Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 10, 2026

Day 29

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 31st Legislature
Second Session

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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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Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
de Jonge, Chantelle, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
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Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
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Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP), Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Hon. Peter F., ECA, Airdrie-Cochrane (PTP)
Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Hayter, Julia K.U., Calgary-Edgemont (NDP)
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Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Petrovic, Chelsae, Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
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Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
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Wright, Peggy K., Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC), Deputy Government Whip
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:
United Conservative: 47 New Democrat: 38 Progressive Tory: 1 Independent: 1

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m. **Tuesday, March 10, 2026**

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, through you, I would like to introduce grade 6 students, parents, and teachers from C.W. Perry school in Airdrie. Please rise and receive the warm reception of the Legislature.

Mr. Dach: I'm pleased to rise to you and through you to introduce students, staff, and teachers from the wonderful C.W. Perry school . . .

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. Dach: Sorry. That was Grandview Heights school in Edmonton-Riverview. C.W. Perry is also welcome here. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so honoured today to introduce to you and through you very good friends of mine Ken Alook and Clayton Auger of Bigstone Cree Nation and A.J. Starlight of Tsuut'ina Nation. They are here today to discuss the importance of providing mental health and addiction supports for Indigenous communities. I ask you now to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce through you and to everybody in the Assembly Nicole Smith and Butch Smith from Rimbey, Alberta. They have a bison farm. It's an honour to have you. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Technology and Innovation.

Mr. Glubish: Sorry. He's not here today.

The Speaker: Okay.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and to all the members of the Assembly, from the Heart and Stroke Foundation: Jennifer Michaud, Samantha Semper, Dr. Jonathan Duff, Dr. Allan de Caen, Eric McVeigh, Patrick Sherback, Laverne Mok, Kim Ruether, and Sarah Logan. I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, in the gallery today we have Dana Severson and representatives of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce as well as representatives from local chambers in St. Albert, Okotoks, Airdrie, High River, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Fort McMurray, Leduc and Nisku, southeast Alberta, and Peace River. Also in the gallery are officials from the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce. Thank you for all the great work you do promoting local businesses in our communities. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Yes. Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a tireless advocate for those with disabilities and on AISH support, Tarra Carlson. I invite her to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Brent and Susan Bibby along with Nina Wright, all long-term influencers in the Grande Prairie area. I ask you to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Riverview, did you have an announcement? No? Okay.

Are there any other announcements? Yes. Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very good friend of mine from Airdrie, who also happens to be one of our most beloved grade 6 teachers in Airdrie, Mr. Brian Jackson. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, Evanraj Mann, an inspiring 80-year-old Albertan whose generosity, determination, and empathy rallied community support and raised funds for those in need at Alberta children's hospital. His leadership is a powerful reminder of the capability and bright future of our youth. I ask that he rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to introduce Patrick Sherback, who's in the gallery today, a constituent of Edmonton-Glenora. Today he's here advocating for AEDs in every single school. It costs about $2,500 per school. We only need about 2,000 to cover all of Alberta. Thank you, Patrick, for your advocacy.

The Speaker: Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you so very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I want to introduce to you Wendy Bosch, Lori Pollock, Jason Howrish, all members of our Grande Prairie Chamber. I would please ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly another good friend of mine from Airdrie who also happens to be the executive director of

the Airdrie chamber, Marilyne Aalhus. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you Lisa Dressler from the Medicine Hat chamber of commerce and my dear friend Aaron Fleming as well. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, you see the conundrum we're in. I have a constituent here from the chamber, Mr. Layne Gardner, who's not only a small-business owner but a father and a community builder. I want everyone to offer the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Conundrum solved because we're out of time.

Members' Statements

International Women's Day

Ms Hayter: Happy International Women's Day. We celebrate the achievements, leadership, resilience, brilliance, and strength that women demonstrate every day. We must confront the challenges that continue to shape women's lives and their choices. Every day, not just today, we must affirm our shared responsibility to advance equality and diverse representation. As leaders entrusted with serving this province we must not just simply acknowledge barriers but actively dismantle them, champion equality, and encourage others to do better.

Alberta still struggles with a persistent gender-based wage gap, the largest one in Canada. In this province women earn 82 cents for every dollar earned by men. At a time when Albertans are already navigating an affordability crisis, these disparities force real and difficult choices about housing, food, education, child care, and long-term stability.

Closing the wage gap is not only a social responsibility, but it's also an economic priority. Fair wages strengthen families, grow communities, and fuel prosperity across the entire province. Improving access to informed and timely affordable health care is essential if women want to have autonomy in every aspect of their life. Alberta is a land of opportunity and possibility where everyone with a dream should be welcomed, supported, and empowered to succeed. Young girls in this province must be free to discover who they are and reach their full potential.

I am proud to stand on this side of the House where we work to advance the rights of women to expand choice and opportunity rather than restrict them and commit ourselves to lifting each other up. When I look at our caucus, I see diversity, determination, inspiration, and a shared commitment to do better. It is our intention to make this province better than how we found it: stronger, fairer, safer, and more inclusive. We will make it better together.

The Speaker: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Cardiac Care in Southern Alberta

Mr. Wright: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year more than 300 acute-care in-patients from southern Alberta must be transferred to Calgary to access cardiac intervention services, and approximately one thousand outpatients are required to travel to Calgary for the same care.

1:40

For patients and families in southern Alberta that means added stress during what is already a difficult health journey. This is why we are taking action, and I am excited for Budget 2026 to strengthen cardiac and critical care in southern Alberta and ensure more Albertans receive specialized care closer to home. If passed, Budget 2026 will invest $59 million over the next three years to advance the south zone cardiac and intensive care expansion project. This investment moves the projects into the next phase, advancing detailed planning and early construction.

A key component of this project is the addition of a new cardiac catheterization lab in Chinook regional hospital in Lethbridge. This facility will improve access to life-saving cardiac care and strengthen the region's ability to treat complex conditions. Once operational, the lab is expected to serve 1,500 to 1,700 patients per year. This project is also expanding critical care capacity across southern Alberta. It is expected to bring the total number of critical care beds to 54 at the Chinook regional hospital and 18 at the Medicine Hat regional hospital.

Existing intensive care and cardiac units in both hospitals will be renovated and incorporated into a new innovative acute-care bed model that allows care teams to respond more efficiently to patients with varying levels of medical needs. In addition the project will enhance diagnostic capacities at both hospitals by expanding access to cardiac imaging, CT, and MRI services closer to home. Mr. Speaker, by strengthening cardiac care, expanding critical care capacities, we are moving health forward right here in Alberta with care at the right place, at the right time.

Alberta Separatism and First Nation Treaty Rights

Ms Pancholi: Twelve days ago the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs unanimously passed a vote of nonconfidence in the UCP government. Why? Because the UCP is supporting a separatism petition that a court has determined contravenes treaty rights. Yesterday those same chiefs were treated with disrespect by the UCP government when their concerns were brought to this House at the chiefs' request by the Official Opposition.

What was remarkable is that when responding to questions about this vote of nonconfidence by the chiefs, there were two words the Premier didn't say once. No, it wasn't Justin Trudeau. Of course she brought him up. No, the two words the Premier could not bring herself to say were "treaty rights." With all those chiefs in the Assembly, the Premier had the chance to assert her commitment to uphold the treaty rights that all Albertans are bound by, to acknowledge the chiefs' statement of nonconfidence in her government and pledge how she will earn back their confidence.

Instead, as Chief Allan Adam of Athabasca Chipewyan Nation said to the media afterwards: she didn't even have the courtesy to look up at the chiefs. As Chief Kelsey Jacko of Cold Lake said: she keeps saying that we have a great relationship, but how do you have a great relationship with someone who doesn't listen? Then the Government House Leader stood in front of those chiefs and called their presence in this House, the people's House, a political stunt. Chief Sunshine of Sturgeon Lake said: "We've just witnessed what the UCP really think of First Nations. When they minimize First Nations and call this nonconfidence vote by the Alberta chiefs a stunt by the NDP, I take that personally and every treaty person all across this land should take notice of what's happening today."

What's happening is a Premier who won't acknowledge treaty rights. What's happening is a UCP government who treats the chiefs of Alberta with disdain. What's happening is a separatist

government that needs to learn one thing when it comes to the First Nations of this land: show some respect.

Fossil Fuel Appreciation Day

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, fossil fuels are important to Alberta's economy. This is no secret. For generations these resources have been a pillar of our province's prosperity, supporting families, communities, and industries across Alberta. A fossil fuel appreciation day would be a thoughtful way to acknowledge the tremendous impact that these resources have had on the development of modern society and on the growth of our province.

Oil, coal, and natural gas have powered not only Alberta but the global economy for well over a century. Much of the infrastructure, technology, and economic strength we rely on today was built and sustained by the reliable energy provided by these resources. From heating homes to fuelling transportation, and from supporting manufacturing to enabling innovation, fossil fuels have played a foundational role in shaping the world we live in.

Mr. Speaker, a day to recognize these abundant energy resources would also serve to highlight the countless workers whose dedication and expertise have kept essential systems running efficiently and safely. Their hard work keeps our hospitals supplied with power, keeps our homes warm through the cold winters, and ensures that industries across Alberta continue to thrive. A fossil fuel appreciation day would also encourage informed, constructive dialogue about energy in our province. By better understanding the historical impact of fossil fuels, we can more effectively discuss the challenges of meeting future energy demands and opportunities that lie ahead. This day could also provide an important chance for schools, industry partners, and community organizations to educate Albertans about how our energy system works, why that matters, and how they would be operated to perform at their best.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, such a day would allow Albertans to honour the past, acknowledge the present, and thoughtfully plan for the future of energy in our province.

Budget 2026

Member Eremenko: This past Saturday I cohosted a budget town hall with my colleague from Calgary-Elbow, and I was so thankful to everyone who came to ask questions and share their comments and concerns. Attendees had one question on top of their mind. Where, under this UCP government, has all the money gone? How has government spent so much and have so little to show for it? What's worse is that where cuts were made, they were made on the backs of the poor, the disabled, and the elderly. They're cutting $44 million by removing people from income support. They're cutting $23 million by reducing eligibility for the seniors' benefit, and they slashed $5 million in funding for AISH and ADAP programs. These cuts are cruel, and they are wrong.

Let's move on to my hometown of Calgary. The UCP government has saddled the average Calgary homeowner with an annual increase of $360 in education property taxes to pay for schools their children may never see. Highlighted by Alberta Municipalities, there was no increase to FCSS funding and no increase to the city's infrastructure funding pot. This in a city that welcomed more residents in one year than there are in Red Deer.

The UCP government is happy to intervene in municipal affairs at their leisure: the Flames arena, the green line, bike lanes, development processes, and social service funding. They interfere when it's politically or ideologically convenient, but if it's not, the province's bigger city may just be out of luck.

When I'm door-knocking in Calgary-Currie, I meet the odd person who says that they are socially progressive and fiscally conservative, and I ask them where they plan to lend their vote in that case because the UCP are neither. They have made the situation so much worse with a government caucus intent on stoking separatism to save their own political skin.

The UCP government is bad with money. They have squandered some of the best economic conditions in a generation through a culture of entitlement and spending with impunity. International conflict that temporarily raises the price of oil won't solve the issue. The only thing that will is a change in government.

Alberta Separatism

Member Gurinder Brar: "Everybody is talking about it," Mr. Speaker. "Our inboxes are swamped," said the head of the Calgary Chamber of commerce about the growing threat of separatism, which is sending a chill through Calgary's business community. The economic heart of our province is quivering in fear, a fear that this UCP government is letting grow because of their constant refusal to denounce separatism. Eighty-three per cent of businesses surveyed said that constant separatist discourse was placing Alberta at a higher risk of recession and delayed or cancelled projects. Seventy-four per cent of businesses surveyed said that separatism would lead to relocation outside of Alberta, and hundreds of businesses rank Alberta separatism as the top issue that they are facing in 2026, ahead of U.S. tariffs, ahead of new pipeline capacity.

Nancy Southern, the CEO of ATCO, said last summer that separatism was already hurting the investment environment, and this is before a referendum has been scheduled. Why won't this UCP government slam the brakes on separatism? Calgary businesses are crying out, Mr. Speaker, but this government is not listening. Instead, they are hammering Calgarians with new taxes and fees while stoking separatist sentiment that will chill business confidence and drive companies out of this province. If the referendum goes ahead, which companies are the UCP prepared for to leave Alberta?

This UCP government needs to make a clear choice. Join us on Team Alberta and denounce separatism, or stay on Team Separation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50 Oral Question Period

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

Citizen-initiated Referendums

Mr. Nenshi: Big day yesterday, Mr. Speaker, lots of interesting moments, but one of the most interesting moments came when the Premier and the Minister of Justice made it clear that they would not allow any unconstitutional questions to reach a referendum ballot. But here's the thing. The separatist question, you know, the one they're gathering signatures for in Yuma, Arizona, and Puerto Vallarta, is unconstitutional. A judge told us that. So can the Premier confirm today that she will never allow that question to reach a referendum ballot?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The citizen initiative process is meant to be permissive. It's meant to allow citizens to get together and see if their fellow citizens are interested in putting a question forward for a vote. It's not meant to have any gatekeepers

stop them in that process. The job of government is to make sure that any issue that was voted on by the people of Alberta, we implement in a constitutional way. We're several steps away from that. We're watching the processes play out, and we will see if the requisite number of signatures is achieved by May 6.

Mr. Nenshi: That answer leads to a very simple question. What the heck is the point? This government passed a law explicitly allowing people to gather signatures for questions they will never put on a ballot. They're wasting their time; they're wasting their money because this Premier is pandering. She's pandering to them, pretending to be one of them – maybe she is one of them – helping them waste their time in doing something that will never actually succeed. So can the Premier confirm today to her separatist base that this is all a charade, that she's letting them waste their time and money and she has no intention of putting this on a ballot?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, public participation in a democratic process is never a waste of time. I think it's important that we respect those who are taking the time to go out and to vet these ideas by their fellow citizens. That is the reason why we have citizen-initiated referenda. It's the reason why we have a permissive process around recall, so that citizens have the ability to talk with their fellow citizens, engage their level of support for different ideas. That's the whole point of it. We support democracy on this side of the House.

Mr. Nenshi: That is an extraordinary statement of contempt for citizens, saying: "You're going to do this work, but we don't care. Just go and do your thing." [interjections]

Let's follow a different thread here. Yesterday . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. We heard the answer. Let's hear the next question.

Go ahead.

Mr. Nenshi: Yesterday we heard from one of the treaty chiefs that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul admitted to him to being a separatist and intimated that he actually signed the petition. Fascinating. Meanwhile the Government House Leader said that being called separatist is an insult. So can the Premier confirm how many other members of her caucus are separatists?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The whole point of a petition campaign is to make sure that the signatures are kept confidential. That's the reason why a petitioner is not allowed to keep the signatures afterwards, and I have to say that anyone who is suggesting that any person has their name on that list without the person's permission is probably violating the spirit and the intent of the legislation. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, none of my MLAs have indicated to me that they have signed. What they have said is that they support sovereignty within a united Canada. That is the position of this government, and that's the position of our caucus.

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

Mr. Nenshi: When someone asks you if you're a separatist, there's a simple answer; no. No member of this government has been able to do that.

Affordability Measures

Mr. Nenshi: This government, in addition to that, is terrible with money. They have historically high royalty revenues. They've got one of the biggest deficits in history, spending so much with so little to show for it. The Premier will blame everybody for this. She'll blame Justin Trudeau. She'll blame immigrants. She'll blame chemtrails. She'll blame the World Economic Forum. What she won't do is take responsibility. Let's give her a chance to do that. Does the Premier have any plan to make life more affordable?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We already have. We advocated to get rid of the carbon tax that party put in place, which their federal counterparts advocated to increase, to save people at the pump and save people on their home heating. Our excellent Minister of Affordability and Utilities brought the prices down from 32 cents a kilowatt hour, caused by their terrible policies to phase out coal too early and bring on an unsustainable amount of wind and solar that did not have enough backup. We're now down to averaging about 3.7 cents a kilowatt hour. Time and time again we have demonstrated that when we hear of what the public is concerned about, we answer. [interjections]

The Speaker: Let's hear the question and the answer.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Nenshi: Her own caucus is heckling her, Mr. Speaker, which is fascinating because, of course, life is much more unaffordable for Albertans, and if she wants to go out and tell Albertans that she's made their life affordable, she's welcome to do so. They can't balance a budget because they say that the price of oil is low, but the price of gas has remained historically high. Last week Albertans saw a 16 cent per litre increase in one day, but the Premier says that she can't give tax relief because of a technicality in the law. If the price of gas remains high, will she give people relief now?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly the member opposite hasn't filled up with gas very often in the last year because what he will have seen is that at times it got down below a dollar, and that's how it's supposed to work. When prices are low, it goes down; when prices go up and they average above $80, that's when we start taking the fuel tax off. If it gets above $90 for a three-month period, it comes off altogether. We're watching the prices with great interest. We have only been one week into the disruption in prices. The long-term trend – I would invite the member opposite to look – is still low. It's still $62 for WTI.

Mr. Nenshi: So now we've heard from the Premier: hey, Albertans, life is affordable, and you're not paying too much for gas. Great quotes there.

This budget consists of higher taxes, higher fees, reduced services, and a giant deficit. That is quite a trick. There is nothing in there to reduce the cost of living for Albertans. There is nothing in there to make Albertans' lives easier or better. Last week the Premier said that our social programs are way too generous because seniors and people with disabilities don't deserve prosperity. Will she take responsibility for destroying the Alberta advantage?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta advantage is no sales tax, and we still have no sales tax. Mr. Speaker, we've got no payroll tax. We've got no health care tax. We've got the lowest personal income taxes in the country. We brought through a $1,500 per family decrease in personal income taxes. We have the lowest fuel tax in the country. We also brought through, with co-operation

with the federal government, a child care program that subsidizes families with kids $1,000 per child, which is a huge burden off families with children. I've already mentioned utility prices have come down.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition Leader.

Mr. Nenshi: She now, of course, is taking credit for things she opposed her entire career, Mr. Speaker.

Government Accountability

Mr. Nenshi: The other thing that she favoured her entire career, she tells us, is the Constitution. Yesterday we heard members go on and on and on about the sanctity of the Constitution, notwithstanding the fact that they passed four unconstitutional laws last fall and it's been coupled with an unprecedented attack on lawyers, on judges, and on the rule of law. Does this government only like the Constitution and only like judges when it benefits them?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the professor needs to read the Constitution. He'll find out that section 33 is a part of the Constitution, and the reason it is there is because we recognize parliamentary supremacy. We recognize the supremacy of the Legislature. The reason for that is the legislatures are the democratically elected body. It is us who has to stand for re-election, and when we make a judgment that the people want a particular type of law enacted in a particular type of way and the court disagrees, we use the section of the Constitution that allows us to preserve that law.

Mr. Nenshi: Her maiden speech in this House was about how rights are inalienable and no Legislature can take them away, and today she tells us that she and her government are supreme over the people. What she's saying is that it's not quite right, so what we know – let's talk about judges for a second, shall we? We've talked a lot about Liberal-appointed judges, except when they agree with the Premier, and the only Albertans who count are Albertans appointed by the UCP. The government has attacked the Law Society. They've raided the funds of the Alberta Law Foundation. They politicized the law. Why?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we do on this side of the Chamber is that we listen to what the people of Alberta want us to do and then we pass legislation consistent with that, and we make sure that we're always balancing rights. We balance the rights of kids who have a right to an education. We balance the rights as well of those who want to go out and do collective bargaining and also strike, but that also has to be balanced against the impact it's going to have on society as a whole. That's the role of elected officials, and we're going to continue to play that role and do that balancing.

2:00

The Speaker: This time let's hear the question and the answer.
Go ahead.

Mr. Nenshi: It's rare to see the Premier this rattled by a question because it goes down to her fundamental hypocrisy.

Now, let's remember that three Conservative Justice ministers in a row were investigated by the Law Society, and the fourth one shamelessly stood up in this House to give himself immunity from that, and they removed the ability of the Law Society to require lawyers to take mandatory Indigenous training. This means less access to justice for people every single day. Why does this government think it's above the law [interjections], and why do they want to remake the law in their own image?

The Speaker: Order.
The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As much as I appreciate the member opposite mansplaining to me what he thinks I mean when I say something, I'm very clear about what our position as a government is.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Ms Smith: The job that we have here in the Legislature is to pass laws. We go out into the public, we will consult on issues, and then we pass legislation. We have different ideas about how that legislation should be enacted, and sometimes the court disagrees with our approach, at which point we have to make a judgment on whether or not we're truly representing the people. We always will put the people first. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
Speaking of order, a point of order was noted at 2:01.
The next question belongs to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Alberta Separatism and Economic Development

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, in a recent survey of businesses by the Calgary Chamber of commerce owners had little optimism about their futures as threats of separation hang over the province. Eighty-three per cent worry separation could bring on a recession, cancel projects, and reduce investment. They worry about difficulty attracting staff and fear they may have to move their businesses. Alberta businesses depend on stability and predictability, but all they get from the UCP is chaos. Why does this government continue to encourage separatism when it's clearly hurting Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will begin by saying that the only people in this Chamber talking about separatism are the members opposite. [interjections] The real problem we have here is that the members opposite have an issue . . .

The Speaker: Order. I thought I didn't have any trouble at all hearing the question. Let's hear the answer, please.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would appear that the professor opposite has a problem with other people talking in this Chamber and having a different opinion. It seems a real top-down approach. Maybe he needs to take a look at that and how his leadership is. [interjections]

What I would say is that in this Chamber we believe very strongly that Albertans should have a say on very important matters that they are concerned about in this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Just waiting for your leader to finish so that you can answer your question. Please proceed.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Government House Leader is talking about in this Chamber, and I am talking about Alberta businesses who are talking about very real concerns. I believe we have guests from chambers in this House. We and they have seen this all before. When the threat of separation shook Quebec, many businesses left

that province. Calgary business leaders are warning that the same drain has already started happening here. Investments are reconsidered and economic growth is slowing, all while this government encourages the separatists and their harmful agenda. Why is the UCP making Alberta a riskier place to invest?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We take the feedback from the chambers of commerce very seriously, including their members. I can assure their members that our government is focused on making sure their lives are easier by cutting regulation, keeping taxes low, and continuing to promote Alberta here in Canada, North America, and around the world. For that reason we've seen record investment in this province, including $75 million for the Coca-Cola bottling company. Dow Chemical is moving ahead with an $11 billion project. Investment is coming to Alberta because they know we're the best place in Canada to do it.

Ms Gray: What this government has been focused on is cozying up to groups with harmful ideas. They should be focused on making Alberta a safe jurisdiction for investment. [interjection] Just yesterday Alberta's treaty chiefs came here to send a message that they no longer trust this UCP government. Without the chiefs' confidence and without the confidence of Calgary businesses it is clear that this Premier is simply not running Alberta well. [interjection] Will the Premier finally denounce separatism and start rebuilding confidence in Alberta as a place to live, work, and invest in?

The Speaker: Chestermere-Strathmore, I don't think you were recognized to speak just now.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I'll begin with a quote from Avik Dey, president of Capital Power Corporation, who said: we continue to be excited about it and, frankly, more excited today than we've ever been at this point in time. That's about the province of Alberta and the prospects of investment. The only threat to this province in investment and job growth and creation is the members opposite ever becoming government again. While they were in power from 2015 to 2019, they had the NDP leader in the mayor's seat in Calgary, Justin Trudeau in Ottawa, and Rachel Notley as the Premier, the triple black swan event, and it drove investment out of this province. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order, Calgary-Buffalo, who I don't think was recognized.

The fourth question belongs to Calgary-Beddington.

Labour Relations with Teachers

Ms Chapman: The UCP government trampled the constitutional rights of Alberta's teachers, using the notwithstanding clause to force them back into overcrowded, underresourced classrooms. Five months later, undervalued, hopeless, demoralized: that's how teachers feel. When asked in a survey, only 2 per cent reported feeling hopeful about classroom conditions going forward. Teachers have been disrespected by this government, so what does the minister have to say to thousands of burnt-out teachers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of education and children's services.

Ms Hoffman: Sorry.

The Speaker: All right. Now that we've straightened out who has what title and the one that gets called actually gets to speak, let's hear from the minister of education and children's services.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, I greatly appreciate the member opposite apologizing in advance for whatever it was that she was going to do.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, after three weeks of job action and parties no closer to resolving the disagreement that we had, it was necessary for us to take the steps that we did to get students back into the classroom. We have to ensure students' best interests are at the forefront of our decision-making, which is precisely why we've taken the steps that we did to ensure students get back into the classroom.

Ms Chapman: Given that teachers are struggling to keep up the good fight against burnout, overcrowded classrooms, funding shortages, and a public education system that is not meeting the needs of its students, given that a third of teachers plan to retire early, leave the profession entirely, or flee this province for one that respects and values the work they do, to the minister. The government failed epically to meet the hiring target for teachers last year. How on earth do you plan to meet your targets this year?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the education system that we have in this province. We have a world-class education system, and that's evidenced, of course, by the incredible results that our students perform in global international rankings. Apart from just globally, we rank the best in Canada in science and reading and math and in many other categories. That being said, we are making record new investments, including a 7 per cent increase this year alone in operating funding to our schools and an $8.6 billion initiative to build more schools in every corner of the province.

Ms Chapman: Given that teachers have said, "It feels like we're alone and you go home feeling like you fail your students every day, and I feel totally hopeless," given that losing teachers when we're already short-staffed will have massive impacts on students, the labour market, and the broader economy, will anyone in this government accept responsibility for driving public education into a state of total chaos?

2:10

Mr. Nicolaides: Our education system is not in any state of total chaos, as the member opposite would suggest. Our students are performing incredibly well against global standards. We are taking steps, of course, to help recruit and retain more individuals. We graduate on average about 2,000 students from our BEd programs every year. We certify an additional 800 coming in from other provinces. We have the highest take-home pay in western Canada for our teachers. As well, we've just dispatched over 476 complexity teams to help address complexity issues and alleviate some teacher workload.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Cardiac Care in Southern Alberta

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In southern Alberta approximately 300 acute in-patients must be transferred to Calgary each year to receive interventional cardiac services. In addition, nearly 1,000 outpatients must travel to Calgary to access the same care. For patients and their families this often means long travel

times, added stress, and time away from their communities during critical moments of care. Can the minister explain how Budget 2026 will strengthen cardiac care services in southern Alberta and ensure more patients can receive life-saving treatment closer to home?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. If passed, Budget 2026 will invest $59 million over three years to advance the south zone cardiac and intensive care expansion project, including a new cardiac cath lab in Lethbridge and expanded critical care and diagnostic capacity in both Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. Together these investments will significantly strengthen health care services in southern Alberta and ensure that more patients can access timely specialized care closer to home, and that's good for everyone.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for that great response. Given that many southern Albertans currently must travel to Calgary to access their critical cardiac care, can the minister please expand and explain how the new cardiac catheterization lab at Chinook regional hospital will help patients in Lethbridge and the surrounding area, including approximately how many patients it is expected to serve once fully operational?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. If passed, Budget 2026 will advance the new cardiac cath lab at Chinook regional hospital into the next phase, which includes detailed planning and early construction. Once fully operational it's expected to serve between 1,500 and 1,700 patients each year, helping Albertans in Lethbridge and across southern Alberta in rural and remote communities access critical cardiac care more quickly, reducing hours of travel and ensuring care is available closer to home when the minutes matter.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Again thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for another great answer. Given the growing demand for cardiac and critical care services in southern Alberta and recognizing the important role that both Lethbridge and Medicine Hat play in supporting patients across that region, could the minister please outline how Budget 2026 will expand critical care capacity at Chinook regional hospital and Medicine Hat regional hospital, including how many additional critical care beds will be added at each site?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If passed, Budget 2026 will expand southern Alberta's critical care capacity to 54 beds at the Chinook regional hospital and 18 beds at the Medicine Hat regional hospital. The project also includes upgrades to cardiac diagnostics, CT and MRI imaging, redeveloped intensive care and cardiac care units, and an acuity adaptable bed model at both sites. Together these investments will ensure more Albertans in southern Alberta can receive timely specialized care. This is part of the 300 beds that are currently under construction and 2,000 acute-care beds that are in design or planning.

RCMP's Real Time Operations Centre

Mr. Shepherd: On February 24 a handcuffed suspect escaped the custody of Alberta sheriffs, stole their patrol vehicle, and drove away. Fortunately, they were supported by the RCMP, who used their Real Time Operations Centre to track, intercept, and disable the vehicle before it could enter Spruce Grove. The suspect has since been charged with assaulting a peace officer with a weapon, possession of a prohibited firearm, and more. To the minister of public safety: what steps is he taking to investigate the circumstances that led to this very real threat to public safety and ensure it never happens again?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, regardless of whether you're a peace officer or a police officer, of course we're all human beings. I can tell you that certainly there are matters that are, of course, before the courts and there are matters that are a matter of internal processes. I can tell you that Chief Parhar and his team are of course investigating to find out what may or may not have taken place. I can tell you that there's a great relationship that is occurring right now between the RCMP and our Alberta sheriffs, and I would be more than happy to get into that in the next question.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that the suspect's capture was thanks to the tools and technology in the RCMP's Real Time Operations Centre and given that it's just one example of how they use the RTOC to collaborate with police services across the province to keep the public safe and given I recently got to tour the RTOC at K Division, just 10 minutes north of here, and learned the minister apparently hasn't yet had the opportunity to respond to multiple invitations to do the same, to the minister of public safety: will he tour the RTOC and talk with RCMP about the key role it plays in co-ordinating collaborative policing across the province?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I don't want to presuppose what anybody did in their previous career, but I actually used to work in a real-time operations centre as a staff sergeant. I have talked to the deputy commissioner. I am fully aware of what they do. It is consistent with the work that I used to do when I was the staff sergeant in the Calgary Police Service.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that that sounds like a no, but given that on my tour of the RTOC I learned the RCMP have set aside a desk for an Alberta sheriffs communications operator to improve collaboration and allow seamless communication between the two services . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

I'd like to hear the question.

Please give yourself 10 more seconds and go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that on my tour of the RTOC I learned the RCMP have set aside a desk for an Alberta sheriffs communications operator to improve collaboration and allow seamless communication between the two services and given that they told me their work with Alberta sheriffs to assign an operator was suddenly cut off when the minister announced his brand new Alberta Sheriffs Police Service and given that that desk has sat empty ever since due to a lack of funding or action from the provincial government, to the minister of public safety: why is he refusing to work collaboratively with the RCMP on a service that plays such a key role in keeping Albertans safe?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. Well, what the member is not telling this Chamber and, of course, the people of Alberta is that there was a very important multi-agency effort that fanned across 34 communities, led by 118 arrest warrants. Forty-nine fugitives were apprehended. Let me quote the RCMP, Mr. Speaker. Operations like this demonstrate the strength of collaboration between policing partners across Alberta. By working alongside the Alberta sheriffs and the Edmonton Police Service, we're able to share information, co-ordinate efforts, and hold offenders accountable. This is what co-operation is . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Is the clock working? Table officers, is the clock working? I didn't see anything there.

Affordability Measures
(continued)

Mr. Schmidt: Since 2020 grocery prices in Alberta have increased by almost 50 per cent, and prices continue to remain sky-high for Alberta families, yet this UCP government has failed for years to take action on affordability and instead continues to pile on costs to Albertans from new fee increases to raising the price of auto insurance. To the minister: enough is enough; why does this government think that Albertans can always be squeezed for a little bit more?

The Speaker: Was there a point of order a minute ago? There was. Okay. A point of order was noted at 2:18.

The hon. Minister of Affordability and Utilities.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to be part of a government that takes every ministry to help with the affordability of Albertans and putting their needs first, which is why we brought forward a tax cut to make sure that every working individual and every working couple can receive $750 to $1,500 a year off their taxes. That's why we're working on bringing in a care-first model for insurance, to lower those bills. That's why we've worked on utility prices, fixing the messes left behind by the NDP, to lower utility prices by 63 per cent from their peak. We continue to put Albertans first, and we continue to meet their needs on a daily basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:20

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you. Given that Edmonton city council is studying a motion to end the practice of restrictive covenants on grocery store sites, that cause food deserts across our city, and given that this UCP government is piling on new fees, raising the cost of living for every Albertan across the province, why won't the UCP follow the lead of our cities and take real action on affordability by banning restrictive covenants on sites owned by grocery stores?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that we've seen what other jurisdictions in Canada have done on restrictive covenants in grocery stores, specifically Manitoba. We're currently going through their legislation. We're talking to Albertans. We're hearing what they have to say, and we're monitoring it closely. If we need to take action, certainly we will. Yeah.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that my constituents can't take monitoring closely to the grocery store to pay for their groceries and given that minimum-wage workers haven't seen wage increases in years, making it harder for them to afford the cost of groceries, and given that life keeps getting more expensive under this UCP government and given the Premier remains more focused on separatism than affordability, when will the UCP finally give minimum-wage earners a break and raise the minimum wage?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are two ways to deal with this: one, the NDP, which is push on the highest minimum wage increase in the entire country all at once, affecting businesses and creating massive job losses across the entire sector, or monitor the situation. [interjection] I hear the Leader of the Opposition digging into his bag and that written script on his desk of heckles. I figure he should go a little lower there.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that on this side of the House we are consulting businesses to make sure that we get this right but also making sure there are jobs in this province, unlike the NDP, who drove those jobs out of Alberta.

Health Services in Rural Alberta

Mrs. Sawyer: Mr. Speaker, rural hospitals are the backbone of health care outside of our major cities like Calgary. However, many are operating with outdated infrastructure and have limited capacity. Budget 2026 includes significant investments in rural health such as the rural hospital enhancement program and major funding to improve emergency and surgical capacity across the province. To the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services: can you please explain how these province-wide rural health investments will directly improve access to care for residents in rural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for her advocacy and question. If passed, Budget 2026 has numerous investments that will strengthen our rural hospitals. For example, the rural hospital enhancement program allocates $60 million over two years to target infrastructure gaps through planning and utilization of shelled spaces. In addition, the Alberta surgical initiative invests nearly $300 million over three years to open new operating rooms, renovate surgical spaces, and provide new equipment across Alberta, including in the member's constituency. Our government remains committed to ensuring high-quality care in rural Alberta. [interjection]

The Speaker: You'll get your turn for a question at some point, I'm sure.

The hon. member.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that excellent answer. Given that ambulance delays are a top concern in rural Alberta because we know that faster response times save lives and further given that rural residents are sometimes left waiting dangerously long times for EMT during emergencies, to the same minister: how will the budget assist in improved ambulance deployment and rural staffing, and how will this translate into faster EMS response times in areas outside of major cities?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you.

The Speaker: Now that the mutual admiration society is done. The minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for her question. We know that more must be done to reduce rural and remote EMS response times. That's why Budget 2026 increases EHS funding to about a billion dollars if you include everything, supporting faster response times, recruitment and retention of paramedics, and expanded in-community transport solutions to keep EMS vehicles available for when they're really needed. In addition, $20 million will be made available through the EHS vehicle capital program, which will replace aging ambulances, ensuring our fleet remains modern, ready, and responsive. Again, we're committed to doing better on EMS.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sawyer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for the answer. Given that many rural communities face family physician shortages, which can cause chronic conditions to worsen unnecessarily, and further given that access to a primary care physician is the entryway into our entire health system, to the minister: how will the budget expand nurse-practitioner-led primary care in rural communities, and how will physician recruitment help stabilize access to family doctors in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the excellent question. If passed, Budget 2026 will invest $87 million over three years to expand the role of nurse practitioners and strengthen our primary health care in Alberta. As well, to further strengthen care in rural and remote communities, our government just ran a $16 million rural and remote family medicine resident physician bursary pilot to support family medicine residents in Alberta who commit to a three-year return of service in our rural-remote communities. We have 132 resident physicians who met that call.

Regulation of Hydraulic Fracturing Projects

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, Butch and Nicole Smith are hard-working Albertans who spent 30 years building a bison farm near Rimbey. After the Alberta Energy Regulator approved a fracking operation near them, their bison were stressed by around-the-clock construction noise. Most operators respect landowners, but there are bad actors. For 18 months the Smith family did everything right, appealed to the AER, reached out to four ministers only to be ignored. What does the Premier have to say to these ranchers who did everything right and were still abandoned by their government?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a lot of sympathy for Mr. Smith and his particular concerns. His situation, frankly, seems rather unprecedented, but I will say that I have exchanged texts with him, many phone calls, and have spoken with him at length in relation to it. He is having an issue with an energy company, and I hope and expect the energy company will make a proposal to come up with a commercial resolution in relation to it. Separate from that, there are processes that Mr. Smith can apply for at the Alberta Energy Regulator, and there's a statement of concerns that he can put forward. He should go through that process, and I'm sure he will.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that the Smith family's losses are in the millions of dollars, given that industrial noise drove their bison into distress – animals running wildly, aborting, and abandoning their calves, calves starving to death – given that their UCP MLA won't return their calls, the agriculture minister offered thoughts and prayers, the former environment minister sent a letter about nothing, and the Energy minister? Well, silence speaks for itself. A simple question: will the Premier investigate the AER, get her ministers to work, or will she stand by while hard-working Albertans lose their farm?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Energy Regulator is probably the best regulator in the world, and they are recognized as such as a global leader and the important role that it plays regulating energy development in our province. They do a really good job in regulating. In 2024 Alberta's government completed a review of the AER. We know that under the NDP the leadership of the AER ran a Ponzi scheme. They ran a private-sector situation that enriched themselves. We're not allowing them to do that. We're making sure the AER is staying front and centre in this. He should reach out . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that at the peak of their operation the Smith family had nearly 2,500 bison and were forced to sell half their herd to save the animals from the stressful noise, given that the AER seems to have rubber-stamped approvals without a basic economic, social, or environmental impact assessment on Rimbey or the Smith family's farm a few kilometres away, given that four UCP ministers failed the Smith family, will the Premier make this right today, investigate the AER, and look into their losses, the losses incurred by the Smith family? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be clear, I've spent time talking to Mr. Smith, and I'm happy to answer the phone any time he calls because I understand his situation. I have encouraged him here and outside of here to go through the proper process, but I do want to let Mr. Smith know that he is relying on a party that was run by the former mayor of Calgary, who ran that city into the ground for 11 years, picking half a million dollar priorities on rings on the middle of a highway instead of fixing water pipes. They're still falling from those ramifications today. Maybe Mr. Smith should go through the proper process and not rely on [interjections] . . .

The Speaker: Order. That was twice, Minister, where you didn't stop talking at the end of your time.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

2:30 Support for Small Business

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After 28 years of serving its community, Angel's Cafe has been forced to close its door following the recent Calgary water main break. This was a local business that did everything right, but despite their hard work they're paying the price for years of infrastructure neglect under previous city leadership. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration: what concrete steps will this government take to ensure small businesses are not left holding the bill for municipal government failures?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a small-business owner myself previously I can tell you that it's a lot of stress making payroll, making sure people come to work every day, but it's one that we do every day because it's important. It drives the province.

To make it even worse in situations like this: you have to pay your taxes, you create jobs, you work hard, you contribute to the community, and you're still behind.

Let me be very clear, Mr. Speaker. This situation was entirely preventable. The now NDP leader was mayor of that city and his legacy of disaster over 11 years is still killing businesses to this day.

Mr. Bouchard: Given that small businesses are not just economic drivers; they're community anchors and further given that when a business of 28 years that has weathered recessions and lockdowns can be pushed aside overnight with little protection, it sends a chilling message to every entrepreneur in this province, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what specific steps can this government take to protect small businesses facing sudden closure due to municipal infrastructure failures or negligence?

The Speaker: The hon. House leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we are focused on keeping Alberta a business-friendly environment. We're keeping taxes low, creating jobs, attracting investment. That's what we're focused on. We're not focused on giving ourselves the largest pay increase for any mayor in the history of the province. What I can say is that 11 years the Leader of the Opposition was mayor of Calgary, and that disastrous legacy is still killing businesses today. It's one of water restrictions and small businesses paying the price. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Member, you had nine questions. Now it's somebody else's time to talk.

Go ahead.

Mr. Schow: That is a legacy of killing businesses, Mr. Speaker. I have one question for the Leader of the Opposition: when will he apologize?

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

Mr. Bouchard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Angel's Cafe is not just a storefront; it represented owners, employees, families, and its community and further given that this could happen to other businesses across Alberta facing municipal mismanagement, aging infrastructure, or unexpected disruptions, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how will this government work to prevent similar situations, and what safeguards can be put in place to ensure Alberta truly stands behind the small businesses we all claim to value?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to that member for the question. I know that this situation matters to that member. He's been an advocate for Angel's Cafe in my office regularly. I can tell you as somebody who solicits Angel's Cafe when I'm in Calgary, I deeply regret the situation we're in. The responsibility of core infrastructure is the responsibility of every municipality. It is the watchword of municipal government. It is their job to do, and our job as a provincial government is to oversee it and make sure they execute, which is why our government requested documentation from the city of Calgary. It's also why more steps to come and future steps from this government to make sure accountability and we know what has happened in the situation with the . . .

Mr. Nenshi: So nothing to support small businesses.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

I think it's time to only hear from the Member for Banff-Kananaskis. Can we all agree on that?

Water Management in Central Alberta

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Drought frequency and intensity is increasing across the province, shining a light on the inadequacies of government systems to ensure that everyone has abundant access to water. In the Blindman and Medicine River subwatersheds landowners struggle with wells and tributaries that run dry by late summer, and even the Blindman River itself can be without water. What has the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas done to ensure energy companies reduce their use of fresh water to increase local water availability for people, livestock, wildlife, and the river itself?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're doing more than any other government in history to protect Albertans from drought. We are investing $125 million over five years to build new infrastructure and stepping up to modernize our water management system. We're defending communities and maximizing our water resources for years to come. That's what we're doing, unlike what the NDP did for four years, driving businesses out and making sure that we did not have the infrastructure we needed to be able to deal with drought.

Dr. Elmeligi: Given whatever it is they're doing isn't working, given that poor regulation of water withdrawals from multiple simultaneous users impacts groundwater aquifers, given most temporary diversion licences granted by the government for fracking are not followed up with information about where the water is coming from or how much is used, given the AER renews these licences annually, which renders them more permanent than temporary, given Environment and Protected Areas has committed to gathering data to understand impacts of these licences and review potential policy changes, to the minister: what results have been found and what policy changes have occurred?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, unlike the opposition, we won't politicize something as important as water. Instead, we're taking action across the board where they drag their feet. We're investing millions to build our water storage and critical infrastructure. We're investing millions more over wetlands, wetland watersheds, and natural protections, and we're conducting a province-wide review to identify the next major projects that Alberta needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that local groups from the area and landowners have met with multiple ministers to discuss this issue and propose solutions that allow for fracking while also protecting local water access such as the potential to phase out the use of fresh water for fracking and make more water available for people, livestock, and the river, given that none of those proposed solutions appear to have been implemented and issues continue to impact landowners, why has this government failed to represent the needs of the people, especially those in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House, and champion solutions . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, while others talk, we act. Over the last two years we have funded 28 major infrastructure projects. Planning is under way for multiple reservoirs, and a groundwater study will help unlock water in southern Alberta and throughout the province. That's what real progress looks like on this side.

Services for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, the government has boasted about opening the door to greater employment opportunities for people on AISH by kicking them off AISH and forcing them onto ADAP. The government knows there are very limited job opportunities for people with disabilities. Secondly, the government is ignoring the very real struggle people with disabilities face even getting out of their door. Exactly where in the budget is the new money devoted to improve municipal adult disabled transportation systems to give people with disabilities the same reliable access to transportation to get them to and from these nonexistent jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced – Assisted Living and Social Services. Sorry.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's over a quarter billion dollars in the budget to do exactly that, the most that has ever been in the Alberta budget. We doubled the budget last year. We've increased it by over $50 million this year to make sure that we invest in this space. What the real challenge is for people within the disability community that want to enter the workforce is that prior to this they were stuck underneath NDP programs that punished them for going to work. The NDP when they were on this side of the aisle never bothered to change that. Instead, they took away every dollar those people earn, and this side of the House has fixed it.

The Speaker: My apologies for not saying the name of the ministry right.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Dach: Given that many thousands of people with mobility issues live in rural Alberta as well and given that those rural Albertans on reduced, below poverty line AISH, ADAP income supports will also be forced to try to commute to nonexistent jobs, how does the minister expect disabled Albertans to travel to work since he has done nothing to promote the re-establishment of a regularly scheduled rural bus transportation network to serve every community in Alberta and every Albertan, disabled or not?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I find it appalling to hear people who think members of the disability community can't participate in the workforce. We're investing in this area to be able to provide supports – simulated work environments, transportation supports, other employment supports along those lines – to give everybody the best chance they can in this province. You know, this side of the House, a Conservative government, since 2019 has increased disability supports by $1 billion. That's an increase of almost 40 per cent. The reality is that that side did nothing. They're punishing people for going to work, and we're not going to do that anymore in Alberta.

2:40

Mr. Dach: Given that people with disabilities face many additional barriers getting to and from work, including accessible entrances; hazardous sidewalks and crosswalks; lack of ramps, elevators, accessible washrooms, et cetera, and given the woefully inadequate, inaccessible public transportation options, including a lack of accessible taxis in this province, when will the government introduce meaningful accessibility legislation?

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the NDP keep wanting to ignore that they failed on this file. They had a chance when they were here. They said that they were the great champion on this issue. They didn't index the payments, they didn't increase AISH payments, they didn't pass accessibility legislation, they didn't invest in employment supports, and they continued to punish people on AISH for participating in the workforce. This side of the House: we've indexed payments. We've increased the budget by almost 40 per cent, a billion dollars. This year we'll spend more money than any government in history supporting the disabled, $3.6 billion for my department alone. That's real action. The NDP is all talk.

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

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 17
Fiscal Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2026

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

Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago I introduced Budget 2026, a disciplined plan that sets clear priorities and ensures taxpayer dollars deliver real results for Albertans today and into the future. Through Bill 17 we're moving forward with key measures from our budget. The amendments in Bill 17 implement several Budget 2026 commitments and modernize provincial legislation. This includes an increase to the tourism levy to support programs and services that benefit Albertans. It also consolidates the existing caregiver and infirm dependant credits into a single Alberta caregiver credit, making the system simpler and better aligned with federal and provincial programs. It also clarifies Alberta's data centre levy framework so rates are based on actual power consumption. As Alberta faces global uncertainty and rising costs, our government is focused on clear priorities, careful decisions, and practical action.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move first reading of Bill 17, the Fiscal Measures Statutes Amendment Act, 2026. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a CBC article entitled Motels Used More Often by Province to House Edmonton Poor. This is actually from 2014. I'm tabling this today because in estimates this morning it was revealed that $7.2 million is being spent on hotels. I say that that is woefully shameful on this government.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you for – tabling isn't really an opportunity to debate. [interjection] No, but thank you.

Member Ceci: I'm tabling five copies of an op-ed in the *Edmonton Journal* and *Calgary Herald* yesterday titled Cutting Historical Society [of Alberta's] Funding Will Hurt Alberta Tourism.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Horner, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Insurance Act Automobile Insurance Rate Board 2025 annual report.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Schow, Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration, pursuant to the Workers' Compensation Act Workers' Compensation Board of Alberta 2024 annual report, pursuant to the Northern Alberta Development Council Act letter dated November 7, 2024, from Mr. Yao, hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council, to hon. Mr. Jones, minister of jobs, economy, and trade, reporting on the council's activities for the 2023-24 fiscal year the Northern Alberta Development Council 2024-25 annual report.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

The points of order today were withdrawn, so we have one accident-free day. Thank you.

Hon. members, it . . .

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'll recognize the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you. I would hate to presuppose what you were about to say, but before we adjourn to . . .

The Speaker: I was about to recognize you.

Mr. Schow: Oh, do you want me to sit down and try this again?

The Speaker: No. Let's do it.

Mr. Schow: Okay. We will move forward.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for recognizing me. I rise to request unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) in order to proceed to consideration of Government Motion 34.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Mr. Schow: Lovely, Mr. Speaker, and I thank all members for unanimous consent.

Government Motions

Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee

34. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly order pursuant to section 15 of the Citizen Initiative Act the following:

1. A Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to review the Alberta Forever Canada citizen initiative policy proposal, which was tabled in the Assembly by the Speaker of the Assembly on December 2, 2025 (Sessional Paper 241/2025);
2. The committee consists of the following members:

Lunty (Chair)	Nixon
Sawhney (Deputy Chair)	Pancholi
Ellingson	Sawyer

3. The committee continues despite a prorogation of a session and may, without leave of the Assembly, meet during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
4. Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff, assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid, subject to the approval of the chair;
5. In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may utilize the services of employees of the Legislative Assembly Office or, with the concurrence of the head of a department or an officer of the Legislature, utilize the services of employees of the public service employed in that department or office;
6. The committee must submit to the Assembly, within 90 days after the passage of this motion if the Legislative Assembly is then sitting or, if the Assembly is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting, either
   (a) a report with respect to the policy proposal at the earliest practicable opportunity, or
   (b) a report recommending that the policy proposal and report be referred to the Lieutenant Governor in Council for the purpose of a referendum in accordance with the Referendum Act.

Mr. Schow: This motion is written in its entirety on the Order Paper for all members to read, and I did read it completely yesterday into the record. If there are no objections, I will not read it again verbatim.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion would establish a select special committee of the Assembly to which the Alberta Forever Canada citizen initiative policy proposal petition – hoo, try saying that five times in a row fast – may be referred. This is due to the date for this motion under the Citizen Initiative Act, and I ask all members to support this, to vote in favour of this motion as it is an important conversation to be had.

The Speaker: Are there any other members to speak to it?

Seeing none.

[Government Motion 34 carried]

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon, this evening, and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. This afternoon the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will continue consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider estimates for the Ministry of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction in the Grassland Room.

This evening the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Advanced Education in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction in the Rocky Mountain Room.

Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Education and Childcare in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Indigenous Relations in the Grassland Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:49 p.m.]

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