestry and Parks at 2:30, and then again at 2:31 by the Government House Leader.

The hon. Member for Camrose is the only one with the call.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans expect their government to enforce tough standards to protect them and their businesses and given that some critics wrongly claim that the automatic yes framework weakens oversight despite its clear authority to deny permits when needed and further given that since 2023 permit wait times in our province have decreased by nearly 20 per cent, with some reduced by 30 days or more, could the same minister explain how this new framework will build upon this progress while keeping Albertans secure and our regulations strong?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I've got four kids. I love clean air, clean water, and I want my kids and grandchildren to enjoy that as well. I can tell you this process does not preclude the regulator from saying no. If there's an environmental issue, if there's a health and safety issue, they can absolutely say no, but if the answer is going to be yes, then we don't need to take three years to do it. Let's tell the proponent it's approved, let's get them investing in our province, and let's create those mortgage-paying jobs for Albertans. That's what this is about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that long wait times for permit approvals hold back businesses, builders, entrepreneurs, and others and given that uncertain times for permit approvals are a risk factor for investors, causing them to look elsewhere to put their money, and further given that the automatic yes tool employs a shot clock approach to provide greater certainty for

permit applications, could the minister share a concrete example of how the shot clock approach to permitting will unleash development and entrepreneurs in places like the Camrose constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This actually was tried by the Alberta Utilities Commission. It used to take us three months in this province to approve a 10 megawatt generator. What the AUC did is that they got rid of the permit, they took it away, they replaced it with a checklist, and now that checklist is allowing these 10 megawatts or less generators to get approved in under six days. This is great news for the economy, and it's great news for Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Health Services Procurement Process

(continued)

Ms Wright: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's parents are watching as their child's EAs, custodians, and school admin assistants remain on strike for weeks, months, all while knowing this is a UCP government increasingly beset by scandal, chaos, and corruption. They're also hearing troubling allegations that public funds are being funnelled into contracts that benefit their wealthy insiders instead of students and workers who need the most support. Can the minister explain why this government continues to justify hundreds of millions of dollars for bloated private surgery contracts while failing to prioritize fair wages for these essential . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad we got a question on bargaining, because when I rack my brain and I think about things that the NDP did during their time that are positive and still remain, I have a hard time thinking of many, but one that does come to mind is the public sector bargaining and co-ordination office. That was brought in under the NDP and ensures that Alberta stays at market. We're at the table with many unions right now. We've seen a lot of wage escalation, especially since post-COVID, and what helps me sleep at night when I see these large numbers is knowing that we're going to be at market. We've seen a lot of wage escalation around us. I know that's where we'll land with everyone.

Ms Wright: Given that a constituent, Rebecca, told me that she is deeply concerned about this alleged misuse of funds and the corruption that this represents and that access to health care is already difficult with long wait times for hospitals and few family doctors accepting patients and she says that the Premier and Health minister cannot be trusted and given that a constituent, Janis, says she finds the Premier's answers, quote, laughable at best and, frankly, embarrassing and given that I know members in this House have also received hundreds if not thousands of e-mails from constituents, Mr. Speaker, why is the Premier refusing to listen?

Mr. Horner: Like I said, Mr. Speaker, we will always operate in good-faith bargaining. Right now we assist the school divisions in any conversations that they're having with CUPE. We're not at the table with them, but we will assist and we will make sure that we have fair deals. No one wants recruitment and retention challenges in an economy, in a province that's growing as fast as ours. We need to ensure that we're at market, maybe even top of market but not out of market, or where do you land? You land in a place like the NDP did, where they offered zeros for four years because we were outliers. That's not a place where Alberta can be.

Ms Wright: Given that my constituents know this scandal shows this government is not focused on public services Albertans deserve like health care and education and given that my constituents and Albertans understand that corrupt care is about alleged political interference, given that these allegations of political interference may lead to the very heart of this government and given that the only way to truth is to convene a public inquiry through the Public Inquiries Act – we'll try again, Mr. Speaker – when can Albertans expect the announcement to be made?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, that hon. member must have missed something because I've said it repeatedly, that there are three independent investigations happening right now, including one being led by the former provincial Chief Justice of Manitoba. That is an independent investigation taking place that will continue to take place with the results being posted online for that member, all opposition members, and all Albertans to read on June 30, 2025.

Employment Services for Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: For years we've highlighted the massive barriers to employment for disabled Albertans. We're a province of almost 5 million people, and we do not have accessibility legislation, and this UCP government has not opened any new pathways to meaningful employment for disabled Albertans. Without a legislated accessibility framework, unemployment rates will not change. Now, in an effort to cut AISH by reducing the number of people actually on AISH, they introduced an AISH employment program they call ADAP. My question is simple. To the minister: who did you consult in creating ADAP?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, in Budget 2025 we're doubling employment supports for those who face disabilities and for employers, the largest investment in this area. The NDP never went anywhere near that. We consulted very far when it came to ADAP's decision, round-tables with groups across the province, and we're going to continue to do as we do it. One of the biggest was the disability advocate of the province, who, unfortunately, the NDP have been attacking, a man who faces disabilities himself and has defended the disability community. Shame on that member for her behaviour.

Ms Renaud: Given that this nonindependent disability advocate looked more like a hostage at the presser and given that the UCP government has announced massive structural changes to AISH, a program worth \$1.6 billion, without substantial information or consultation and given that we already know this government has no problem entering into all kinds of shady sole-sourced contracts that defy explanation, to the minister: what strategies have you put in place to assure Albertans that your massive overhaul of AISH will not enrich your friends and insiders through procurement while harming disabled people?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:39 by the Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, there is not an overhaul of the AISH program taking place. We continue with our AISH program, the highest payments in the country, and we're going to continue to do that right here in Alberta. What we are not going to do is what that member did when she was in government with the NDP, which is take people that are facing disabilities and tell them that they can't have jobs, take away their money when they have jobs, imprison them in a program that did not allow them to succeed. Those inside

AISH have asked us to fix that, and this government is going to do it despite what the NDP say.

2:40

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Renaud: Given that this minister should be ashamed of himself for gloating about poverty wages that are AISH . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Renaud: It's like \$10 an hour for a full-time job. Now, they're looking to reduce the number of people on AISH by creating a pathway to AISH employment they call ADAP, but they're not telling people what they're doing. There are over 10,000 people that currently work sporadically on AISH, and they're afraid because this minister refuses to be transparent about what's going on. What is going on? We know you didn't consult. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

I have noted a point of order by the hon. the Government House Leader at 2:40.

I also noticed a bit of tit-for-tat amongst the members. Perhaps we could try to keep this on the rails for the last question at the end of QP.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the only reason why anybody on AISH is scared is because of the NDP Official Opposition fearmongering each and every day on this important issue. We're going to continue with our AISH program. We're going to continue to make sure that it is the highest paid in the country. But what we are not going to do is do what the NDP did: ignore people on AISH, ignore people with disabilities and tell them that they cannot work and claw back their money and imprison them inside their homes, not allowed to participate in the workforce. We heard them loud and clear. We're going to fix the NDP's mess when it comes to this area.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. We will continue with the remainder of the daily Routine immediately.

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, we were at tablings, and I believe the hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington had one.

Ms Chapman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of an e-mail from Alberta mom Abbie. She says that she's "reaching out today to add [her] voice to a growing cry for the government to come to the table in good faith and help end the work stoppages" of educational support workers.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you. I rise to table five copies of an article in which the Member for Taber-Warner describes a former CEO of AHS as a very excellent, high-performing, solid person and stated: "It doesn't look good when the CEO was fired and then the board . . . was fired shortly thereafter. We've got some caucus meetings [coming soon]. I will try to get some more information." I hope we are successful. I look forward to the report from his personal inquiry.

The Speaker: I am sure all members look forward to reading it. That is the purpose of the tabling, so they can do so.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of the CTV News article from yesterday quoting the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton's CEO, Mary Jane James: this is the worst time in my 18-year history, seeing our staff crying with our clients, crying for our clients.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five requisite copies of an e-mail from a constituent from Calgary who's writing to express her shock and disgust at the Alberta government's handling of the green line. This is representative of many e-mails that I've received.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. McIver, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Government Organization Act Alberta Boilers Safety Association annual report 2024.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order, and at 1:56 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Schow: I did, Mr. Speaker. Without the benefit of the Blues I'd be paraphrasing the question from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), particularly "makes allegations against another Member; imputes false or unavowed motives." In this instance it appeared that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was suggesting that the Minister of Health was taking kickbacks. That is certainly unparliamentary, and I think that that member should refrain from using language like that in the future. I think it is a point of order.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also do not have the benefit of the Blues. I believe that the Government House Leader is incorrect, though. At that time the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was talking about the ongoing corrupt care scandal that has had a great deal of media coverage. In fact, I believe he even referenced reading in the newspaper about kickbacks, about the issues. Over the past five days that we have been in session, this has been a predominant topic for this Legislature, and I suggest it will continue to be until this government calls a real public inquiry. I believe it's a matter of debate and will continue to be a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Are there other submissions?

I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule. Hon. members, at 1:56 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said, "Well, Mr. Speaker, I've read some articles in the newspaper that apparently the minister is getting kickbacks from all these AHS deals." I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has lots to say, both from a seated position and from a standing position, one of which is appropriate, the other much less so, with respect to his primary concerns around the issue of the day. I also know that just because you've read something somewhere doesn't mean that

you can make an accusation here inside the Assembly directly about a minister doing something untoward, breaking the law, getting a kickback, being corrupt.

Speaker Kowalski had much to say about not doing indirectly what you can't do directly. He also had much to say about members making innuendo about what has taken place. I think that very clearly and intentionally that's what we saw here today. At other times during the afternoon I've heard that member make a number of comments off the record that perhaps are very close to unparliamentary or may quite well be. In light of the overall conduct, I am going to ask the member to apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Schmidt: I withdraw the comment, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at point of order 2, which is at 1:58. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning raised the point of order.

I will make one additional comment with respect to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's withdrawal. I accept that. The Government House Leader and the Official Opposition House Leader have both been requested to have a meeting in my office in the early days of next week with respect to the ongoing deterioration of apologies and members of the Assembly perhaps trying to be too cute by half and that creating some ongoing disorder. I look forward to that discussion, that perhaps we can come to a conclusion collectively that will deal with this problem more broadly.

As I was saying, at 1:58, I believe, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning rose on a point of order. I believe the Opposition House Leader is rising.

Point of Order Referring to a Member by Name

Ms Gray: Yes. Thank you. At that time, under 23(h), (i), and (j), during raucous debate in the House the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services was heckling the Official Opposition but could be clearly heard to say: you should apologize, David. Now, that type of comment directed to a member is a point of order, particularly in light of the practices of the House that we do not refer to members by their name, both by practice, previous ruling, in *House of Commons* chapter 13, page 619. I believe this is a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, if I did in fact use a member's name, it's certainly unparliamentary. I'm happy to withdraw that.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at point of order 3, 2:12, for which the hon. Government House Leader subsequently provided me notice of a withdrawal.

That brings us to the hon. minister of Treasury Board – hey, look, you got a promotion. The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks rose at 2:30 on a point of order.

2:50

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. At the timed noted, the hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks rose on a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). The member noted a point of order coming from the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. At the time the member there said, "Tell the truth" while the hon. Minister of Justice was speaking. This particular language suggests that the hon. Minister of Justice is not telling the truth or would be lying. That, of course,

is unparliamentary. This has been ruled out of order on a number of occasions.

In particular, Speaker Wanner cautioned all members against heckling “tell the truth,” on June 2, 2016. In particular, the hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks would know on a personal level that this is, in fact, a point of order as on March 23, 2017, April 3, 2017, November 16, 2017, and May 30, 2017, he himself was called on the exact same point of order.

Mr. Speaker, I think that there is precedence for this. Apology and withdrawal I think would be acceptable for the Chamber and to refrain from using such language in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton–City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, they say that imitation is the highest form of flattery, but apology is the highest form of integrity. I will apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

That brings us to 3:39 and 3:40, I believe, when the hon. the Official Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Ms Gray: Withdrawn.

The Speaker: I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Perhaps at 2:40, the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: I also withdraw mine.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, you did miss the point of order at 2:31, 2:33.

The Speaker: You’re a hundred per cent correct.

I consider the matter at 2:40 dealt with and concluded, that you’ve withdrawn.

Please proceed to the last point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing the offsetting penalties. Repeat third down.

At the time noted, the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction was answering a question and through his answer talking about improved approval rates and times for government approval processes. The Member for Calgary–Bhullar–McCall and the Member for Edmonton–Gold Bar were clearly shouting. When the member was talking about automatic approvals, they would say: automatic corruption, automatic kickbacks.

Mr. Speaker, this was noted twice. I think that this language, as you’ve noted already today, talking about innuendo and insinuating that the minister himself would be involved in practices involving kickbacks and corruption, is totally inappropriate. The members opposite know that.

I believe this is a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). Without the benefit of the Blues, I understand that this may be difficult if you didn’t hear it yourself or it didn’t get recorded, but I think it’s important to note.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Unless the Government House Leader is claiming that the minister himself is doing the approvals and has been the one who is adjusting those approval rates, then heckling “What about kickbacks?” certainly would not be something we can associate directly to the minister. I think that given what is happening in our Chamber in light of the corrupt care scandal, in light of the RCMP investigation, in light of the Auditor General’s investigation, in light of the statement of claim from the fired AHS CEO, it was a good heckle. It was short, it was witty, it was on topic, and it was directed at the government. I do not believe this is a point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule. Are there any other submissions?

The minister of red tape reduction was saying, “Mr. Speaker, if you liked red tape reduction, you’re going to love automatic yes,” and an hon. member said, “Automatic yes to a public inquiry.” The minister continued and said, “The first two are code of practice and permit by rule.” The Member for Calgary–Bhullar–McCall said, “Automatic yes to corruption, bloated contracts, kickbacks.” He continued. He then went on to say, “What about kickbacks?” The hon. Member for Edmonton–Gold Bar said, “How about public inquiries?” and “What’s the time frame for public inquiries?”

I will say this, that you can’t out-heckle an old heckler. “Automatic yes to corruption” certainly gets very close to the line of a point of order. It implies that minister may be the one responsible for corruption. But in light of our co-operation here this afternoon on points of order, in light of the fact that I do appreciate appropriate levels of discourse in the Assembly, while we haven’t necessarily seen that at its peak over the last couple of days, I would say that this is much more friendly banter between caucuses of the Assembly.

I won’t consider this matter a point of order, but I do provide a caution to the member that you can’t imply that a minister or ministers are responsible for corruption. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded. It’s not a point of order.

Hon. members, that brings us to adjournment. Prior to doing so, it’s important that we note that the legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon, this evening, and tomorrow morning for the consideration of main estimates. This afternoon Alberta’s Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Trade in the Grassland Room, and Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Health in the Rocky Mountain Room. This evening the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs in the Rocky Mountain Room. Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Environment and Protected Areas in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services in the Grassland Room.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) and the 2025-2026 main estimates schedule the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:57 p.m.]

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