



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 16, 2026

Day 32

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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

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Boitchenko, Hon. Andrew, ECA, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Brar, Gurtej Singh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
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Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP)
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Miyashiro, Rob, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC),
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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 Resource Stewardship

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Calahoo Stonehouse
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Ip
Petrovic
Rowswell
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 16, 2026

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, it being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Dorothy Pridgen. I invite all to participate in the official language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

[applause]

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

The Speaker: The Legislative Assembly is grateful to be situated upon Treaty 6 territory. This land has been the traditional region of the Métis people of Alberta, the Inuit, and the ancestral territory of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Iroquois, and Nakota Sioux people. The recognition of our history on this land is an act of reconciliation, and we honour those who walk with us. We also acknowledge that the province of Alberta also exists within treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10 territories and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you 120 grade 6 students along with their teachers from Father Michael Mireau junior high school. I would ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you some of the finest students in the land from the finest school, Guthrie school, from Morinville-St. Albert. If I could ask you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it gives me great pleasure to introduce today's anthem singer, Dorothy Pridgen, who is five years old. I'm sure we all agree that Dorothy did a sterling job today. Dorothy is joined by her parents, Sara and Keith Pridgen,

along with her grandparents and friends. I ask them to all please rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members, I'm pleased to introduce Rabbi Ari Derlich, executive director of Chabad Lubavich of Edmonton. Rabbi Derlich has played a large role in our Legislature's annual Hanukkah ceremony ever since the first ceremony in 1992. The rabbi has also played an important role in advocating for Alberta's Jewish community. The Alberta Legislature is pleased to celebrate the strength and vibrancy of Alberta's Jewish communities. I ask the rabbi to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to introduce His Grace the Most Reverend Susai Jesu, the newly appointed archbishop of Keewatin-Le Pas. He is here today with Francis Aranha and Andrew Bennett. Please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce two special friends. The first is Mimi Williams, who I've known and admired for decades, an Alberta woman who has a history of reaching out and fighting for justice by asking: how can I help? Second is Jillian Creech, St. Albert chambers' businesswoman of distinction and general manager of St. Albert Centre. I ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It was an honour to attend the lighting of the menorah on the Legislature Grounds during Hanukkah, and I was pleased to participate in the universal message of freedom, which is so cherished by our society here in Canada. As you have previously introduced the rabbi, I'd like to once again ask Rabbi Ari to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Chamber.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you five incredible disability advocates: Kimberly Wood, Azrael Wick, Bean Gill, Karima Ewig, and Hiba Nasser. I would ask that we extend the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce Zachary Weeks from Edmonton and Dan Pederson from Calgary. They're here to hear Bill 206, the Accessible Alberta Act. Also, I have a number of medical students: Mehul Nimpal, Timothy Ming Wong, Madison Claire Pilon, and Justin Kim Ma-Phan. They've come to visit us here today. Could they please stand and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: Calgary-Foothills.

Member Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you four amazing University of Calgary medical students who are here today in their day of action: Duaa Fatima, Jaspreet Gill, Esha Dhaliwal, Simran Panesar. If you could please stand and accept the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to introduce Geoff and Ellen Barlow, who came here all the way from Vancouver, along with Brennan Jenkins, the parents and the husband of my press secretary. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure of introducing some medical students from the University of Calgary to all of us today. I have Farheen Zahra, Keshikaa Suthaaharan, Haleema Yousuf, Myren Sohn, and Noam Sander. If you could please rise and get the warm welcome of the Legislature.

Mr. Haji: It's my pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly six incredible advocates from the disability community: Keltie Marshall, Shantel Sherwood, Tarita Youngberg, Tarra Shipman, Marie Dancsok, and Liz Lepp. I ask all of them to rise and receive the additional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, sir. Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce members of the Human Rights Committee and staff advisers of AUPE – Hitomi Suzuta, Noel Devapiriyana, Kelly Dumouchel, and Shamanthi Cooray – in the gallery. They are here to watch democracy in action, specifically a debate on the accessibility bill tabled by my colleague.

The Speaker: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a special group of students from Ponoka-Lacombe and Red Deer county: Nathaniel, Anna, Allie, Elijah, Hannah, Mae, Eden, their moms and sisters, Joanna and Kris, and my friend and their grandpa, Al Siebring. Please rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

Legislative Assembly 120th Anniversary

The Speaker: Okay. Members, today we recognize a remarkable milestone in the history of Alberta's democracy. It is the 120th anniversary of the first sitting of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. The first sitting of this Assembly took place on March 15, 1906. On that day the 25 Members of the Legislative Assembly took their seats, carrying the hopes and expectations of a young province. Those seats, however, were not in this Chamber but, rather, a temporary Chamber inside the Thistle Roller and Ice Rink. Following its humble beginnings the Assembly would also meet in the McKay Avenue school for several years before this Legislature Building and Chamber were completed in 1912. Together they laid the foundation for the democratic traditions that continue to guide us today.

For more than a century elected representatives have gathered here to debate ideas, shape public policy, and give voice to the perspectives of Albertans from all walks of life and every region. The issues we face today may differ from those confronted in 1906, yet the commitment to thoughtful deliberation and service to the public good remains today. In this continuity of purpose that has enabled the Assembly to endure and evolve over 120 years, may the next 120 years continue to reflect the resilience, progress, and democratic values that have defined the Assembly from its earliest days.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

World Cup of Hockey 2028

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans live and breathe hockey, and today is a big win for Albertans. Alberta won the bid to host the 2028 World Cup of Hockey, beating out 12 other jurisdictions across North America. This is a big deal. This is no small victory. Alberta just scored the winning breakaway goal on the international stage, and from backyard rinks in small towns to packed NHL arenas, the love of the game runs deep across our province. Hosting the World Cup of Hockey means that the eyes of the hockey world will be right here in Alberta, and this is all thanks to the teamwork of Alberta's government, Tourism Calgary, Explore Edmonton, the Calgary Flames, and the Edmonton Oilers.

The world's best players will compete for gold right here in Edmonton and Calgary, and the benefits will extend far beyond the rink boards, Mr. Speaker, with events within and outside of Edmonton and Calgary through the World Junior Hockey championships, community fan festivals, and Indigenous cultural programming.

This event is expected to create more than 42,000 jobs and generate approximately – wait for it – \$375 million for Alberta's economy. Not only this; this is the largest international sporting event hosted in Alberta since 1988, before I was born, when the 1988 Winter Olympics brought fans, athletes, and media from around the world, and we're going to do it again, Mr. Speaker. This event will showcase our province's commitment on the world stage to hockey and sports. Once again, when Alberta gets the puck, we know how to carry it across the blue line and finish the play.

This takes leadership, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the Premier for her leadership in helping bring the World Cup of Hockey to Alberta. Securing an event of this magnitude takes vision, teamwork, and determination. The ice will be flooded, I'm sure the fans will be loud, and in 2028 the world will see exactly why Alberta is one of the greatest . . .

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

Alberta Separatism and First Nation Treaty Rights

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: [Remarks in Cree] Nearly 150 years ago my ancestors entered into Treaty 6, a sacred covenant grounded in *wahkohtowin*, the understanding that we are bound together in a relationship, responsibility, and mutual respect. Last week chiefs from Treaty 6 travelled from our homelands to meet with His Majesty King Charles III at Buckingham Palace to officially invite him to Canada for the 150th anniversary of the signing of Treaty 6 at Fort Pitt. The chiefs also used the meeting to state their concerns about Alberta separating from Canada.

For months this government has fuelled separatist rhetoric and allowed people to believe that they could simply vote their way out of Canada through a provincial referendum. A province cannot unilaterally separate from Canada. It is legally impossible. This UCP government has betrayed treaty partners by threatening the agreement that our forefathers agreed to. This is not leadership; it is political theatre built on fear, fear that misleads the people and fear that divides the people.

The fact that treaty leaders were compelled to travel across this ocean is a serious wake-up call to every single member of this Assembly, as treaty chiefs and treaty nations reaffirmed their intentional treaty relationship with the Crown, reminding His

Majesty of Queen Elizabeth II's statement to treaty chiefs where she affirmed the sacred nature of our treaties.

A week ago today the chiefs brought forward a vote of non-confidence in this very House, and it was denied. Because of this, the chiefs have made it clear, and I quote: domestic remedies have been completely exhausted; we therefore will continue efforts at the international arena. End quote. Dr. Chief Wilton Littlechild.

As the Official Opposition our position remains clear: treaty partners must work together on treaty enforcement in a way that advances reconciliation and justice.

Hay-hay. Nanaskamon.

Ivermectin

Mr. Bouchard: Authoritarian, kooky, quackery: Mr. Speaker, three words used by the Leader of the Opposition to describe a 2025 report by Dr. Gary Davidson, a report which recommended doctors be given the ability to prescribe ivermectin in the event of a future pandemic. Yes, I said ivermectin. Ivermectin is proven to be effective as an antiviral medication, a medication that has been used safely for decades and costs less than 30 cents per dose. It's used to treat intestinal infections caused by threadworms and used for other infections, such as head lice, scabies, and river blindness. It's on the World Health Organization's list of essential medicines and is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as an antiparasitic agent.

Yet, quackery was the commentary from the Leader of the Opposition just last year and last month was quoted in a virtual town hall, saying: there you go, folks; ivermectin actually does work for something. Why did he say this? He's using ivermectin. He's using ivermectin, and it sounds like – and I'm glad to hear – it has been successful so far. The same drug that the Leader of the Opposition taunted, teased, and mocked Albertans for using is now a savior drug, his savior drug. Quite the turnaround from the horse paste his colleagues called it. Quackery, Mr. Speaker.

I hope this is a lesson for the three-time mayor and triple-crown Leader of the Opposition. I hope it's a lesson for his caucus. I hope they understand that opinion or quackery is not fact. Data and analysis should be the only guide to commentary on this issue. This medication won a Nobel prize in 2015 for its discovery and application on human beings, not horses, Mr. Speaker, an application the Leader of the Opposition is now realizing works. That is not quackery; that is fact.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, while this UCP government has racked up a \$9.4 billion deficit in the midst of an economic boom, regular Albertans have nothing to show for it. What we do have, shamefully, is an affordability crisis made much worse by a bad case of incompetency and misguided priorities.

For those who drive, for example, car insurance is not a luxury; it's an essential service mandated by law and supposedly regulated by the provincial government. So why is it so unaffordable? This UCP government is not holding up their end of the bargain. They allow extortionate rates for insurance that's often inadequate to cover the costs of an accident, and the rates just keep going up. Fuel costs are rising at a record rate throughout the province, and where's the relief? This UCP government has the ability to make fuel prices more affordable, but instead they just sit on their hands while regular Albertans pay 16 cents more for a litre one day over the next.

1:50

Also, Albertans are struggling to pay their utility bills. We pay some of the highest rates in the country for electricity, and this UCP

government has done absolutely nothing. In fact, by not building more generating capacity and by chasing away renewables, they have destabilized our power grid and increased the threat of blackouts. High energy costs affect the price of food as well. Grocery prices have skyrocketed. Yet, instead of looking for ways to make life more affordable, this UCP government has cut seniors' benefits, leaving thousands of Albertans in a perilous situation.

Life doesn't have to be like this in Alberta. This UCP government is preoccupied with fanning the flames of separatism rather than getting down to work. Albertans work hard; this government does not. Better is possible. Let's get it done together.

Oral Question Period

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

Mr. Nenshi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't get the image of the roller derby rink Legislature out of my head, but we'll keep doing it.

Support for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Nenshi: Today let's start by talking about people with disabilities. This government often talks about how our support in this province for people with disabilities is overly generous. The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed 36 years ago, in 1990. The federal government and all provinces except P.E.I. and Alberta have accessibility legislation, and my colleague from St. Albert has introduced Alberta's first accessibility act. Will the government support this?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that the program that we're putting in place with ADAP is designed exactly to give more support to people with disabilities, to make sure that they have an opportunity to work to the full extent of their abilities and to be able to earn more in doing so while they continue to be supported by our medical benefits program. I know that there are many members of this Legislature who've been very supportive of ensuring that new builds comply and conform with disability standards, and I know that the Infrastructure minister is intending to do that.

Mr. Nenshi: The bill before the House, Mr. Speaker, is not about income support or ADAP. It's about accessibility. It's about basic needs for people with disabilities. In fact, it will improve the ability for people with disabilities to work.

You know, last week we heard from the Premier that our benefits are overly generous for people with disabilities, and now it's, "Oh, we support people with disabilities in everything we do," but the Premier should know that a large number of Albertans living with disabilities live in severe poverty and severe food insecurity. Why does the government treat people with disabilities like this?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, as more individuals seek more opportunities in the workforce, there are going to be more opportunities to also address issues of accessibility. The two things go together. This is part of the reason as well why we're changing the support program. Under the existing program as soon as those who are earning income get to a certain amount, it gets clawed back 50 per cent and then 100 per cent, and it reduces their ability to earn a full market

income. We have a program that's going to allow them to be supported all the way up to earning \$45,000 a year, which will give more opportunity.

Mr. Nenshi: That was an extremely strange answer even by this government's standards. Apparently if people put out their resumé, somehow buildings will become accessible to them without any policy that it has to happen.

Let's be clear. The government is taking money out of people's pockets. They're taking away the \$200 from the Canada disability benefit. Moving from AISH to ADAP takes away another 200 bucks. They are increasing people's rent by at least \$200 per month, and they won't commit to making the province more accessible. Does the Premier really believe people are moving to Alberta to live in poverty under AISH?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those who are on AISH and unable to work will continue to be supported with the highest benefits in the country, hundreds of dollars more than other provinces. In addition, those who want to work and are able to work are going to be able to expand their ability to work without having those dollars clawed back, and those who are able to earn a full market wage are going to be supported by ensuring that we continue to cover their medical benefits. We've got three different opportunities for those with disabilities to ensure that they have full lives and are supported by the government.

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

Mr. Nenshi: The Premier does love magical thinking. Jobs will suddenly appear for a group of people with incredibly high unemployment, despite the government not doing anything to help those jobs happen.

Provincial Fuel Tax

Mr. Nenshi: On a different topic, this weekend the Premier's political hero – no, not the one who got fired from ICE; the other one, the President – was begging other countries to send their young people to Iran because the war is not going as expected. Meanwhile the price of gas hit 157.9 cents in Calgary yesterday, and because of a technicality there's no gas tax relief. Will this government give families gas tax relief?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite knows very well how our fuel price relief program works. If there's a three-month period where the price of oil averages above \$80, we begin to phase out the fuel tax. We've been two weeks into this price surge, and quite frankly we're not sure what the long-term price is going to be. It fluctuates almost daily. I've been looking at the WTI and Brent projections. I would tell you that the long-term price of oil is still expected to average around \$60, and that's what we've got to make sure that we can support our budget on.

Mr. Nenshi: Well, the Premier is correct, Mr. Speaker, in saying that the legislation is poorly drafted. Because of a technicality, the way the gas tax relief is calculated is based on a certain set of dates that, by coincidence – and it really is a coincidence – ended the day the oil price spiked and gas went up 16 cents a litre. Now, that's just a technicality. It's just legislation. The government is getting a huge windfall from this, but families are not getting a windfall as they

pay more at the pumps. What will the government do to actually provide gas tax relief?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a program in place so that it is predictable. When we're dealing with a large number of retailers, they have to know in advance whether or not they need to adjust all of their prices in order to accommodate a lower fuel tax. As I said, we are two weeks into this current crisis. I think we are all hoping that it ends very quickly without a lot of bloodshed and loss of life. We're going to be continuing to watch this. If more needs to be done, we will step up and do more. We had affordability payments when prices got too high. We're going to make sure that we monitor this so that people aren't hurt.

Mr. Nenshi: Those poor, poor gas stations. They have no problem raising the price 16 cents in one day, but they can't possibly reduce it, says the Premier.

This Premier's budget makes everything more expensive, particularly for drivers. The budget is driving up licensing, registration, auto insurance, heck, even speeding fines – not that I know anything about that – and also gas prices. Who knew the Conservatives were the ones waging a war on cars? Will the Premier admit that her government has no affordability plan here?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite may have studied business, but he certainly didn't practise business, because otherwise he'd know that businesses need to have predictability. That's why we have this formula. They submit their taxes to us on a quarterly basis, which is why we have to set these prices on a quarterly basis. We have always stepped in when we've needed to have additional programs. We did reduce the fuel tax. We did give affordability payments. We also put in affordability payments for home heating as well as for electricity. We'll monitor to see if we need to do more.

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

Mr. Nenshi: Businesses need stability, says the Premier of the government that provides more business instability than any government in Alberta's history.

Provincial Referendum Questions

Mr. Nenshi: Now, last week the Premier pretended that there is no separatist referendum question coming despite all the people collecting signatures for it. She only focused on the nine questions that she herself and the government have drafted, but a recent court decision says that one of those is unconstitutional under section 15. Is the Premier removing that question from her list of nine, or is she going to magically make it constitutional?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that the evidence speaks for itself. We just won the World Cup bid for 2028. That shows the stability that we're making for the private sector, which will generate \$375 million worth of revenue. It will also support 43,000 jobs. I can tell you that when you look at our job-creation record compared to the rest of the country, we have seen year over year an increase of 85,000 jobs. The rest of Canada has seen a decrease of 33,200 jobs. We're not afraid of citizen-initiated

referenda or a referendum. We'll ask the people, and we know that they'll make the right choice.

2:00

Mr. Nenshi: Now we understand that businesses need stability and no one represents business better than Gary Bettman and billionaire NHL owners. That's a great economic strategy.

Let's try the real question again. The Premier knows that one of her nine beloved questions has just been ruled unconstitutional. She says that there will be no unconstitutional questions on the ballot, so is she removing that question from her list of nine, or will she somehow magically make that question constitutional? In case the Premier doesn't know, it is the one about making nonpermanent residents pay for government services.

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so pleased that I've had Tourism and Sport ministers who understand the importance of sport and driving the tourism economy, unlike the member opposite, who continues to talk down against some of our big job creators. Forty-three thousand jobs being created and supported by the World Cup bid: that's important, and I'd appreciate it if the member opposite would recognize the importance of sport and tourism rather than continuing to try to chase it away.

Mr. Speaker, we have always said that it is our job to implement any kind of referenda in a way that's constitutional. We want to gauge the support of citizens of Alberta, and once we see the results, then we'll be doing the implementation.

Mr. Nenshi: She got there in the last three seconds, Mr. Speaker. She's admitted again that she won't put unconstitutional questions on the ballot, but she continues to put unconstitutional questions on the ballot. She made it easier for the separatists to be able to get their question forward, but we know that question is unconstitutional. A judge has told us that. We know one of her nine questions is unconstitutional. I'm just asking one last time: if the separatists get their signatures, will the Premier put an unconstitutional question on the ballot, or is this strictly performative and we know nothing will actually happen?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Citizen Initiative Act is meant to be permissive. It's meant to allow for citizens to go out and get a petition campaign and gauge the support from their fellow citizens and, if they get the requisite number of signatures, for it to be put to the people so that we can see whether or not there is support. My job, and I think all of the jobs of everyone in the Legislature, is to make sure that people have hope in Canada again. That is part of the reason why we were so pleased to work with the federal government as well as our municipal counterparts to secure the 2028 World Cup bid so that we can all be cheering for Team Canada.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I'm not surprised. Corrupt care is once again in the news. Today media reports reveal that a former AHS Board member, who was fired by this government after he suggested that the RCMP should be brought in to review serious allegations of bad deals, is now fighting in court to have his privacy restored. This is after he reported being harassed by podcast hosts who have connections to the UCP. Does the Premier worry about the quality of board members her government will be able to recruit when UCP individuals stalk and harass former board members?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. We are definitely taking a trip down memory lane with this line of questioning, but what I can say is that we respected proper processes through the entire process. I'm grateful that the members opposite continue to go through their greatest hits, though they weren't really that great in the first place.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, corrupt care is not a memory; it is littered throughout Budget 2026, and it is costing Albertans money. This former AHS Board member was fired after he suggested that the RCMP should be called in. The former board member was then apparently stalked and harassed by the self-described political hit man who frequents UCP events, who gets quoted by UCP ministers. While the courts will settle all of this, it ties back to the UCP's decision to fire anyone raising concerns about corrupt care. Will the Premier apologize to Albertans for the hundreds of millions of dollars her government wasted and call a public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. Justice minister.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question, but this involves two parties that have nothing to do with government policy, any of the government ministers, or any members of this government caucus. It is a matter before the courts, and the member should know better than to ask questions about matters before the court. We will not be commenting on any matter that is currently being litigated in court.

Ms Gray: But what they will do is come into this Chamber and quote that same podcaster, who is harassing former AHS Board members. This podcaster is connected through his lawyer to Sam Mraiche, the businessman at the centre of Turkish Tylenol, unusable masks and gowns, shady land deals, and bloated surgical contracts. Albertans are sick of the UCP's ties to these people. They are sick of wasted health care dollars. They are sick of ER wait times skyrocketing. Will the Premier finally stop all excuses and call a full public inquiry?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned to the member before, this matter is before the courts. It involves two parties, third parties that have no connection to what is happening in this Assembly. As we've always said before, we will not comment on ongoing cases. That member should know better. We're not going to comment any further on a matter that has nothing to do with this government, its policy, or any of these caucus members.

Accessibility Legislation

Ms Renaud: The new program called ADAP is set to replace AISH for tens of thousands in July. The UCP government says that it isn't a \$200 cut. They call it a positive move because it gives disabled Albertans the ability to work. What they fail to mention is that they don't have pathways for tens of thousands of jobs for people currently labelled severely disabled who are about to be moved off AISH. The disability community and this government's own disability advocate know that any real employment gains will only be made on the back of meaningful accessibility legislation. To the minister: why has this government not passed accessibility legislation?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, to be very clear, ADAP is not replacing AISH despite the Official Opposition continuing to say

that. AISH is legislated by this Chamber. It is the law for individuals who cannot participate in the workplace, so they can receive AISH going forward. What's happening is that ADAP is coming along to support individuals who can participate in the workforce, many of whom would not be eligible for AISH, to make sure they have their support. Some of the other things that we're doing along the way in that area is investing \$268 million in employment supports. Is the Official Opposition going to stand with the disability community who wants to work?

Ms Renaud: Given that Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the Alberta Human Rights Commission, and the UCP's very own disability advocate, Greg McMeekin, have clearly and unequivocally called on this UCP government to pass accessibility legislation, given that Treasury Board and Finance recently released a report to the advocate called contribution of disabled Albertans to the economy, which also supported this legislation, will the minister explain why his government believes they can create opportunities without accessibility legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Alberta will continue to take a thoughtful approach when it comes to accessibility for those with disabilities, and we take a different approach than other provinces, whether it's the work done through the Alberta Human Rights Act or the Safety Codes Council, particularly the Barrier-Free Sub-Council, for accessibility provisions, which were included in 2024 safety codes that were adopted in Alberta. We will also have a working group working with the disability community so that the 2025 building code currently under review continues to incorporate this important group of Albertans in our safety codes.

Ms Renaud: Given that it's clear this UCP government is uninterested in actually creating good-paying jobs for disabled Albertans as they ignore their own experts, given that their own department, Treasury Board and Finance, outlined the benefit to industry and to the community as a whole as removing barriers gives people with disabilities more access to the marketplace both as economic contributors and consumers, given that this government barely understands what we're talking about when we're asking about accessibility legislation – they think we're talking about AISH and ADAP – obviously, we need this legislation today.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's the Official Opposition bringing it up in their preamble, AISH and ADAP. Again, as you just heard from the Minister of Municipal Affairs, work has been done by his department when it comes to accessibility of the building codes. In my ministry we've also done work when it comes to making sure that we have accessible housing in all of our builds. We exceed all of our standards and the number of accessible houses that must be built inside affordable housing, and we're also investing unprecedented amounts in supporting the disability community in participating in the workforce. Unfortunately, the Official Opposition doesn't seem to care about it. They're late to the party, but we're going to keep getting it done.

2:10 World Cup of Hockey 2028

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, have you heard the news? Alberta has won the bid to host the NHL's 2028 World Cup of Hockey. This is one of the world's premier best-on-best tournaments, where the most talented hockey players on earth will compete for gold. This will be

the largest international sporting event hosted in Alberta since the 1988 Olympics. Can the Minister of Tourism and Sport please share how Alberta won this bid for the 2028 World Cup of Hockey?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Sport.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for such a great question. What an amazing announcement today. We have competed against various North America destinations for this event, including Las Vegas, New York. Our amazing Premier brought together Team Alberta to win the bid, including our partners at Explore Edmonton, Tourism Calgary, the Oilers, and the Flames. With our proven track record of hosting successful major sports events, our world-class venues, and unmatched passion for hockey, Alberta was the right choice to host the World Cup of Hockey.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that the World Cup of Hockey will bring thousands of fans, players, and media from around the world to Alberta and given that our government's bold plan to grow Alberta's visitor economy and strengthen our reputation as a world-class tourism destination is working and further given that our government is committed to creating jobs and economic prosperity for Albertans, can the same minister please share how the World Cup of Hockey is anticipated to benefit Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Sport.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for another great question. The World Cup of Hockey is expected to create more than 42,000 jobs in Alberta and boost Alberta's economy by more than \$375 million. Thousands of athletes and fans will shop, dine, stay right here in Alberta, creating opportunities and prosperity for local businesses and our communities. Hosting the World Cup of Hockey will showcase Alberta's passion and hospitality on the international stage, strengthening our reputation as a world-class . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a lot of money and a lot of jobs.

Given that few places in the world live and breathe hockey the way Alberta does and given that playing in such a prestigious international hockey tournament is something that many young Albertans dream of and further given that over the next two years Alberta will host both the 2028 NHL World Cup of Hockey and the 2027 World Junior Championship, to the same minister: what is Alberta's government doing to support the next generation of Alberta athletes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under our amazing Premier our government is committed to creating opportunities for young Albertans and their families to get active and participate in the sport that they love. By hosting the World Cup of Hockey, including the youth hockey programming that comes with it, we are creating unforgettable experiences that inspire next generations of Albertan athletes. That is why our government continues to invest over \$8 million in the every kid can play program, helping make sports more affordable for young Albertans in our province.

Hospital Emergency Services

Ms Hoffman: On December 22 a young father of three died in an Edmonton emergency department after waiting eight hours for care. His family spoke about the horrible death, calling on the government to act. It took 24 days for the Premier or any of her health ministers to respond publicly. When they finally did, they made only one promise. They said that they'd hired triage liaison physicians and have them working by February 1, but they haven't. Why did the health minister break his promise?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of hospitals.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I'd like to again extend our deepest condolences to the family and friends of Mr. Sreekumar. The recently released quality assurance review, which was one of the reviews that were conducted after this adverse event, provides 16 recommendations for system-wide improvements at both the Grey Nuns site specifically but also system-wide. These recommendations are already being implemented at the site and across our acute-care system. In addition, the judge-led, independent, and public fatality inquiry has now been booked. It's scheduled for October 19 to 23 and December 14 to 18.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Given that last week that report on the same tragedy was finally released and hiring triage physicians was one of the 16 recommendations and an additional one and a key one was building desperately needed hospital spaces in Edmonton but given that the UCP's capital plan and budget show no construction money for any spaces in Edmonton and given that had the UCP followed through on the planned south Edmonton hospital, it would be open now, will the UCP recognize this crisis was avoidable and stop trying to privatize our health care and just fund the south Edmonton hospital already?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's not accurate. We also have money in the budget, over \$60 million, to develop shelled and vacant space. We're also looking at decanting spaces in hospitals so that we can backfill it with acute-care space. We've already committed to expanding the Grey Nuns and Misericordia hospitals with two bed towers. Each would be about a 350 bed net increase. We've also announced a stand-alone Stollery, and we'll continue to build projects that will support the acute-care needs of Edmontonians and Albertans broadly as we know this region cares for about 2 million, 2 and a half million people in northern Alberta.

Ms Hoffman: Given that there is no construction money for the projects the minister keeps talking about and given that Alberta medical students are here today in the gallery – they care about emergency departments; they care about our hospitals – and the minister declined meeting with them and given that they have five recommendations, including increasing multidisciplinary teams in hospitals so that patients can get the care that they need when and where they need it, will the minister take even five minutes, meet with these medical students immediately following question period – I'll get us a table in the basement – and hear the rest of their recommendations?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some other highlights that I'd like to make out of the quality assurance review: there were 16 of them. One of those recommendations, number 12, was to address

the alternate level of care burden on our hospitals. At any given time 1,200 people are in hospital beds when they should be in alternative care settings. Through collaborative work between ALA and Acute Care Alberta we've successfully reduced the number of alternate level of care patients by 20 per cent across hospitals, even higher in Edmonton. This frees up hospital capacity so our EDs can flow better and patients get better care.

Auditor General Investigation of Government Property Acquisitions

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, last week in committee I asked the Infrastructure minister about an *Edmonton Journal* article. It states that the Auditor General and the department were in mediation with the Privacy Commissioner over documents related to the government's real estate deal with Sam Mraiche for land beside the Muriel Stanley Venne building. The minister and his deputy both said that they were unaware of that mediation, and the deputy promised to follow up with the Auditor General that week. Did the deputy follow up, and will the minister confirm that all requested documents have now been released to the Auditor General?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question and for his diligence in Committee of Supply. I really appreciate that. Yeah. As everyone knows, last year there was a property transaction that happened. We have been working with the Auditor General's office on that file and other files, and as of last week my deputy minister has confirmed that the office of the Auditor General has received all requested files.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that in that same meeting I asked the minister about an internal review of government real estate transactions ordered by the previous minister, given the minister confirmed that his department reviewed five years of transactions ending in March 2025 and given that Albertans deserve transparency about how public land deals are handled, will the minister release the results of that internal review and table all related documents so that Albertans can see exactly what the department found?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member pointed out, the former minister did request an audit of eight acquisition transactions last year. My department has done an internal audit. We will continue to ensure that we are compliant with all legislation that applies to property transactions along with our property construction legislation. With that, we will continue to work with the office of the Auditor General to ensure that we have their expectations met as well.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that sounds like the minister is refusing to release the results of that internal review and given that in committee the minister also confirmed that the Auditor General's investigation into the Sam Mraiche land deal has expanded beyond that single purchase and now includes eight government acquisitions, will the minister tell this House which eight transactions are being investigated by the Auditor General and why?

2:20

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah, the office of the Auditor General has accepted responsibility to audit eight additional acquisitions from February 19, 2023, through to February 18, 2025.

Those were the transactions that were completed during the time that the former minister had suggested that we should be reviewing the transactions. We're thankful to the office of the Auditor General for their diligence in reviewing these files.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My riding of Leduc-Beaumont is growing at an unprecedented rate. More and more families from across the country are moving to the area, demanding a stable supply of housing to support the local economy, workforce, and quality of life. Can the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services please explain how Alberta's record-breaking housing starts in 2025 are ensuring home ownership remains an attainable goal for families in growing communities like Leduc and Beaumont?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of assisted living.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. Alberta broke records again for two years in a row. We're the only jurisdiction anywhere in Canada where we see homes growing at the rate that we see taking place because we bet on our industry. We're now responsible for 80 per cent of all housing starts on the prairies, 14 per cent in the country. We're only 12 per cent of the population. We did that because we ignored the NDP and did the opposite, which ended up making sure that we had these great, record results. Here's the great news: six of the 10 most affordable jurisdictions are in this province. The two most affordable large cities are in this province. I've got lots more to say in the next question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for sharing that good news. Given that housing growth depends on reducing red tape, partnering with municipalities, and supporting builders so new homes can be built faster and more efficiently across our growing regions and given that this government has continued to show its commitment to reducing red tape and barriers to investment, can the same minister please share what this government has done to make it easier to build affordable homes and break housing construction records year after year?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we ignored the Official Opposition Leader, who increased taxes by 82 per cent when he was the mayor. Instead, we went forward with removing things like GST from new home builds, creating a very tax-friendly environment for those who want to invest in affordable housing. We're also investing \$9 billion with our partners to make 82,000 more affordable households all across our province. Again, though, the biggest thing that we did was remove red tape, ignore the NDP suggestion of socialist rent control, and let our industry do the job. That's why rent is coming down more than twice the national average inside our province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lundy: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that this government is not just building homes but building entire communities and given that families rely on access to seniors supports, assisted living, and community services as neighbourhoods continue to grow, can the same minister please explain how this government is making sure our record-breaking

housing growth is supported by the services that families and seniors need in fast-growing areas like Leduc and Beaumont?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, assuming the budget passes, this ministry is going to invest just over \$12 billion in supports all across the spectrum to be able to make sure that investments like in our housing programs are also going to make sure they have the support programs that are in place. We also worked with the Minister of Finance to be able to come up with a new labour deal for all of our sector, which this budget fully funds, to make sure that we have the staff that we need inside the buildings that we need to be able to take care of. We're investing \$6.6 billion to keep care of our seniors alone in this province. We'll see if the NDP vote against that like they always do.

Immigration Policies

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, let's make some things clear. Immigrants didn't create a \$9 billion deficit; this Premier did. Immigrants didn't collapse the health care system; this Premier did. Immigrants didn't fail to build schools or choose not to invest in teachers; this Premier did. When will this Premier take responsibility for her failures and stop blaming newcomers?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's make things clear. Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government absolutely destroyed our immigration system. Let's also make things clear that while the NDP was in government, people were fleeing the province looking for jobs and opportunity because there was nothing here when they were driving investment out. Let's also make things clear that while in government the NDP raised taxes at an unprecedented rate, putting incredible pressure on homeowners, on citizens, making it difficult for youth to find their first jobs. Let's make one thing clear. Under the NDP Alberta was not the place to be. Under the UCP we're attracting people from all over. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sabir: Given that this Premier complained about the Trudeau government's cuts to immigration, given that the Premier posted that she wanted to double Alberta's population and increase the population of Red Deer by 900 per cent but given that now she's trying to blame the newcomers to Alberta for her government's failures, can the Premier explain why she's attacking immigration after she spent public money inviting people to move to this province?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we're addressing as a government, under the leadership of the Premier, is to take more control over Alberta's immigration system, focusing specifically on economic immigration to fill the gaps in the labour market where necessary as we attract billions of dollars of investment right here to Alberta. Alberta is winning. Alberta is doing very well, but we have to make sure that we do it in a way that the growth is sustainable, that we can keep up with education, health care, infrastructure, and all the things that are important to Albertans who live here and want to thrive here.

Mr. Sabir: Given that we are seeing an increase in hate crimes and violence against immigrants and cultural communities and given that this Premier has shown hypocrisy in complaining that immigration was first cut and then complaining that it wasn't cut

fast enough, instead of wasting even more public money on divisive referendum questions, will the Premier call an election now?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I am almost without words that the members opposite, including the Member for Edmonton-City Centre and now the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, would somehow equate the actions of the government of Alberta looking to take more control over the immigration system, correlate that with the increase in hate crimes and violence. That is disgusting. That is absolutely repugnant, and I'm shocked that the members opposite and the Leader of the Opposition would allow this kind of question to take place in this Chamber. We take violence in the streets very seriously, and we're grateful to the minister of public safety for his diligent work to help control it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Highway 40X Bypass

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Grande Prairie is a fast-growing region, and with this welcome growth comes increased traffic flows, especially from heavy trucks, that are straining our transportation corridors. The proposed highway 40X bypass connecting highway 43 and highway 40 will support economic development and commercial activities now and into the future through a better integrated transportation network. Can the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors please tell the Assembly of what progress has been made towards the construction funding for this highway 40 bypass project?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for his great advocacy for 40X. It's a very important project. It was actually just last December that there was an open house in Grande Prairie with the county of Grande Prairie as well as the city, himself that was there advocating for the important work of this project. I'm happy to say that we've hired ISL Engineering to do the detailed design work and to buy the required land along the project to make sure that we can get it built. With his continued advocacy I'm sure we can continue on with the great progress that we're having on this very important project.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that Grande Prairie is home to some of the hardest working people in our province and further given that the transportation infrastructure projects often support economic growth and employment opportunities across the province, can the same minister outline how the highway 40X bypass will help create jobs and support economic activity in the Grande Prairie region and throughout northwestern Alberta?

The Speaker: The minister.

2:30

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The 40X bypass, for members maybe in the opposition that aren't familiar with Grande Prairie: it essentially will have a ring road that will go around Grande Prairie. Right now you have big, heavy truck traffic that goes right through downtown Grande Prairie. Obviously, rural Alberta is very important to the economic engine of this province, and to be able to have this big, heavy truck traffic that's very

important for our economy to be able to safely go around Grande Prairie makes not just economic sense for the businesses and the resource industry in northern Alberta but also for the people living in Grande Prairie. Overall, it's a great project, and I'm happy to see it continue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that increased volumes of traffic, especially from heavy trucks, can place pressure on existing transportation corridors in the Grande Prairie region and further given that with increased traffic comes increased risk of safety, can the same minister outline how highway 40X bypass will improve road safety, helping to ensure that both commercial drivers and residential traffic can be moved more safely and efficiently?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Dreeshen: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, obviously, this government knows how to co-ordinate with municipalities to get projects not just designed but also completed.

This government knows how to build a team, Mr. Speaker, to get things done, unlike the NDP leader whose team keeps leaving him. First it was Gil McGowan; then it was Max Fawcett. Now we're hearing that his campaign director, Michael Burton, just left. I wonder if it maybe takes a new NDP leader to finally stop this NDP exodus that just seems to be leaving them. The previous member just talked about wanting to have an election. Kind of hard to do that without a campaign director.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Alberta Separatism and Economic Development

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce survey shows 87 per cent of Albertans say that separatism talk negatively impacts their businesses. When the local economy is suffering and people are worried about what impacts it will have on their jobs, this brings real pain to workers, families, and communities across our province. Will the Premier admit this dangerous separatist rhetoric is damaging our economy, or will she keep ignoring these clear warnings from Albertans?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite, what we will not ignore are the people of Alberta and letting them have a say in what happens in this province on important matters. What I can tell you is that Alberta year over year has created 85,000 new jobs in this province, a testament to the work that we've done to attract investment and to educate a workforce to make sure that we can meet the demands of the new manufacturing facilities and business expansion. Alberta is doing very well while the rest of the country is just trying to keep up.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Given that this is not the first view of Albertans this government ignores given that the majority of Albertans have said no to coal mines, no to RCMP changes, no to taking Alberta out of the Canada pension plan, given the UCP ignored every voice every time and given that now 87 per cent say that the separatism conversation is negatively impacting their businesses, for how long will this minister ignore the voices of these businesses?

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, we'll have to forgive the member opposite. He wasn't here at the time, but he does forget to mention that Albertans also said no to the NDP two times in a row, making

them the first one-term government in the history of the province. That's not a record that I'd want to have.

The member opposite said in a member's statement today that Alberta is not building more capacity for generation. Mr. Speaker, this is the same party that phased out coal far too fast, costing Albertans \$4 billion. Seven years since they've been out of government, and we're still cleaning up their mess. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. We only want to hear from the hon. member right now.

Mr. Gurtej Brar: Given that this UCP government never heard, acknowledged, or addressed Albertans' concern and given that this government is now blaming immigrants for all the problems that this government created, I will give them another chance today to rebuild trust. Will the Premier finally listen, oppose separatism, and stop letting fear chase away jobs and hope of Albertans?

The Speaker: The House leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only thing that chases away Albertans is the prospect of another NDP government, led by the Leader of the Opposition. What I can tell you is that right here in Alberta year over year we've created 85,000 jobs. Year over year that's also over 60 per cent of all the jobs created in the entire country. That is a win. The members opposite should be spiking the football with us and saying, "Hey, we're doing a great job," and applaud the Premier and ministers on the front bench and the government caucus for all their tremendous work to attract investment, investment that they drove away.

Access to Diagnostic Health Services

Dr. Metz: This UCP government continues to spend so much to deliver so little. Instead of increasing public system capacity for diagnostic tests, they will now offer Albertans heavily marketed tests, like whole-body MRIs, that have no value, but the follow-ups will cost the public system nearly \$1 million annually even if each private MRI scans just one person daily, and that's only one test. Additional costs caused by excess testing won't get to the root of Albertans' health woes. Will the minister stop this nonsense now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to say that we are a government that is looking to make sure that we allow Albertans to have choice and to improve the overall health care system. One thing that is going to improve the overall health care system is the fact that we have more doctors in this province than ever before, record investment of \$7.7 billion in our medical physicians. To the medical residents: it's never been a better time to be a medical resident in Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Dr. Metz: Given that after seven years of the UCP imaging wait-lists are longer than ever and self-ordering unnecessary tests will make waits longer and given that countries that permit patients to self-order diagnostics lose workers to the private system and given that Albertans will have an imaging professional deficit of over 500 people by 2030 and given that wait-lists for MRI and CT are growing because of limited technologists, preventing further hours of scanning, how will the minister manage longer wait-lists due to this poorly thought out plan?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the members opposite are in fact criticizing when we haven't even brought forward the legislation or the regulations. We are still in the consultation mode. We want to make sure that we have the proper guardrails in place. We want to make sure that we have done the deep dive into making sure that we are learning from other jurisdictions that have this in place. We're looking to Europe, where they have many of the things that we are looking for: dual practice, having the ability to manage your own health care. Albertans deserve that.

Dr. Metz: Given that medical lab quality standards require that only regulated providers order lab tests, which reduces the risk of inappropriate tests and assures follow-up, and given that only in the United States, where self-ordering is allowed, are individuals unprotected from false marketing and given these private tests waste public dollars better spent clearing the backlogs created by UCP bad choices, why is this government wasting public dollars on test follow-ups, placing Albertans in the path of unscrupulous influencers and risking . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister of health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the member opposite is fearmongering before we even bring forward any legislation and/or documentation.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: There's no point creating fear in the public when, in fact, we are still in the engagement process, but I look forward to bringing forward that legislation and/or regulations in the near future. We look to other jurisdictions like Singapore, like Tokyo, like South Korea, where these scans are available and are benefiting people.

The Speaker: The next question belongs to the hon. Member for . . . [interjection] Order.

Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Community Grant Programs

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, community organizations play a key role in bringing people together, creating jobs, and strengthening neighbourhoods. By investing in these initiatives, we are helping build stronger connections and a higher quality of life for all Albertans. Could the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women please tell us how grant programs like the community facility enhancement program and investing in Canada infrastructure program contribute to a stronger Alberta and how they improve long-term provincial success like we have seen in my riding with our contribution to the Irma Agricultural Society?

2:40

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2:39.

Now we're going to hear the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2019 our government has awarded nearly 5,700 grants to nonprofits across Alberta, delivering real, long-term results, strengthening communities, and improving Albertans' quality of life for generations to come, including last year in the member's own constituency with nearly \$57,000 through CIP, the community initiatives program, for Armor of Light Recovery Society's launch of the empower her initiative in Wainwright, supporting women navigating addiction, violence, and recovery, and, as the member mentioned as well, the

Irma Agricultural Society for the community livestock pavilion and learning centre.

Mr. Rowswell: Given that provincial investment boosts additional support from donors and partners and given that rural communities often face unique challenges in supporting community programs and further given that investments in community programs often represent one of the few capital sources available to them, to the same minister: how does the provincial funding specifically impact rural Alberta, and why is it so important to continue to invest in projects that deliver measurable social benefits across the province?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, this government knows that community organizations are at the heart of strong and thriving rural communities, which is why we invested \$64 million through CIP and CFEP last year. To date nearly \$21 million of this investment has supported nearly 135 rural organizations across our province through CFEP alone, and we know every \$1 invested through these programs results in an additional \$3 investment from other sources directly back into our communities. By investing in rural projects and nonprofits, we're strengthening local businesses, creating local jobs, and enhancing local services in every corner of our province.

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, given that demand for community grant funding remains high among organizations in rural communities and given that our government continues to support projects that focus on enabling community engagement through expanded programming for facility improvements, can the same minister please tell us what rural communities can expect moving forward when it comes to ongoing support for the programs that keep Alberta towns the best place to live, work, and raise a family?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to supporting Alberta's rural communities. If passed, Budget 2026 invests \$70 million to continue supporting our nonprofit organizations and enriching communities with enhanced programming, new facilities, community events, and more. Through this investment we will continue delivering results, supporting the nonprofit sector, and supporting the community grants that improve lives, create more jobs, and stimulate local investment in all of Alberta. This is in addition to the countless other grants and programs offered across our government to ensure rural Alberta continues to grow and drive Alberta's social, cultural, and economic success.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent of this Chamber to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: I'm waiting for somebody to stand. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to introduce five outstanding medical students from the University of Calgary: Sanskruti Patel, Oreoluwapo Maxwell, Ben Shi, Keshikaa Suthaaharan, and Haleema Yousuf. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce Vice-president Shamanthi Cooray. She ran five times to be vice-president of AUPE, a story of tenaciousness, perseverance, and never giving up, and she won. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

Ms Hayter: Mr. Speaker, through you I am thrilled to introduce you to Jen, my office manager. So grateful, Jen, for everything you do and being part of my team and all the support you provide myself and the hard work you do for Calgary-Edgemont constituents. So excited to ask Jen Borggard to please rise and receive the well-deserved warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From my old alma mater, University of Calgary, I have five medical students to introduce: Parth Patel, Sirui Li, Priya Patel, Shivgeet Sandhu, and – I apologize ahead of time – Inioluwa Adeboye. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

Access to Diagnostic Health Services

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, health care is one of the most important services delivered by our government. All Albertans will interact with the health care system at some point in their lives, and it's critical that our citizens receive high-quality care. One of the key components of effective health care is proper access to diagnostic imaging technologies like MRI machines and CT scanners. These are allowing our highly trained health care workers to properly diagnose and treat a wide variety of illnesses and injuries.

In my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul this does not mean that we are not seeing the same level of skills that I would hope that we would see these tools coming in with. This has forced many of our local residents in the lakeland to travel to Edmonton to access these wonderful services. Not only does this leave our residents with long travel times at risky times of the year, but it also puts additional strain on urban facilities that already have high pressure. The establishment of permanent diagnostic imaging facilities in the lakeland would be a game changer and dramatically improve the quality and quantity of health care in the region. With the catchment area of over 73,000 people there's more than enough demand to sustain a need for additional imaging technology, Mr. Speaker.

I have been listening to my constituents, and they have all agreed that health care is the highest priority for our region. While it is indeed a tough fiscal year for the province, it is important that we strive to deliver core services as effectively as possible. It is also important for our region and our province as a whole to have the best health care in all corners of this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta Separatism and Economic Development

Ms Goehring: Last year I rose to speak on the importance of supporting Team Canada in the wake of Trump's tariffs. Today it is more important than ever for us to stand together with our fellow Canadians as this government continuously fails to denounce separatism.

As the shadow minister of Tourism and Sport and the military liaison I've seen first-hand the positive impact our national identity has for our local athletes, tourism industry, and the military community. It's a privilege to witness the incredible achievements of Alberta athletes representing our nation on the global stage and the beautiful landscapes and tourism attractions that bring so many tourists to Canada.

This government, however, is failing to invest in our tourism and sport communities. Not only has the government failed to invest in its most successful industries, but it's actively scaring away investors and creating an environment of instability by refusing to denounce the growing separatist narrative in this province. This government's continuing pandering to a minority of Albertans is irresponsible. They created a deficit and now refuse to step up, join Team Canada, and secure stable investments for Albertans.

Every member of this House should be able to stand for our country, but as we saw last week, that is not the case. It is absolutely unacceptable, for instance, that the UCP Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul will not outright oppose separatism. His riding is home to 4 Wing Cold Lake, the busiest fighter base of the Canadian Armed Forces and one of four bases in Alberta that employ thousands of Albertans that defend our country.

Alberta New Democrats stand with Team Canada and will continue to work with all levels of government to ensure that Albertans can thrive.

Thank you.

2:50 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so excited. Two tablings today. First is that Canada's mixed relay team took fifth at the Winter Paralympics featuring Natalie Wilkie, a Canmore athlete. Natalie just crushed the Paralympics, winning so many medals. There's an article there about her taking four medals at the Paralympics. Congratulations to all of our athletes.

The Speaker: Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of an e-mail sent to the minister by a health professional talking about the experiences of patients, including his cancer patient, and asking for a full review of the corrupt care scandal.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Rutherford.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of the press release from the confederacy of treaty chiefs where the chiefs go to meet with King Charles III.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the five requested copies of an article outlining the problematic nature of the referendum questions and how they may exacerbate discrimination.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of tablings of an article from RBC, Seeding Scale: Addressing Canada's Agri-food Growth Capital Gap.

The Speaker: Edmonton-West Henday.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of a letter from 2SLGBTQQIA+ National Committee urging the UCP to move beyond rhetoric and act with urgency, accountability, and cultural humility for the safety, dignity, and inherent rights of Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA-plus peoples.

The Speaker: Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter of a five-point action plan to help to have more timely access to emergency care. We have members of the Calgary Medical Students Association and the Alberta university . . .

The Speaker: Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the requisite copies, I have two tablings today. The first is an e-mail from Victor Do, a constituent physician who is expressing his opposition to the privatization of health care by this government.

The second is from Trish, Tay, and Tob Olenek, who are deeply concerned about the unacceptable conditions in our emergency rooms experienced by a family member.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings today. The first is an e-mail dated February 21 from a constituent of mine who wants the Premier to be aware of the contributions his wife as a permanent resident has made to this province.

Then I have five copies of an e-mail dated February 21 from an individual who would like the Premier and the UCP government to stop blaming immigration for their challenges.

The next is an e-mail dated February 21 from an individual from another riding who says that they oppose the UCP's referendum questions and ask how much it will cost.

The fourth is an e-mail dated February 20 from a constituent of mine who questions the mandate of the Premier to call the referendum on the questions that the Premier has called them on.

The fifth is an e-mail dated February 20 from an individual who would like the Premier to be reminded that this province was built by immigrants.

The Speaker: Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with two tablings. I have the requisite copies. First, a news release from the town of Mayerthorpe raising the alarm about a 320 per cent policing costs under the UCP's new police funding model.

Secondly, an information report from the town of Jasper raising their own concerns about the more than doubling of their costs under the UCP's police funding model.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a very heartfelt letter here from somebody who is a breast cancer survivor talking about their experiences with treatment in 2019 and also a friend who's going through treatment right now and how much worse it has gotten in that short period of time.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an article in the *Edmonton Journal* entitled Homeless Agency

Loses Housing Support Funding, and I urge all members of this Chamber to read this critical article.

The Speaker: Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an editorial published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* by doctors McRae and Lang from Calgary, Privately Paid, Direct-to-consumer Diagnostic Testing: Let the Buyer Beware.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an e-mail from a constituent from March 12 indicating her concerns about the steep cuts to the eligibility criteria for the income thresholds.

I have a second e-mail, also from a constituent, asking why the budget is being balanced on the backs of seniors.

The Speaker: Calgary-Foothills.

Member Ellingson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite copies of letters from three constituents from across the province, letters to the Premier opposing the changes to the health care system in Bill 11.

The Speaker: Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you. Two tablings, Mr. Speaker. Eleven letters from recent dates from supporters of the three defunded provincial heritage organizations.

The second tabling is a March 9 op-ed in the *Edmonton Journal* by Lorien Johansen titled Cutting Historical Society Funding Will Hurt Alberta Tourism.

The Speaker: St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter from the mayor of Edmonton to the minister responsible for AISH urging them to pause implementation and the recent changes to AISH and ADAP.

The Speaker: Edmonton-McClung

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings concerning Red Deer officials raising their concerns about the highway 2 realignment, which will damage the wetlands.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, related to this, Highway 2 Expansion through Red Deer Wetland Prompts Conservation Concerns as a CBC article prompted by a conservationist concerned about losing the wetland due to the highway 2.

The Speaker: Seeing no more – oh. Pardon. Under the wire, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Apologies, Mr. Speaker. I was just waiting until others got through. I'm tabling five copies of a CBC article just related to tougher provincial rules for governing daycares related to last week.

The Speaker: Thank you. Seeing no more tablings.

Okay. We're at points of order. There's one today at about 2:39 p.m. from the hon. Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At 2:39 p.m. the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services was

responding to the Member for Calgary-Varsity, and we rose to do a point of order under 23(h), (i), (j), makes allegations against another member, imputing false or unavowed motives to another member, and uses abusive or insulting language likely to cause disorder. Specifically, the language used at that time was "the member opposite is fearmongering." Counter to the practices of this House, language around fearmongering has been ruled out of order since it was first used in 2006 in a point of order. I believe this was unparliamentary and would ask the member to apologize and/or it to be ruled a point of order.

The Speaker: The minister of health.

Member LaGrange: I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Well, that was clean and the way it should be. Thank you very much, and that concludes that matter.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 206 Accessible Alberta Act

Ms Renaud: For decades the Alberta disability community has been pushing for accessibility legislation, and I'm so grateful that my caucus and I could facilitate the introduction of private member Bill 206, Accessible Alberta Act. In plain language, if this bill is passed, it will enable the creation of a plan for government to work beside experts to develop accessibility standards that will identify, remove, and prevent barriers for disabled people. Alberta disability services and protections are currently based in on an intersecting patchwork of legislation that are really antiques. They no longer address today's challenges and opportunity.

The legislative need for an accessibility act was articulated by this government's own disability advocate recommendations in 2025, and I did table that document. Let me read you a short quote from page 20 of the disability advocate's report.

Taking a proactive approach to [disability] and accommodation through legislation would help improve the lives of those with disabilities in all aspects of life, from the built environment to employment. An Accessible Alberta Act. . . would provide clear directions to government departments and industry partners.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, this was from 2025. Before this government decided to roll out a revolutionary new employment program, their disability advocate released a report saying very plainly: employment needs access. So knowing accessibility legislation would help, because we know that the minister read this report, instead, the minister hid this report and chose not to share it with the public and chose not to share it in this House.

3:00

Now, every province except P.E.I. and Alberta has passed accessibility legislation, some as old as 1978, which is Quebec, La Belle Province, with the newest being Saskatchewan and New Brunswick in 2023. Like the Accessible Canada Act, the Accessible Alberta Act aims to remove, identify, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities in the built environment, employment, procurement, transportation, housing, government services, and information technology and communication.

We already have human rights legislation, some would say. Alberta human rights protect individuals from discrimination in multiple areas like accessibility legislation would. However, the act is reactionary and doesn't create a duty to accommodate unless a complaint is filed, and that's an important point. As noted in the disability advocate's report on page 19,

Accessibility legislation is different from human rights legislation, although both play important and complementary roles. Accessibility legislation, while grounded in human rights policy, would take a broader and more proactive approach to [access].

The Alberta Human Rights Commission annual report 2021 also noted support for the accessibility legislation as proposed activities align with the broader advocacy efforts in Alberta calling for enforceable accessibility standards similar to the laws adopted in most other provinces.

Now, using available data from the Alberta Human Rights Commission annual report, we can estimate that the average number of complaints involving disability, both physical and mental, is between 45 and 50 per cent of the total complaints year after year after year. Across reports disability has consistently been the most cited grounds in Alberta human rights complaints, more proof that this accessibility legislation is essential.

Now, the federal legislation, Accessible Canada Act, was the model for the Accessible Alberta Act, as it was for B.C., Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, which passed similar legislation after the federal government passed the ACA. The ACA was created in response to our obligations under the United Nations convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. The UNCRPD – that's a mouthful – is a thorough document that includes articles about accessibility. Now, while this document was ratified by the Canadian government, it requires federal and provincial governments to enact implementing legislation, and Alberta has failed to do that. Passing the Accessible Alberta Act would help meet Alberta's responsibilities, and I want to remind everyone that this important document is a recognition of the inherent dignity of people with disabilities and enshrining the principle of Nothing about Us without Us, meaning all decisions affecting people with disabilities must be based on active engagement and consultation, not a ridiculous online survey that is a box-checking exercise.

Now, if you go to page 32 of the disability advocate's recommendations to the minister, which he promptly sat on and hid, you will note that the office of the disability advocate's key undertaking was "to understand the potential economic impact of adopting accessibility legislation in Alberta." To do so, the disability advocate's office approached Treasury Board and Finance, which in turn produced a report called contribution of disabled Albertans to the Alberta economy. What was interesting to read was that Treasury Board and Finance identified as a barrier that there was insufficient data. We already knew that, Madam Speaker, because this government doesn't keep records about, let's say, how many apprentice seats are filled by people with disabilities, how many people finishing postsecondary education are employed a year later. We have nothing. We have no data.

We heard the Treasury Board say that there was insufficient data available to comprehensively access the direct economic impact of accessibility legislation, so the TBF analysis was shifted to the economic contributions of workers with disabilities in the province and the potential economic gain if all Albertans with disabilities who had the potential to work obtained employment. Well, now we know where the minister's half-baked comments come from about the need for ADAP. They missed an important piece. Yes, there is a large economic gain to be had by all people involved, but you

need accessibility to get there. Insufficient or hidden data is what defines the decisions this UCP government is making in terms of disability services, and that needs to change.

TBF also reminded us that disabled workers already make significant contributions to our economy, creating half a million jobs, generating \$29 million in employment income, and adding \$48 million to our GDP. Now, Treasury Board and Finance noted that greater accessibility has the potential to increase education and employment opportunities, which may lead to higher incomes and greater GDP gains. This report further revealed that disabled people not currently working but who have the potential to work could have significant economic impact by contributing an additional \$14 billion to Alberta's economy, \$8.5 billion in additional labour income, and creating an additional 158,000 jobs. TBF noted that industry would economically benefit from increased accessibility by growing their customer base at home and in the global market.

A recent study estimated that the benefits of a more accessible Canada could range from \$252 billion to \$422 billion in a reference year. To further illustrate this point, I encourage all members to check out the Alberta Chambers of Commerce policy recommendation 2025, which calls for an accessible Alberta act. Joining the larger provincial chamber organizations are chambers from St. Albert, Airdrie, Sherwood Park, Fort McMurray, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Edmonton, and, of course, Calgary. Across the chamber of commerce network accessibility legislation is promoted by similar statements of support from communities all across the province. All of these business-representing organizations emphasize themes of improving economic participation, increased consumer spending, talent attraction, and expanding labour supply, and of course they point to the clarity of standards, which facilitates progress.

Now, the UCP-appointed disability advocate completed his accessibility legislation recommendations to government in a report titled the same in 2025. We need accessibility legislation now. In his own words, "The risk of not addressing accessibility now is far greater than waiting for a future opportunity." That's unequivocal. The Alberta disability community has been pushing for this legislation for decades. In fact, accessibility legislation was the central pillar of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, first created in the 1980s. The 1980s. That's over 40 years ago. Forty-plus years later we've got a council focused on giving inclusion awards, not access.

Alberta has a patchwork of complex disability-related legislation and regulation where too many Albertans are left behind. Take this place. ASL is only available during question period, so anyone who is deaf cannot participate in this debate. Alberta chambers have clearly outlined their support for the Accessible Alberta Act, and they understand the benefits. This government claims to want to improve unemployment realities for people with disabilities, but they refuse to listen to something or pass something that will actually make that a reality. The Alberta disability assistance program, without proper accessibility, is just a cost-cutting exercise disguised as help.

Alberta New Democrats listened to Albertans. We spent the last almost two years listening to Albertans about this legislation. We've been listening to them all. We listen to economic and subject experts. We rely on data, science, and lived experience. We know accessibility legislation is essential for our province's economy and well-being.

The Deputy Speaker: My apologies, hon. member. I may have missed it, but can you just move second reading for me?

Ms Renaud: Yes. I'm sorry.

I move second reading of private member Bill 206.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you so much to that Member for St. Albert. I remain in awe of her and her advocacy daily. [interjections] Yeah. Speaking of remaining very much in awe, I look up at the folks in the gallery, who among them – I won't name them all because there are many – are amazing advocates for the disabled community, and I know there are quite a few watching at home as well. Thank you.

You know, when people are critical of us and they say, "What's the Alberta NDP actually offering?" I want them to think about days like today. Days like today. Here we are offering concrete policy, a piece of legislation that would tangibly improve the lives of Albertans, something that somehow nearly every other province across Canada has agreed is critical, and that's accessibility legislation.

3:10

Yet here we are. Alberta refuses to even acknowledge the need. They refuse to even consider legislation that would not only help disabled Albertans but all of us. It's clear that when we uplift members of our community, when we uplift one group, we all benefit. Yet instead of, you know, agreeing to engage in healthy, considerate debate, the UCP and the minister responsible will ridicule, will refuse to accept and acknowledge the lived experiences of disabled Albertans, and that's wrong. For all of you watching in the gallery and watching at home: you deserve better. It seems, from his prior remarks in question period, that this government is not going to be supporting our legislation. I hope I'm wrong, but it's not looking good. People ask me: well, how do we change things like this? It seems the way we change things is by changing this government.

Let's go back to this piece of legislation itself. [interjections] This bill – and that member: I look forward to the Member for Morinville-St. Albert joining debate instead of heckling me. I look forward to his reasonable, considerate debate. In fact, I know there are members in this gallery today that are from his riding and that hope he will support this bill. I await his comments on this bill.

Back to the legislation. Bill 206 aligns with the recommendations made by the UCP-appointed disability advocate in 2023. Yes, you heard that correctly: the UCP-appointed disability advocate. If passed, this bill will require Alberta to introduce accessibility standards that would bring our province in line with other provinces and protect the Charter rights of people with disabilities. Bill 206, instead of being reactive, as we've seen in some jurisdictions, is going to take a proactive response, and it's really going to, you know, take a comprehensive look at the barriers that folks in the disabled community experience.

As I said, I'm really grateful to that Member for St. Albert because one of the things that she does so well is engage with the community. We've all heard the saying Nothing about Us without Us. That's the mantra for many in the disabled community. That Member for St. Albert isn't just, you know, doing amazing engagement, which she is; she's amplifying the voices of community. She's not speaking for folks; she's uplifting and amplifying their voices. I could share the voices of so many folks who've written us. Today I opened my inbox this morning, and I was inundated by a number of e-mails calling on me as the MLA for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to support this bill. I know that if I'm getting these e-mails, we all are, and that includes members on the other side.

Let's look at some of the comments that folks from the community have said. Voice of Albertans with Disabilities points out that being one of the only two provinces in Canada without accessibility legislation puts Alberta

at a critical disadvantage compared to provinces that have taken proactive steps to ensure equal opportunities and access for all. This gap has significant, tangible impacts: individuals with disabilities in Alberta face daily obstacles that restrict access to essential services, fair housing, and even basic physical spaces. Consider the struggles of navigating buildings that lack ramps or elevators, the inaccessibility of health care and legal services without ASL (American Sign Language) interpreters, or the limited availability of affordable, accessible housing that upholds people's rights to live independently and with dignity.

Folks in this Chamber and beyond know that as the shadow minister of housing I've heard a lot from the community around accessible housing, and the need is greater than ever, so I really appreciate that that piece is included as well.

As the Member for St. Albert pointed out, we're talking about the economic impacts here as well. Beyond that, this isn't just about how, economically, our community could be strengthened. As Voice of Albertans with Disabilities points out, it's also a question of equity and justice. They say, "Alberta's lack of . . . legislation sends a disheartening message to its residents [and those] with disabilities: that their rights, safety, and well-being are secondary. This must change." They're right. This must change.

To repeat, as I said earlier, if this government isn't willing to support Bill 206 and isn't willing to pass accessibility legislation, well, if we can't change that, then let's change this government.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure – a great, great pleasure – to rise in support of Bill 206, a piece of legislation, brought forward by my colleague the Member for St. Albert, a long time in coming, and I know that she has done the work to make sure that this legislation reflects, just frankly, the standards that Albertans should expect from their government and that all Albertans can benefit from.

I'm really pleased that she's had this opportunity to bring this legislation forward, and I'm very pleased to support it. I know that this is really us doing the pure work of opposition, which is to bring forward the voice of Albertans. The reason why so many of our constituents and many of our MLAs are interested in this piece of legislation, bringing accessibility legislation forward, is because it affects every single constituency in this province. It affects the residents of this province from corner to corner to corner of this province, Madam Speaker.

There are over 1 million Albertans who live with a disability every day. Over 27.5 per cent of working-age Albertans report having one or more disabilities, 20 per cent of youth aged 15 to 24 in Alberta have disabilities, and 40 per cent of seniors. That means a vast majority of our population, almost 1 million people. Then if you add on their families, their caregivers, their supporters, their employers, there are so many people advocating to make sure that Alberta is barrier free for all Albertans.

The reality, Madam Speaker, unfortunately, is that almost three-quarters of Albertans with disabilities report that they do experience barriers, and that's why Bill 206 is very important. It is to bring forward that legislation, to identify and to address those barriers so that all Albertans, including those with disabilities, have every right to thrive, to succeed, to share in the prosperity of this province. They deserve legislation that is intended to break down those barriers so they can participate fully in every aspect of life, like every Albertan deserves to.

I want to say that this is truly an act of consultation. This work has been brought forward by the Member for St. Albert after working tirelessly not just over the last two years on this particular

piece of legislation, but she's tirelessly worked with the disability community long before she was even in politics. This comes from the heart, and it comes from a real need.

Now, the member mentioned already, of course, that we are one of only two provinces in this country that don't have accessibility legislation, and we have to ask ourselves why. This piece of legislation doesn't come with a huge price tag, Madam Speaker. This is not anything that's going to cause a huge burden. It's why, frankly, the member was able to bring this forward as a private member's bill. Typically, as we all know, private members' bills can't bring forward pieces of legislation that would have incredible budgetary impact. There are no financial barriers to bringing forward accessibility legislation. It's actually simply about making sure that we're bringing down barriers for all Albertans.

Now, what has been really interesting to me is that over the last two years when the Member for St. Albert and others have specifically asked government why they haven't yet acted on the recommendations from the disability advocate, from the disability community to bring forward accessibility legislation, repeatedly, over and over, what happens is that the government stands up, whoever is the Minister of Municipal Affairs at the time, to talk about safety codes or building codes. It reveals that the government either wilfully ignores what accessibility legislation is really about or, for some reason that has yet to be clearly outlined or laid out before this Assembly, is opposed to accessibility legislation.

Madam Speaker, if the government were to take a look at accessibility legislation, national and across other provinces, they'd see that this isn't legislation that's about making sure there are just ramps at buildings. Yes, that's part of it, of course. When we talk about accessibility, that's the piece that everybody thinks about, of course, the physical access to buildings, and that's one part of it. But why that would only be a concern for the Minister of Municipal Affairs: I'm completely confused by that.

Really, if you look at what other legislation and accessibility standards across the country have done, they're very varied in terms of what they address. As the bill itself talks about, it's meant to address transportation and education and health and technology. I took a look at some of the standards, accessibility standards, that have been established by both the national government, the government of Canada, and also by other provinces, and we'll see that it's not just about physical accessibility to buildings.

In fact, in Ontario under their accessibility legislation they brought forward standards on customer service; for example, requiring staff to have training on serving customers with disabilities, allowing service animals, and handling disruptions. They brought forward standards on information and communications, requiring websites to follow certain standards so that they can be read and viewed by even those with disabilities. They've brought in very significantly, both in Ontario and at the federal level, in Manitoba, in Quebec, and B.C. – under the accessibility legislation they brought forward standards about employment, about how to make sure, for example, job postings are accessible, that their hiring and retention and recruitment standards meet those accessibility expectations.

3:20

This is very important and should be very appealing to a government that is trying to move people off AISH and actually lower the costs of their benefits only so that they can get more work. Well, if they want to get Albertans with disabilities more work, as the Member for St. Albert said, they need to create accessibility legislation to make hiring and recruitment and retention more accessible for all Albertans.

Other examples of standards that have developed under accessibility legislation include transportation standards, making sure that public

transit, buses, and taxis are more accessible; designs for public spaces to make sure those spaces and service counters and play areas are more accessible. These are great things. These are great things that make our public spaces, our workplaces, everything more fair for everyone else. I really encourage the members of the government side to just simply accept that this is a wonderful piece of legislation. There is no downside for them to accept this ability to develop a process by which a consultation can be done to develop these standards.

If you look at Bill 206, it sets out a process where a committee is established. That committee is comprised of individuals who have lived experience with disabilities. They will make recommendations. They will consult with businesses. They will consult with the industries that are affected, the municipal actors, private-sector, public-sector actors. Then government can do public consultation on these standards. It is a process that is very iterative, that is very expansive, and it's meant to include as many people as possible. That's what this bill does.

I really want to hear from the government members why they wouldn't support accessibility legislation. Not only do I want them to stand up and represent their constituents, because all of them have constituents who are living with disabilities – I'd like to hear them talk about those experiences – but I'd really like to hear a thoughtful explanation as to why any government member would not support accessibility legislation. There's no partisanship here, Madam Speaker. There are no, you know, ideological differences here. This is actually fundamentally the core of what government is supposed to do. They're supposed to deliver programs, services, standards to improve the access of all Albertans to the prosperity that we all enjoy. This is not a difficult thing for government to get behind.

We might get to a point where government on this bill just votes against it without even speaking to it, and I hope that doesn't happen. That has happened many times in this Legislature before.

Ms Hoffman: Maybe they'll vote for it.

Ms Pancholi: You know what? The Member for Edmonton-Glenora reminded me that it's very possible that government will vote in favour of this although I will say that the government has had many, many, many years to bring in this legislation, so their failure to do so – again, I think Albertans with disabilities deserve an explanation as to why they won't bring it forward themselves or, if they're going to vote against this bill, why they're going to vote against it. I think that's the least that the government members can do, especially those government members who are ministers who serve in ministries such as Children and Family Services, such as Assisted Living and Social Services, such as Indigenous Relations, such as all the various health ministers who are constantly, on a day-to-day basis – and seniors, who deal with individuals who have disabilities. Why would they not support accessibility legislation? It's a pretty simple question, and I think that the government members owe that explanation to Albertans.

In the meantime I'm incredibly proud to stand with a government caucus, to stand behind my colleague from St. Albert, who's finally, after a long time, many, many years, done the work to bring forward legislation that will improve the lives of Albertans. Madam Speaker, that is what we are all here to do, and that is what we are very proud to do.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I rise today to support Bill 206 and thank my colleague from St. Albert for

introducing this. I hope the government side will support this as well. Accessibility is not just for people with disabilities; it's for all Albertans. In fact, this government already supports many of the tenets of this legislation through its support and advocacy for age-friendly communities. I'm pretty sure most members from the other side aren't aware of this. Bill 206 and age-friendly communities would be housed in the same ministry, Assisted Living and Social Services.

So what is age friendly? Well, for those unfamiliar with the age-friendly movement, let me explain. This is according to the government's own website.

'Age-friendly' is the idea of making structures and services more accessible and inclusive for seniors with varying needs and capacities.

This means looking at how we build infrastructure, the way we get around, and even the way we shop for goods and services.

Sounding familiar?

Age-friendly communities promote healthy and active aging. People in age-friendly communities are supported in maintaining their independence and have access to the community supports and services they need.

Key features of age-friendly communities are things such as:

- well-situated public benches
- clean, secure, and accessible public toilets
- maintained and well-lit sidewalks
- fully accessible public buildings
- housing integrated in the community that accommodates changing needs and abilities

Sounding very familiar.

- friendly, personalized service and information instead of automated answering services
- public and commercial services and stores in neighbourhoods close to where people live.

Madam Speaker, you know, in order to more fully connect Bill 206 with age-friendly communities, which, again, this government fully supports and advocates for, allow me to elaborate with the government's own words. The checklist for age-friendly communities lists essential features of the age-friendly communities, developed by the WHO and the Age-Friendly Rural Communities. It's a guide developed by federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for seniors. This provides a guide for communities as they undertake the age-friendly assessment. A lot of the things that I'm going to tell you right now are things that are included in my colleague's legislation.

Let's look at outdoor spaces and buildings such as sidewalks, pathways, and things like that.

- Sidewalks, pathways ... are accessible, well-maintained, well-lit and cleared of snow and ice.
- Sidewalks are continuous, with low curbs and can accommodate mobility devices such as walkers, wheelchairs, scooters, and strollers.
- Snow removal is prompt and considerate (e.g., consideration is given to how snow is piled for those who need to get in and out of cars, and for those who may be using walkers, wheelchairs, scooters or strollers).

Sound familiar?

- Parking lots are well-maintained and cleared of snow and ice.
- Streets are well-maintained.
- Rain shelters are available to support pedestrians and are accessible for people using mobility devices.
- Public washrooms are accessible and can accommodate people with a variety of disabilities.

This is super important for people that aren't aware, in fact, so important that the department of public health at the University of

Lethbridge actually did a survey in Lethbridge about the availability of public washrooms for seniors and people with disabilities, and it was quite shocking the lack of those services available to our community.

- Public washrooms and rest areas are located at convenient locations with proper signage.

and they're accessible, and they're available all over.

Let's talk about safety and security issues.

- Programs and policies are in place to support community safety and crime prevention.
- Neighbourhoods and trails are well lit.

Let's talk about buildings because we were talking about something earlier. Our member mentioned and asked a question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who talked about codes and things. Well, how about: public buildings and businesses are accessible, and they have ramps with appropriate slopes? They have:

- few, or no, stairs to get into buildings and within buildings, or alternative ways to enter and access buildings;
- non-slip flooring;
- doors that are easy to open;
- accessible washrooms located on main floor; and
- parking that is well-maintained and easy to access.

There are also things that we want to look at in communities to make it more accessible, things like grocery stores, churches, government buildings, community centres.

- Services are grouped together, located in close proximity to where people [actually] live.
- Services and stores can be easily accessed (e.g., they are located on the ground floor of buildings, include wheelchair ramps, etc.).

When we talk about roads, we want to make sure that

- Roads are well-maintained, [they're] well-lit and are supported by clearly visible signage.

3:30

We want traffic flow to be well regulated. We need traffic lines on pavement that are clear and visible.

- Roadways are free of obstruction that could block drivers' vision.
- Traffic signs and intersections are visible and well-placed.
- Pedestrian crossing controls allow adequate time for people with limited mobility to cross.
- Parking lots and street parking are located close to amenities.
- Parking regulations are enforced (e.g., preventing people from parking in emergency zones and parking spaces for persons with disabilities).

and make sure that

- There are sufficient numbers of parking spots for persons with disabilities.
- Parking and drop-off areas are safe and sufficiently marked.

In fact, Madam Speaker, in the city of Lethbridge new parking lot design ensures that there are full parking spots on each side in the disability parking sections.

We talked about snow removal already, but what about transportation?

- Accessible, affordable and convenient public transportation options are available.
- Public transportation services are clear, with well-marked routes and vehicles.

- Public transportation services are reliable and frequent, and meet the needs of citizens.
- Vehicles used for public transit are clean, well-maintained, accessible, not overcrowded and have priority seating that is respected.
- Where public transportation is limited, volunteer and/or private transportation services are available.
- Affordable and accessible community transportation services . . . are available to take citizens to medical appointments, shopping excursions and community events.
- Affordable and accessible community transportation services are available to take citizens to appointments and events in larger centres.

And remember this is about age-friendly communities, Madam Speaker. This isn't just about people with disabilities, but this is exactly what this legislation speaks to.

- Accessible transportation for persons with a variety of disabilities, including mobility challenges, is available across the range of transportation services.

What about things like information? I think that's addressed as well in this legislation.

- Information is provided to seniors and persons with disabilities in alternate formats (including large print) about the range of transportation services (public and private) available to them, including information on how and where to access them, schedules and fees.
- The use of public and alternative transportation is promoted in the community,

so people actually know what's available.

Let's talk about housing really quickly.

- A range of appropriate and affordable housing options (including for sale and for rent) are available, such as apartments, independent living, smaller condominiums and family homes.
- Housing is located in close proximity

again,

to public, commercial, and religious services.

- Housing options (including houses and apartments) are available that are responsive to local needs, including the needs of seniors, [people] with disabilities and young families.

Aging in the right place: we've talked about this before, but I want you to understand how this also affects people with disabilities, because one of the issues that we're dealing with in an aging population right now is an aging disabled population. We're dealing with not only people with disabilities but people that are aging, so let's think about this.

- Home supports . . . [should be] available to enable older Albertans to live at home.
- Systems are in place and available to assist citizens who live alone . . . who may have mobility or health challenges.
- Housing modifications are available and affordable, with financial assistance provided for those on fixed incomes.
- New housing is built to accommodate individuals and families at different life stages and/or to allow people to adapt their homes to meet changing needs.
- New housing is encouraged to consider principles of universal design. (For example, interior spaces have even surfaces and are wheelchair accessible to allow freedom of movement in all rooms and passageways.)
- Information on financial assistance programs for home modifications is readily available and easily accessible.

One of the things that this legislation also speaks to is social participation. In order for people with disabilities to engage in our communities, there needs to be a range of events . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Member Boparai: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today in strong support of Bill 206, the Accessible Alberta Act. This bill is not only overdue; it is urgent. It represents a chance to finally build an Alberta where people with disabilities can live, work, learn, and participate fully in our society without facing constant, preventable barriers. It is also a chance to address an affordability crisis that is hitting Albertans with disabilities harder than anyone else.

For several long years the UCP government has failed to act on accessibility. Alberta remains one of only two provinces with no accessibility legislation at all, and this inaction has allowed physical, social, and economic barriers to stack up while the cost of living has exploded. Madam Speaker, this bill is about dignity, it is about fairness, and it is about ensuring that Albertans with disabilities are not going to be asked to pay more, struggle more, and wait longer for the supports every person deserves in a province like ours.

There is an affordability crisis for Albertans with disabilities. Madam Speaker, Albertans across the province are struggling under the weight of rising costs, but for Albertans with disabilities the affordability crisis is not simply a challenge; it is a compounding emergency. The price of rent, groceries, utilities, transportation, medications, and insurance has reached historic highs, yet despite the clear evidence of mounting financial strain, this government chose to freeze AISH for more than three years during the period of highest inflation Alberta has seen in decades. It also clawed back the federal Canada disability benefit, removing \$200 per month from the pockets of Albertans already living in deep poverty. It then forced thousands onto the new ADAP program without any consultation, a move that undermined stability and violated the basic principle of Nothing about Us without Us.

The truth is that people with disabilities face unavoidable additional costs that those who don't never have to think about: assistive equipment, medications, mobility supports, specialized transportation, home modifications, and informal caregiving, all of which increase in price during an affordability crisis. At the same time they face greater barriers to employment and lower average earnings. As costs rise, they feel the impact disproportionately because every increase combines with the extra expenses they already carry.

Madam Speaker, we have seen this with previous bills. Bill 210, that was introduced by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, revealed the disproportionate harm faced by the workers in low-wage service jobs, and Motion 504, brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-South West, demonstrated how unchecked automobile insurance premiums have crushed families already burdened by rising costs across every aspect of life.

The accessibility crisis similarly intersects directly with the affordability crisis for Albertans with disabilities and those who care for them, and now Bill 206, introduced by the Member for St. Albert, highlights how Alberta's absence of accessibility legislation is leaving us one of the only two provinces without such a framework and amplifies the financial strain on Albertans with disabilities. These Albertans already face higher day-to-day costs and systematic barriers that make essential goods and services more expensive and more difficult to access. For Albertans with disabilities these two crises do

not simply overlap; they reinforce one another. Rising prices worsen the impact of existing barriers, and those barriers, in turn, magnify the financial pressure caused by rising prices. The result is a compounding affordability burden that grows heavier every year this government fails to act.

And then there is the government's failure to act. Madam Speaker, the UCP government received a comprehensive accessibility report from its own appointed disability advocate in 2023. That report contained detailed recommendations on how to establish proactive accessibility legislation. Rather than act, the government ignored it for two years until advocates forced the report's release through a FOIP request.

3:40

During the government's delay the affordability crisis deepened significantly. Basic costs rose rapidly. Supports remained frozen. Rents spiked. Food prices climbed. Insurance premiums surged. Albertans with disabilities were left to shoulder these increases without any meaningful relief. Inaction in the face of such a crisis did not merely maintain existing barriers; it amplified them, leading to greater poverty, financial instability, and forced reliance on food banks and charitable organizations. The consequences of inaction are not theoretical; they are felt every day in every community.

Madam Speaker, Bill 206 transitions Alberta from a reactive, complaint-driven system to a proactive, standards-based model of accessibility similar to the systems already implemented in eight other provinces. This bill establishes an accessibility standards committee and ensures that a majority of its members are people with disabilities, including Indigenous representation.

The committee will be required to consult with disability organizations, Indigenous communities and municipalities, businesses, agencies, and other impacted groups. It is tasked with developing accessibility standards across a range of essential areas, including government services, transportation, employment, education, housing, and communications. Once the committee develops these standards, the government will be required to adopt them through regulation, moving the province toward the goal of a barrier-free Alberta by 2040.

In the current affordability crisis the proactive approach matters because every barrier removed is a cost removed. When workplaces are accessible, people have better opportunities to earn income. When government services are accessible, people spend less time and money navigating complicated systems. When buildings and transportation systems are accessible, people are not forced into expensive alternative arrangements just to participate in daily life.

Accessibility is not only a human rights issue but also a key component of affordability. Madam Speaker, more than one-quarter of Albertans, 27.5 per cent, live with at least one disability, and that number has grown significantly in recent years. These Albertans are essential contributors to our province. In 2021 alone 390,000 Albertans with disabilities were employed, making up 17 per cent of the workforce. Their work generated \$29 billion in employment income and contributed \$48 billion to Alberta's GDP. However, despite their contributions they continue to face higher levels of unemployment and underemployment than any other group. They also bear the highest levels of hidden costs from assistive devices to additional caregiving needs, which grow heavier when costs rise. Improving accessibility directly improves affordability and labour force participation.

Treasury Board and Finance estimates that closing the disability employment gap nationally could add up \$50 billion to Canada's GDP. When people can work, participate, and access the supports they need, they contribute more to the economy and rely less on emergency supports. This benefits families, communities, and the entire provincial economy.

Madam Speaker, stakeholders across the province have expressed strong support for accessibility legislation. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce has called for accessibility legislation with clear, measurable outcomes because businesses understand the economic benefits of inclusion, especially during times of labour shortage. Disability organizations such as Voice of Albertans with Disabilities and Barrier-Free Alberta have advocated tirelessly for proactive legislated accessibility standards. Their years of advocacy underscore the urgent need for government action, especially now as the affordability crisis continues to deepen.

Madam Speaker, Alberta's New Democrats believe deeply in inclusion, fairness, and affordability.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I want to begin by acknowledging the intent behind Bill 206 and the genuine passion of the member opposite who brought it forward.

Accessibility matters. The full and equal participation of Albertans with disabilities in every aspect of life in this province is not a partisan issue; it is a shared value in this Chamber. I want to be clear about that from the onset because what I'm about to say is not a rejection of that vision; it is a rejection of the way this bill proposes to get us there.

Mr. Speaker, let me start with what is working and what is actively changing. Alberta is not standing still on accessibility. Earlier today Alberta's government announced that through Budget 2026 we're investing a historic \$3.7 billion to support Albertans with disabilities this year alone. That is a year-over-year increase of nearly \$100 million. Since 2019 we have increased annual investment in disability supports by more than \$1 billion, a nearly 40 per cent increase. These are not talking points; these are commitments backed by real dollars reaching real Albertans.

Alberta has the highest employment rate for persons with disabilities in this country at 53 per cent and the highest hourly earnings for employed persons with disabilities at more than \$33 an hour. Through Budget 2026 we are investing an unprecedented quarter million dollars to help Albertans gain and retain meaningful employment, including enhanced supports for Albertans with disabilities through WorkFirst Alberta and specific disability-related employment supports. These are supports that are flexible, person centred, and focused on breaking down barriers so that folks can achieve long-term success.

As for built environments, which are often at the heart of accessibility conversations, we are making real, measurable progress. A new edition of the Alberta building code came into force on May 1, 2024, introducing updated accessibility and safety requirements for all new construction and major renovations. In October 2024 we released an updated Accessibility Design Guide to help designers building in municipalities not just meet minimum code requirements but adopt best practices that exceed them.

Our building and safety codes require barrier-free access in public buildings. Multifamily residential buildings must provide accessibility in common areas, lobbies, hallways, elevators, and entries, and municipalities enforce these standards as the authorities have jurisdiction under the Safety Codes Act. The province's affordability housing portfolio actually exceeds those standards, with 14 per cent of units being barrier free, well above the 10 per cent code requirement, and when we look at the new affordable housing builds currently under way, Alberta is once again on track to exceed accessibility requirements.

Alberta also has the most robust suite of disability programs in the country: record funding for AISH; the new Alberta disability assistance program; supports for adults, children, and families with disabilities; a disability advocate's office; supports for accessibility upgrades to residences for persons with disabilities; service dogs;

supported transportation; and specialized service delivery networks across the province.

Now, the members opposite may suggest that because we do not currently have a single stand-alone piece of accessibility legislation, we are somehow behind. That implication, Madam Speaker, does not hold up. Only three provinces in this entire country – Ontario, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia – have fully developed accessibility standards, and the results have been sobering. Ontario's most recent independent review found that accessibility in that province has reached what the reviewers called a crisis point: nonexistent enforcement, limited accountability, fragmented oversight, and insufficient data. A single piece of legislation did not solve the problem. In many ways it created new ones because it wasn't doing it right. I do not want that for Alberta.

Currently Alberta has embedded accessibility requirements across multiple frameworks, including the Human Rights Act, the Safety Codes Act, the building code act, and our programs and services that provide real, enforceable projections that are actively being strengthened, and we are committed to continuous improvement in accessibility informed by Albertans with disabilities.

3:50

Accessibility experts and advocacy organizations participate directly in the Safety Codes Council's Barrier-Free Sub-Council. We work with national partners through the Canadian Board for Harmonized Construction Codes and the National Research Council. In 2024 we signed a five-year memorandum of understanding with Accessibility Standards Canada to strengthen collaboration on accessibility standards for the province. In fact, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs has already begun engagement on the development of broader accessibility standards and legislation. That work is under way. It is being done thoughtfully, collaboratively, and with the people who will be most affected by it, including Albertans with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, looking at the piece of legislation before me, the challenges with this bill are too substantial to address through amendments. Let me walk through the key concerns. First – this is the most fundamental issue – the bill would cede control of the creation of the building accessibility standards to a small unelected body of six to 10 people. This committee would have the authority to develop standards covering employment, the built environment, IT, government services, housing, transportation, health, education, and procurement, billing the provincial government to every municipality, every employer, every building owner, every transit provider, and every goods and services provider in Alberta.

Yet the legislation is incredibly prescriptive about who sits on that committee in a way that severely limits representation from the very sector that would bear the cost and responsibility of implementation. There is no requirement for health care representation on the committee empowered to set health standards. There is no formal economic impact assessment required. There's no provision for mitigated costs of implementation for small businesses or nonprofits. Madam Speaker, when we are talking about standards, what could require physical modifications? New policies and new technologies across every corner of this province. We need the people responsible for implementation at the table. This bill does not ensure that.

Second, the breadth of definitions and powers is extraordinary. As drafted, this would be among the farthest reaching accessibility legislation in the country. Ambition is not a flaw, but ambition without adequate structure and flexibility is a recipe for exactly the kind of failure we have seen in other jurisdictions.

Third, the bill is far too prescriptive. It leaves almost nothing to regulation. The committee makes up what standards should include. Reporting requirements, review timelines: nearly everything is

locked into statute. It provides no opportunity to course correct as we go. If something is not working, we would have to recall the Legislature and pass amendments to fix it. Good governance, especially on legislation this expansive, leaves room to adjust through regulation. This bill does not.

Fourth, the wording in several places is unclear. The definition of disability, for instance, is broad enough to create genuine uncertainty about scope and application. Legislation that affects every Albertan and every organization in this province must be precise.

Finally, the bill creates red tape by establishing multiple new administrative structures with remunerated members, layering costs on top of the existing mechanisms in place to identify and address accessibility barriers such as Alberta's disabilities advocate and the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, which have proven very effective.

Madam Speaker, I want to close where I started. We share the vision of a strong, accessible province, where all Albertans are empowered to reach their full potential. We are committed to continuous improvement informed by Albertans with disabilities, and we are acting on that commitment with historic investments, updated building codes and design guidelines, with national partners and with engagement already under way on the development of accessibility standards and legislation.

The way to honour that commitment is to get this right, not to rush forward with a bill that concentrates enormous power in a small unelected body without adequate representation, that locks every detail into statute with no room to adapt, that carries unclear definitions, and that layers new bureaucracy on systems already in place and delivering real results. We owe it to Albertans with disabilities to do this properly. We owe it to the organizations, employers, and municipalities that support . . .

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to private member's Bill 206, proudly brought forward by the Member for St. Albert, who has been a tireless advocate for people with disabilities in this province throughout her whole career as an MLA and, beyond that, before her election to this Legislature.

I must say, Madam Speaker, that it was a painful 10 minutes that I just spent listening to the Member for Camrose squirming and flailing and trying to justify this ad hoc approach to disability legislation that the government has in place right now. If indeed the story that the Member for Camrose was telling was about the government's so-called success in addressing issues with respect to accessibility in this province, then in fact the need for this Bill 206 would not be there.

In fact, the reason we're bringing forward this bill, Madam Speaker, is because the need is dire. I can only imagine what the folks in the gallery, members of the audience at home as well, who are speaking tirelessly as advocates for accessibility legislation, are thinking now as they hear the government's response in an attempt to downplay the need for this accessibility legislation. I can only think it would be really, really difficult for them to listen to the government saying: everything is fine; aren't we doing great? Then they go ahead and try to downplay the need for a systematic, universal, overarching approach to disability legislation.

The Accessible Alberta Act demonstrates that an ambitious, far-reaching, and prescriptive piece of legislation is necessary, and the Member for Camrose says that it leaves no room for regulation. I'll tell you what, Madam Speaker. It leaves no room for successive UCP governments to wiggle out of actually being bound to accessibility legislation, and that's why the legislation is prescriptive, because this is not a negotiable item. Accessibility for

those with disabilities, whether it be physical or mental, is absolutely a human right, and it has not been recognized in this province with the current legislation that we have now.

Now, I would imagine that the Member for Camrose and others in the Legislature on both sides of this House – given that the percentage of Albertans who suffer from disabilities and have accessibility issues is around 27 per cent, so 1 in 5 actually have a mental or physical disability, it's probable to believe, Madam Speaker, that everybody in this House is directly associated with somebody, probably more than one, probably many people who have physical or mental disabilities. So to hear members opposite tell us that they're not planning to support this legislation, which one would have thought would have been a no-brainer to support, is really disheartening. They are telling people to the right and to the left of them and to those loved ones around them, their friends and neighbours from across the street in their hometowns right across this province that they matter less than everybody else who may be able bodied.

This legislation, Madam Speaker, is long overdue in this province, and we're proud to bring it forward and to make sure that those folks with disabilities are respected in the same way that able-bodied people are. Even though, yes, it may end up costing our society more to bring forward these new measures, whether it be in building codes, whether it be in transportation, whether it be in active transportation, whether it be in the workplace adjustments, people deserve that. The return on investment is huge, and I don't know why the government doesn't understand that even in simple economic terms.

Everybody in this Legislature can speak to their own lived experience and understanding of how they visualize people with disabilities living on a daily basis. Try, if one might, to think about your local experiences. I'd ask all MLAs to do this. For example, I can speak to my own constituency where there's a major housing development called West Edmonton Village. You cannot find a wheelchair accessible suite in there. There are people who are managing to make do with a washroom that's not accessible by having family members assist them in the washroom in their own residence because that's the only affordable residential accommodation they can find.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

In my own building where my office is located they did a renovation in the Callowood Professional Centre, but they failed to make the bathrooms accessible. Just last week, Mr. Speaker, I ended up having to open the doors and hold them open for an individual who was using a wheelchair who couldn't get out of the bathroom because the building, which is a fairly modern building, doesn't allow for wheelchairs to get through a double-door system. That's the kind of thing that we're trying to address here, but the Member for Camrose on the other side seems to tell us that this legislation isn't necessary. Well, I'll tell you what. It is necessary.

4:00

We haven't gone anywhere near far enough to make sure that there's no excuse for a building manager or building owner, especially when they're doing renovations, not to involve themselves in talking to the disability community and making sure that those renovations absolutely meet the needs of people with disabilities. The principle should always apply right across the board, Mr. Speaker: Nothing about Us without Us. Nothing about Us without Us. If you're going to do some renovations, make sure that you've talked to people who are most affected by those renovations. That's people with disabilities. You'll find that they are more than eager to spend the time to let it be known how they could be helped so they can participate just as fully as you and I

would in our society, whether that be at work, going to recreation, going to school, or in residential accommodations.

Well, I know from my experience, Mr. Speaker, as a realtor for 30 years how extremely difficult it was even 10 years ago, when I last sold real estate, to find accessible accommodation for people who wish to either rent or to buy their own. This stems from the fact that when you do an area structure plan or a neighbourhood structure plan, the legislation doesn't require to the depth that it should the construction of accessible units to a percentage or a degree that meets the needs of the population of people with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities have a right to be able to expect that they can buy or rent in any neighbourhood that they wish to locate in or even in a residential community that's outside of a major metropolitan area, in a small town. There should be a requirement that there be accessible accommodation right throughout the province of Alberta.

This isn't a cost, Mr. Speaker. This is an investment in 25 per cent of our population who simply want to share the same rights as the rest of us, to be able to live, work, and go to school and raise a family and be accommodated in the way that all of us have expectations as able-bodied people.

Another topic that the Member for Camrose might want to address is accessible transportation, Mr. Speaker. I've talked about this in the Legislature a lot of times. I mean, this government wants to encourage folks who are disabled to go to work and make it easy for people to go to work. We're taking them off AISH and we're going to go get them involved in the ADAP program and we're going to cut their benefits, but they have the right to work.

Well, first of all, those jobs don't exist for the most part, and secondly, how are they going to get there? Once you leave your inaccessible housing unit and you go to the street, if you're in rural Alberta in particular, where are you going to go? There's no bus. You can't go from one community to another. Greyhound disappeared in 2018, Mr. Speaker, and there's been no real replacement except for a few of the larger companies that will make money on the gravy routes, where they're heavily populated. But try taking a bus from High Level to Vauxhall or any community in between.

If you want to travel from one community to another, especially if you're a disabled person – like, in a municipality you may have some form of DAT system, disabled adult transportation, in Edmonton and Calgary and the larger centres, Lethbridge and so forth, but even in some of our larger centres they are pretty much ad hoc, potentially run by volunteers. They come forward and then they fail after six months or a year, and there's no reliable accessible transportation options for people in this province to be able to get to and from work or to travel for vacation or to go to school.

This, Mr. Speaker, is not something that is going to be remedied by this government's ad hoc method of addressing the situation of people with disabilities in this province. We need Bill 206 to cover in a very universal way the needs.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak?

Member Hoyle: Mr. Speaker, I'm immensely proud to stand in full support of Bill 206, put forward by my amazing colleague the Member for St. Albert, whose relentless, passionate, and heartfelt advocacy has brought forth this long-needed legislation. If passed, this bill will require Alberta to introduce accessibility standards that will bring Alberta in line with other provinces and protect the Charter rights of people with disabilities. For far too long Albertans with disabilities have been asking and waiting for this UCP government to take meaningful action to remove the barriers that prevent them from participating fully without barriers in our province.

My question is: why did the UCP take seven-plus years and counting to even consider potentially creating accessibility legislation? The

members opposite talk about taking their time to carefully put together legislation, but, Mr. Speaker, seven-plus years and counting and still nothing? Currently Alberta has a patchwork of policies and legislation that address disability on an issue-by-issue basis, including legislation like the Alberta Human Rights Act that creates frameworks for adjudicating complaints without barriers. After seven years of this UCP government Alberta remains one of only two provinces in Canada without any accessibility legislation. This is simply unacceptable.

With Bill 206 we can finally offer a better path forward because this bill takes the proactive standards-based approach used successfully in eight other provinces in this country. Instead of the reactive complaint-driven system Albertans are currently forced to navigate, Bill 206 focuses on identifying, preventing, and removing barriers before they cause harm. This is integral, Mr. Speaker, because this approach is based on dignity, efficiency, and respect. Bill 206 sets a goal of a barrier-free Alberta by 2040, putting Alberta in alignment with the federal Accessible Canada Act and jurisdictions across the country.

To do so, this bill establishes an accessibility standards committee whose majority must be people with disabilities because accessibility legislation must follow the simple guiding principle of Nothing about Us without Us. For far too long people with disabilities have been shut out of policy-making that directly affects their lives, and this bill corrects that by ensuring that the committee must include people with disabilities, Indigenous representation, the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities, and a representative of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Importantly, the committee must consult widely with disability organizations, Indigenous peoples, municipalities, businesses, government agencies, and much more.

We need this legislation more than ever, Mr. Speaker. Not only has this UCP government failed to bring in accessibility legislation; they have actively made life harder and more expensive for people with disabilities in Alberta, in fact for all Albertans. It is this UCP government that cut and deindexed AISH, forcing people with disabilities to shoulder the full burden of inflation. It is this UCP government who clawed back the Canada disability benefit, snatching federal support from some of the poorest Albertans. It is this UCP government that forced thousands onto the new ADAP program without consultation, stripping supports and creating confusion and hardship overnight for thousands of Albertans.

Tens of thousands of Albertans were left now unsure how they will pay for basic necessities. Cutting income supports after years of high inflation is nothing short of cruel, and prioritizing cost savings over livelihoods of Albertans with disabilities is unconscionable. It is heartbreaking that the members opposite hear that Albertans living with disabilities have even considered medical assistance in dying because they feel abandoned and frightened by the actions of this UCP government.

4:10

To make matters worse, when the UCP's own Advocate for Persons with Disabilities recommended comprehensive accessibility legislation in 2023, the government buried that report for years. It only became public because a disability advocate filed a FOIP request. After that, the government still did nothing, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, this UCP government is not focused on building accessibility in Alberta. On this side of the House the Alberta New Democrats will make life more affordable and accessible for Albertans with disabilities, and we will do that by always consulting Albertans with disabilities about the decisions that directly affect their day-to-day lives.

I want to remind the members opposite that accessibility is not only a human rights issue, but it's an economic opportunity. In 2022

more than 27 per cent of Albertans were living with at least one disability. People with disabilities comprise approximately 17 per cent of Alberta's workforce, contributing nearly \$48 billion into Alberta's GDP in 2021 alone, but too many still face barriers that prevent them from working or accessing services.

More than 1 million working-age Canadians with disabilities want to work but are sidelined by preventable barriers. Many employers still believe people with disabilities are less productive, more prone to absenteeism, or costly to accommodate despite evidence showing otherwise. These misconceptions lead to unconscious bias during hiring and promoting decisions. What is this government even doing to handle that issue with jobs? Sixty-eight per cent of job seekers with disabilities report facing obstacles during recruitment, including inaccessible online applications, assessment tools, and interview platforms that don't work with assistive technologies like screen readers. This has led to nearly half of disabled Albertans remaining out of work while they grapple with a government that has not invested in accessibility or job creation for this community.

Closing the disability employment gap could increase Canada's GDP by up to \$50 billion. This means that businesses and workers stand to see major benefits through accessibility measures in this bill. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce explicitly called for an accessibility act in 2025, with measurable outcomes and phased implementation, because a barrier-free Alberta means a stronger and more inclusive job market. This is important, Mr. Speaker.

While Bill 206 isn't able to reverse the UCP government's harmful cuts to AISH, undo the damage caused by the ADAP rollout, or fix the hidden wait-lists or frozen intakes for vital support programs, it does create a proactive community-led foundation required to finally build an Alberta where people with disabilities are not forced to fight for basic access and inclusion. It supplements the Alberta Human Rights Act by shifting from a reactive model, where people must file complaints after their rights have been violated, towards a forward-looking model, where barriers are identified and removed in advance. This is long overdue, Mr. Speaker. Standards developed under this act could transform accessibility, employment, infrastructure, information and technology, housing, education, procurement, and so much more. These are the everyday systems Albertans rely on to live, work, partake in schools, and to fully participate in society. When those systems contain barriers, people are excluded.

Alberta's New Democrats firmly believe in a province where everyone can participate fully and with respect and dignity. We believe in affordability, accessibility, and genuine consultation. We believe that policy should be built with the people it affects, not forced on them. This is why we fully support Bill 206. This bill also brings Alberta closer to meeting our Charter obligations. It brings us in line with every other major jurisdiction. Most importantly, it brings hope to thousands of Albertans with disability. It is not a privilege, accessibility; it's a right.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to add my voice to the debate on Bill 206, Accessible Alberta Act, brought forward by my colleague from St. Albert. You know, many of my colleagues already having spoken have identified this, but we're so grateful to the MLA for St. Albert for her extensive work, her expertise in this area. Previous to being elected, she was the executive director of LoSeCa, which is an advocacy organization for persons with disabilities, so this has been her life's mission, really. Her contributions and her fighting for people with disabilities in our province has really

given them a strong voice. I look forward to when we are government, and she can continue doing that and we can make the decisions.

I also just want to say that, you know, I used to be the minister of seniors and housing. Right now I'm the shadow minister of seniors, continuing care, and home care. We have 875,000 seniors in our province, and that population is about 16 per cent of the total population. By 2031 1 in 5 people in Alberta will be a senior. Of course, I'm among them because I turned 65 back in January. I'm proud to say that I'm a senior.

Member Ceci: A spring chicken.

Ms Sigurdson: I'm a spring chicken according to this senior. Thank you for that. I don't know; not too many people call me a spring chicken anymore. That's from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Anyway, for sure as we age, our bodies do wear down. There's just no question about that. Just in bringing up the fact that as our population ages, we have to be a more sensitive society and make sure that there is accessibility and support for people who have issues with mobility. That's why Bill 206 is so important, because that will ensure comprehensive programs and plans to make sure that our aging population is supported. You know, personally, again, I'll just share that I've got osteoarthritis in my knees, and at the moment I seem to be able to still navigate okay. I try to exercise lots to support myself, to be strong, but I'm sure there'll be a time when going up stairs will just be prohibitive for me. I know that there are many people who already have those difficulties.

Making sure that people with mobility issues have access: we know that that's so important for people to be included in our society. We already have so many issues with social isolation in the seniors population. We know that when seniors are isolated, for many different reasons but mobility can be one of them, this legislation would definitely support people to be more connected in their communities because there wouldn't be the barriers to that. Like the Member for Edmonton-McClung was talking about, where even in his new building people can't even go to the bathroom, people aren't being supported to live in dignity if they happen to be in a wheelchair, and that shouldn't be happening in a rich province like Alberta.

Another thing I just want to say is that Alberta is one of two provinces that do not have accessibility legislation. The other province is P.E.I. I mean, P.E.I. is, you know, our smallest province, a very low population. Every province, every territory should have this type of legislation. A rich province like Alberta with 5 million people in our population: it's ridiculous that we don't have any comprehensive accessibility legislation. That's why this bill is so important, and I'm so pleased that the Member for St. Albert brought it forward because it's long overdue. It's long overdue that we have this legislation.

4:20

I guess I just want to say on another personal note that my mom lives in a continuing care facility. She's 89. You know, I'm her daughter. I have osteoarthritis, but I got it from her. She has significant mobility issues. Currently she's in a very difficult situation because she lives in a four-storey continuing care. There are stairs, and there's one elevator. Right now that elevator is not working. They said: well, it's not going to work for three weeks. My mom is stuck on the fourth floor for the last three weeks, and she just physically cannot go down those stairs. She said that she tried to go down one floor and then had to be supported to come up again, and it was so difficult for her. I mean, this is a short-term thing. There is an elevator in that facility, but it's significantly

changed her life over these three years, so we've been checking in with her a bit more. If there isn't accessibility for people, it's a significant barrier for people to be able to be engaged.

You know, my mom: like, she's one of those gals. She was a schoolteacher for many years. She gets her hair done every Friday. After school was over on Friday, she'd always go get her hair done, and she still does. But in these three weeks she can't, and I know that that bothers my mom. She really likes to get her hair done. That's one of the things she's had to give up. Anyway, this is just sort of some impact on what happens when people don't have the ability to be connected with their community.

This legislation, I guess, has got three purposes. You can read it right in the act. It's very straightforward. It's on page 2, if anybody wants to read along.

The purposes of this Act are to

- (a) recognize that
 - (i) barriers impact all persons in Alberta, particularly persons with disabilities,
 - (ii) persons with disabilities must be involved in the development and design of laws, policies, programs, services and structures that impact their full and effective participation and inclusion in society on an equal basis with others,
 - (iii) persons with disabilities have rights and freedoms, including those stated in the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination on the basis of disability, and
 - (iv) under the UN Convention, ratified by Canada in 2010, Canada has committed to take appropriate measures to ensure accessibility, and Alberta supports that commitment.

If Alberta supports the commitment, I'm sure that there'll be no difficulty with any of the members on the other side voting in favour of this bill. You know, this is really supporting the human rights of people living with disabilities. It is very fundamental, and it is about us in Alberta having an inclusive society. That's sort of the first purpose.

The second one is to "create an accessible Alberta by 2040 by identifying, preventing and removing barriers through the establishment of accessibility standards," and the third is to "provide for the involvement of persons with disabilities, and individuals and organizations that serve or work on behalf of persons with disabilities, in the development of accessibility standards."

That last one is a very fundamental thing. If you're creating legislation, it's always very important to include the people that that legislation impacts. Otherwise, a lot of times the people who are sitting around those tables, the policy tables, if they don't have the people who are experiencing these kind of challenges, then they're not thinking through the whole understanding of what they need, how they're impacted by that. That's why, when you are making policy, it's so important to have a diverse group of individuals around there, around that table making those decisions, people with lived experience, maybe academics, people who have studied this area.

Mr. Kasawski: Mr. Speaker, when we gather in this Legislature, we are entrusted with the responsibility of shaping the kind of society Alberta will become. We debate budgets, in the last few years a lot of deficit budgets. We pass laws. We argue about priorities. But at the heart of all this is a much bigger question: what kind of province do we want to build together? I believe we should always strive to make Alberta a place where every person has the

opportunity to thrive, a province that is not only prosperous but inclusive, a province where our communities are strong because everyone can participate fully in them. That is why I rise today in support of Bill 206, the Accessible Alberta Act, a thoughtful piece of legislation brought forward by the MLA for St. Albert.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Kasawski: Yeah. Hear, hear.

This legislation sets an ambitious but necessary goal, creating a barrier-free Alberta by the year 2040. It proposes a standard-based approach to identifying, preventing, and removing barriers that limit participation for people with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a radical idea. In fact, Alberta is behind. Accessible legislation already exists in eight other provinces and at the federal level through the Accessible Canada Act. That federal law established a national framework for developing accessibility standards and set the same goal, a barrier-free Canada by 2040. We need to bring this legislation to Alberta. Under that framework organizations such as government departments, Crown corporations, and federally regulated industries must develop accessible plans and report on their progress towards removing barriers. Bill 206 follows a similar path with our province. It would bring Alberta in line with the rest of the country and give us the tools to systematically identify barriers, whether they existed in buildings, digital services, employment practices, transportation systems, or public programs, and remove them. An example of low curbs, mentioned by the MLA for Lethbridge-West, is such a great example of how working on accessibility in this province benefits everyone.

Accessibility doesn't happen by accident; it happens through thoughtful design, deliberate policy, and clear standards. True accessibility requires listening to the people who experience barriers every day. Their knowledge must shape the solutions. Bill 206 recognizes that principle of ensuring people with disabilities are part of the process and develops accessibility standards.

Mr. Speaker, it's worth noting that when the government ignores the principle, the consequences are real. We have seen this recently with the government's decision to overhaul the assured income for severely handicapped, AISH, program and transition people into the Alberta disability assistance program, a program that many disability advocates say happened without proper consultation and will result in lower benefits for thousands of Albertans, advocates like Bean Gill and Zachary Weeks. I'm so glad, you know, they are here today. That is precisely why the principle of Nothing about Us without Us matters, and I know the MLA for St. Albert included the people with disabilities and their advocates in the creation of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, accessibility is not just a matter of fairness; it's also a matter of opportunity. In the Alberta Chambers of Commerce they understand this. In fact, the chambers, including Sherwood Park chamber of commerce, released a policy proposal calling on the government to implement accessibility legislation in Alberta because businesses recognize that inclusive workplaces expand the labour pool and strengthen the economy, and that matters right now. We're running a deficit budget. We could use more people making more income in this province. This government has run out of ideas of how to balance the provincial budget. Income tax is still its largest source of revenue. If the UCP didn't waste so much money on their pet projects and helped more people work, they'd help Alberta balance its budget again.

Mr. Speaker, we see the value of this work every day in communities across Alberta. In my own community of Sherwood Park we are fortunate to have organizations that demonstrate that inclusive society, what inclusive society looks

like in practice. One of those organizations is the Robin Hood Association. For decades Robin Hood has been a part of our community. It has worked to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, helping ensure that every individual has the opportunity to live a full life, contribute to their community, and simply have a great day. That's the motto of the Robin Hood Association. Their work strengthens families. It strengthens community, and it reminds us what inclusion truly looks like.

4:30

Another remarkable organization in Sherwood Park is Winder Inclusive Communities Service. They support neurodivergent adults by helping build meaningful relationships, develop confidence, and create fulfilling lives. Their work is about empowerment, about ensuring that individuals are recognized as valued members of their communities and have the opportunity to shape their own futures. Organizations like these are doing the work of building an accessible Alberta.

What Bill 206 does is ensure our laws catch up with the values that many communities are already living. Mr. Speaker, in a few weeks I'll attend the Robin Hood Association Empowerment Gala in Sherwood Park on April 9. I invite everyone to buy a ticket, buy a table, support the Robin Hood Association. I would love to be able to stand in that room and tell the people, the families, the advocates, the staff, and the individuals whose lives are touched by their work that this Legislature passed Bill 206, that Alberta chose to join the rest of Canada in committing to a barrier-free society in 2040, that we recognize accessibility not as an afterthought but as a foundational part of building a great society.

When we remove barriers, we invite more people in – more people into our workplaces, more people into our schools, more people into our communities – and when everyone can participate fully, Alberta becomes stronger, more innovative, and more compassionate. That is the kind of province we should be striving to build, a great society, one where everyone belongs and thrives. Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members of this House to support Bill 206, the Accessible Alberta Act.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise here today on behalf of my many constituents who live with a disability to show my support for Bill 206. I want to thank my colleague the Member for St. Albert for bringing this forward. I dare say that no member of this House enjoys more trust and respect from the members of the disability community than the Member for St. Albert. There is no one in this House who has spent more time in consultation with, listening to, and representing the voices of Albertans who live with a disability than that member, and that is echoed on every page of Bill 206.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I would say that the majority of us in this place have no understanding of what it is to live with a disability in a society and an environment that are not built for you. I have maybe a small understanding. In 2012 I developed multiple chemical sensitivity, which means that I am affected by artificial scents and perfumes and by chemicals in the environment. You don't realize how much that exists, how many artificial scents and perfumes there are, how many people wear heavy cologne, how many chemicals you run into in your environment until the fact that running into them makes you sick makes you painfully, painfully aware.

It takes a lot of conscious thought and effort to navigate the world thinking about that, trying to avoid it. I've been fortunate that I've had workplaces that, in fact, did have accommodations, scent-free spaces that made it much easier for me to be able to continue to participate in the way that everyone else can do. But there are still spaces I can't go into. There are places where I need accommodations to be able to participate. That is what people living with a disability live with every single day at an exponentially higher level of difficulty than I'll ever know. Bill 206 is just about trying to correct that balance. It's a simple thing, but unfortunately what we heard today from the Member for Camrose is that this government refuses to do even that simplest of steps, putting forward basic accessibility legislation.

The Member for Camrose spent quite a bit of time reading the lists in which the government patted itself quite heartily on the back, claiming Alberta is not standing still on accessibility, trying to claim that their nominal increases on services and supports for Albertans with a disability at a time of record inflation and population growth is somehow a heroic feat. It's not, Mr. Speaker. It's the bare minimum to even be considered even remotely competent and ethical in governing. It's the bare minimum.

She talked about, you know, \$250 million to help folks with a disability to gain, maintain meaningful employment. Meanwhile this government is clawing back millions more from those very same Albertans that they've received through the Canada disability benefit. This government has no claim to pat itself on the back, Mr. Speaker; perhaps to hang its head in shame, especially as we hear today that they intend to vote down and vote against this legislation. They talk about building and safety codes. Again, that is the bare minimum.

The Member for Camrose talked about how concerned they are about the impacts of this legislation. Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. This is the most interventionist government Albertans have ever seen. They've got their fingers in everything. They throw their weight around without a care for how it impacts everyday Albertans, for how it drives investment away, how it affects business, how it affects Albertans who live with a disability.

In fact, you know, the claims that were put forward by the Member for Camrose, I'd say on behalf of the government, are wildly inaccurate, I think rooted in the worst possible faith reading of what's actually in the bill and making many claims about things that actually aren't there at all. For example, this bill would not affect private industry. It's not mentioned. It's not covered by anything in this bill, yet the Member for Camrose claimed it was.

You know, the government tried to say: well, hey, only three provinces actually have fully developed accessibility standards; I mean, Alberta's not that bad. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that this Bill 206 would simply bring Alberta in line with the eight other provinces that already have accessibility standards. Let's be clear. The UCP love to point to practices in other provinces when it benefits them, if it means they get to give themselves bigger gifts or bigger salaries for their MLAs, more money for their parliamentary secretaries. When they want to cut the supports that the Alberta government pays to some of the most marginalized Albertans, they are very happy to look to other provinces and try to adopt what they're doing. They love to race to the bottom, but when it comes to a simple accommodation, to introduce accessibility legislation, all of a sudden: "No. No. We can't do what other provinces do."

Mr. Speaker, according to the 2022 Canadian Survey of Disability, conducted by this government I would note, 27 and a half per cent of Albertans aged 15 and over, approximately 906,100 people at that time, reported having one or more disabilities. That number has only increased in the four years since.

You know, it's really interesting. You can tell a lot about who a government likes, who they're listening to by what they're actually willing to do. Alberta separatists, Mr. Speaker: now, they get multiple pieces of legislation, supporting their court case, commitment of tens of millions of Alberta's taxpayer dollars in their quest to tear Alberta out of Canada. That's what this government is willing to do for them. There are more Albertans living with a disability than Albertans who support separatism – I just read the numbers – but this government is not even willing to pass a simple private member's bill to support and help them because it doesn't benefit the government. Pandering to separatists does. The Premier has said so, helps her keep her political party together, helps them cling to power. That's what this government acts on, not what is actually ethically right, not what would be good for our economy, not what would be good for Alberta. It's strangely quiet in the House now. Should be.

4:40

You know, the Member for Camrose said that she believes that when it comes to this government working to improve accessibility for Albertans with disabilities, they need to do it properly. Mr. Speaker, I would dare say that when it comes to improving accessibility for Albertans with disabilities, I'd like to see this government simply do anything at all. But they're not. They're dragging their feet. They're pursuing things Albertans do not want. I bet if you went out and actually talked to Albertans, if they had maybe taken this out on their Alberta Next town hall tour, they would have heard an awful lot of Albertans that would have supported legislation like this and those supports for the disability community. But they don't ask those questions because they don't want to hear the things they don't want to do.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we have members of the disability community here in the gallery today. They have been calling on – this government's own disability advocate wrote the report with the recommendation to do precisely what the Member for St. Albert has done, and this government has told us they're about to vote it down.

Mr. Speaker, I have an amendment. Just let me know when I'm able to speak to it.

The Acting Speaker: Members, this amendment will be referred to as REF1.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Basically, in short, this would send the bill to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities so that we could actually hear from the community. It's clear this government has not been listening to the members of the disability community, does not wish to listen to them. We are giving them one last chance to do that. I don't want to see this bill slowed down in being passed, but if it means that we stop this government from killing this bill, either today or next week, sending it to committee, giving them the chance to actually hear from members of the public, members of the disability community who would tell them how essential, how crucial this legislation is – I think that's an important step, and it's something that we owe to every Albertan before the government makes this rash decision.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to an opportunity to see if the government members are going to step up, actually listen to their constituents, and support Albertans who live with disabilities. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to amendment REF1? Any members wishing to speak? I recognize the Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am excited to speak a little bit to the amendment proposed by the Member for Edmonton-

City Centre and, further, to Bill 206, which is brought forward by the Member for St. Albert. I'm very excited about the opportunity to move this bill to committee so that we can have some real consultation from community.

I would like to applaud the Member for St. Albert for her work as a champion, which has made an impression on me and so many other Albertans long before I ever became a member of this Chamber. I'd also like to highlight that this bill could not have been brought forward without deep consultative work and especially not without the contributions by the disability community and advocates.

I look forward to debating it more.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? Seeing none.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REF1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:45 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Boparai	Haji	Kayande
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hayter	Miyashiro
Ceci	Hoffman	Renaud
Dach	Hoyle	Shepherd
Goehring	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Guthrie	Kasawski	Tejada

Against the motion:

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

Totals: For – 18 Against – 43

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Speaker: Back to the main motion. The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Member Tejada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'd like to applaud the Herculean efforts from the Member for St. Albert to leave no stone unturned and to present us with legislation, Bill 206, which was born from community contributions and deep consultation. I'd also like to address the courageous and tenacious advocates that are here today, who are incredibly brave and determined, some of the folks who are near and dear to me. I applaud you for your tireless advocacy, for the burden that you have carried in spite of this government and their refusal to create accessibility legislation. I'd like you to know that in addition to the mighty Member for St. Albert, every one of us here, as members of the Alberta NDP caucus, stands with you, commits to both amplifying your voices and actively listening. We are here with you.

Now, I know that in the conversations around accessibility legislation, they're focused a lot on folks with disabilities, but what Bill 206 does is really universal. It benefits us all. There is an inevitability in our lives as humans that at some point we may need the world around us to be more accessible: our homes, jobs, and so many other ways in which we interact with the world. I've heard it phrased that at any time any one of us could become a member of the disability community, especially as our senior population, as we know, is the most rapidly growing part of the population. Bill 206 takes actual measures and creates the standards that we need for aging communities as well.

We will always consult with Albertans with disabilities about the decisions that directly impact their day-to-day lives. As we've seen from the harmful changes to AISH eligibility, the forced ADAP legislation, and pocketing of the disability benefit from the UCP – Alberta's New Democrats believe in having your back, not clawbacks. We believe in removing barriers, not creating them.

The UCP has had seven years to present legislation. They had a UCP-appointed advocate deliver a report recommending stand-alone and wide-ranging accessibility legislation that focuses on a proactive approach, and they have absolutely failed to do that. As we've seen with this government, their modus operandi is to take the community's recommendations and sit on them.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time for consideration of this item of business has now concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

Regional Resource Revenue Data

507. Mr. Sinclair moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) recognize that
 - (i) communities in northern Alberta and in rural and urban areas across the rest of Alberta contribute significantly to provincial revenues through oil and gas, forestry, and other natural resource development, and
 - (ii) publicly available resource revenue mapping data is not presented in a manner that clearly identifies the contributions of these specific regions, and
- (b) urge the government to annually publish a report that
 - (i) provides resource revenue data for the previous year disaggregated by geographical region within northern Alberta and rural and urban areas across the remainder of Alberta,
 - (ii) outlines the methodology and data sources used to calculate the regional revenue mapping data, and
 - (iii) considers utilizing the regional resource revenue mapping data to more equitably allocate infrastructure resources to northern Alberta and rural and urban areas across the rest of Alberta.

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak in support of Motion 507. I'm also incredibly proud that this is the first motion I've tabled in this House. Hopefully not my last, although – thank you – if it happens to be, I'd be perfectly fine knowing that the people of Lesser Slave Lake elected me to advocate for them, and they've gotten exactly what I promised when I put my name forward to be their MLA. It's also my belief

that Motion 507, on the topic of resource revenue mapping, is a realistic path to spark the kind of change that truly matters, stands the test of time.

Mr. Speaker, this motion asks this Assembly to recognize something that many Albertans, particularly those who live and work in northern parts of our province, already understand quite well: resource revenue mapping. Across northern Alberta our regions generate enormous amounts of wealth to the province through oil and gas development, forestry, agriculture, and many other natural resource industries. However, these industries are not just statistics and an economic report. They represent hard-working northerners that not only build their lives around these sectors, but they often build small towns and help keep our communities strong, often sponsoring local sports teams and community events.

Mr. Speaker, these amazing people are the heartbeat of little towns like Slave Lake, my hometown and the one I grew up in. That's why I often repeat the phrase in here: northern Alberta is one big small town. These people represent families, contractors, truck drivers, forestry workers, but they are also, more importantly, fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters, and more than our fair share of kokums and mushums. They're people. Yet despite the enormous contributions being made in this region, there's currently no clear and accessible way for Albertans to easily see how much revenue is generated by specific regions of the province. The information exists in various forms across government – departments, reports – but it is not presented in a way that clearly identifies the geographic origins of those revenues.

Motion 507 proposes a simple and practical improvement. It calls on our government to prepare and publish an annual report that maps resource revenues by geographic region across rural and northern Alberta. Albertans deserve to understand how the industries that power our province are distributed geographically and how different regions contribute to Alberta's economic success. Providing clear resource revenue mapping would help paint a more complete picture of Alberta's economy. It would also help policy-makers and Albertans appreciate just how interconnected our provincial economy truly is. But, Mr. Speaker, Motion 507 does not attempt to dictate how infrastructure funding should be allocated. Instead, it simply encourages government to consider resource revenue mapping as one of the tools available when evaluating infrastructure needs across this province.

Better information leads to better decisions. If we have a clear understanding of where economic activity is occurring and where provincial revenues are being generated, we can have more informed discussions about infrastructure planning, regional development, and long-term investment back into those aforementioned areas. Another important element of this motion is transparency and how the data is presented.

The report proposed in Motion 507 would outline the methodology and data sources used to calculate the resource revenue mapping. By clearly outlining how the data is collected and analyzed, the government would ensure all decision-makers in this province, regardless of location, can better understand and trust the information being presented.

Mr. Speaker, northern Alberta communities also face unique circumstances when it comes to transportation and geography. Transportation networks must support heavy industrial use, critical infrastructures like highway 2, highway 88, and other regional corridors. They serve not just local traffic but industries that generate significant provincial revenue.

Not to mention the new approved project of highway 686. Once completed, this new corridor will be a game changer for the province. Soon people and industry will be able to move from Fort McMurray and cut across through Peerless Trout First Nation over to Red Earth, down to Slave Lake, and either west to Grande Prairie

or south to Edmonton, which is why investing in our busiest economic corridors makes sense not just from a safety perspective but an economic one. These roads will, no doubt, get busier, which is why they need to be properly maintained or widened to accommodate what should be a positive boom for this economy and province.

Mr. Speaker, every morning in Slave Lake the daily commute on highway 88 is jam-packed with logging trucks and super-Bs filled with revenue that fills our provincial coffers, but the people that live, work, and travel these roads or drive these trucks should be given safe passage to and from their work sites. It's important to note that we may not have the high rate of population driving our highways compared to other urban areas. However, the size and weight of the larger vehicles and trucks destroys our roads at a much higher rate, which is precisely why we need to track resource revenue in these areas. We can use this information to provide Treasury Board and other ministries like transportation with common-sense ideas. Not every road in the north or rural needs to be maintained as early as the ones that see so much heavy-duty traffic.

At its core this motion is about transparency and understanding, but, Mr. Speaker, if you speak to anyone who's travelled in my region of Lesser Slave Lake, especially during the winter months, this motion is also about safety and fairness. It's also important to highlight the difficult travel to health appointments because the needs of our area when it comes to health care and outcomes aren't being met locally, and we're forced to commute to bigger centres to do so. Definitely not our choice.

Just last week, Mr. Speaker, I joined our Minister of Mental Health and Addiction at the Wisdom Council meeting on Big Stone Cree Nation in Wabasca. We toured one of the treatment facilities, and one of the workers there told us that people must travel to High Prairie for detox, which is roughly two and a half hours on a good day, or for treatment beds to Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, or Edmonton, with drive times varying from three and a half to four and a half hours. The weather that day happened to be one of the worst this winter season, with blizzards and whiteouts making it impossible to see for brief moments when you pass semi trucks coming the other way.

Tragically, a young father died on our highways that day. Mr. Speaker, in the last five years alone we've seen 15 people, maybe even more, lose their lives specifically on this stretch of highway 88 that I've advocated for repeatedly in this House. On average we see a minimum of three serious collisions a month in this area. This number is not just heartbreaking; it's unacceptable. We must do better. This is one recent example and a sad reality of the challenges we face in northern Alberta, being so far removed from core services like delivering babies, chemo treatments, and dialysis, all services that people in the city most likely take for granted because they don't need to make these dangerous treks on a daily basis.

Now, Mr. Speaker, these anecdotal stories aren't meant to highlight or create divisions. My intentions are to use this role and my time in here to try and inform others who might not fully understand just how difficult something as simple as daily driving and commuting to and from work has become. Improving the roads we drive on . . .

The Speaker: You've got about another two and a half minutes, but sometime really soon you should say the words "I move Motion 507."

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move Motion 507 so we can improve the roads we drive on because it has a massive impact on every facet of how we live our lives in the north. We know we're far away. We know we chose to live and work here. We spend a

good portion of our lives in our trucks, and we accept it. What we can't accept are the current conditions of these roads and corridors. Motion 507, if passed, will highlight areas of need in the hopes that provincial resources follow.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to say how grateful I am to our government for the section of highway 88 that has seen meaningful construction continued in Budget 2026. I know my constituents can't wait for the completion of all the phases of highway 88 over the course of the next few years.

Finally, Motion 507 is a practical step towards improving transparency and understanding within Alberta's resource economy, but it may also help with unity and closing the gap between the urban and rural divide. We have an opportunity in this Chamber, as lawmakers, to choose to help heal this province and bring people together. Motion 507 is a small but important step in doing this.

Although I believe I brought the voices of Lesser Slave Lake to this House, maybe a little too often and probably a little too loud sometimes, I firmly believe that I've translated the real feelings and valid concerns of people from the north to this Chamber. However, this motion has the potential to remove opinion from the equation. Resource revenue mapping can become a tool and a metric that's used objectively, just like population. If implemented properly, it will outlast governments, ministers, MLAs, and become a permanent and integral part of a formula used to, hopefully, provide fair outcomes. It says to the people of northern Alberta: we hear you, we recognize you, and your lives matter. A life in northern Alberta is worth just as much as a life anywhere else in this province.

For all these reasons, I encourage all members of this Assembly to please support Motion 507. Thank you.

5:10

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

Mr. Cyr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise today in the Assembly to speak on an important piece of legislation, Motion 507. This motion calls for the government of Alberta to recognize certain communities' contributions towards the provincial revenues through their natural resources and urges the government to make this information more readily available for all Albertans. Now, I think that we all agree that there are indeed many communities that contribute more than their fair share in provincial revenues. These cities and towns are the beating heart of the Alberta economy, and in many ways they literally keep the lights on.

Mr. Speaker, Bonnyville, Cold Lake, St. Paul: we punch way above our weight. That is just a fact. Fort McMurray, my good colleague here to my left, also punches way above his weight, and I'm telling you . . . [interjections] Well, our big urbans also do their part; I will acknowledge that, but what happens here is that, through the chair . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Let's let the member make his speech.

Mr. Cyr: Lots of communities located in the north of Edmonton, where the majority of the resource extraction economy is located, are unique, and we need to be recognized for that. Unlike the seemingly endless prairies and the aspen parklands of the southern part of the province, the north is full of life, full of remarkable opportunity, and that opportunity is something that we should all be striving to fulfill.

The boreal forest ecosystem dominates the land while an abundance of rivers, wetlands, muskeg contrast with more arid climates in southern Alberta. The beauty, the natural beauty of the region cannot be overstated, but this unique geography comes with

its own challenges as well. Communities are isolated, pearls on a string, if you will, following the course of rivers or highways with little civilization in between.

Highway 28 is a good example, Mr. Speaker. When you're looking at highway 28, the highway itself has two populations at the front and the end of the highway. In between, it's sparsely populated. This is a prime example of what my good friend from Lesser Slave Lake has said for Slave Lake.

These challenges, Mr. Speaker, driving distances between the towns, are measured in hours, not kilometres. This makes access to essential services difficult for locals. It can feel isolating. Living in the north isn't for everyone, but northern Albertans also know the land is full of riches. It's full of heritage, and it is full of tradition.

It is no small exaggeration to say that we are a resource extraction economy. We are looking to diversify. Yes, of course we are, but as it stands, the way we make money is by harvesting the fruits of our natural geography: oil, natural gas, timber. The natural resources are the lifeblood of Alberta's economy and, for a large part, these commodities are located in the northern half of the province. They dominate the local economy. Not only are these resources important for employment and trade, but they are also important as the source of government revenue. These resource royalties pay for our schools, our hospitals, our roads, and so much more throughout the province, including Edmonton and Calgary.

I love Edmonton and Calgary and the commitments they've made to our province, but recognizing that rural also contributes is an important part of our province. Every year we are looking at our royalties in particular. The incredible benefits that we're seeing from this are something I believe we should ensure that our future generations get a responsible return from as well, which is why the UCP are really putting money into our Alberta heritage trust fund. This is a remarkable – remarkable – endeavour that we've taken forward, one that was not put forward by the former NDP government. Every year we are saving more and more of our resource revenue in the trust. This is our rainy day fund, Mr. Speaker. It is a part of our long-term plan for revenue diversification and to encourage stability in how the government collects revenue.

These resource royalties are so important to our province and the areas in which they are produced. With most of these royalties being from industries located in northern Alberta, it is only natural for northerners to look for recognition for their hard work. We understand that as government we have not done the best job of this. It is difficult to find information regarding natural resource revenues and where in the province they are generated. The Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors in particular has been made aware of this issue. He is working with his team to resolve it and provide better information for Albertans.

I'd like to thank the minister for his hard work. We've heard from the Member for Lesser Slave Lake about the money that's being put into his highway. I can also say that the minister is putting money into my highway, looking to make it better. Of course, it's never as fast as we want, but I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I see an improvement and so do my northern colleagues.

Transportation, of course, is one of the most important issues to the north. Because of the relative isolation of many communities it can be a logistical nightmare to co-ordinate the movement of goods and people between communities, but this has given transportation a lot of information to use if this motion was to move forward. As such, they have been working on presenting the important information that all Albertans need for themselves to make an informed decision. One such example of this is commodity flow maps. The maps will help visualize the economic impacts of roads, highways, corridors to better support prioritization. This is being improved and enhanced by

ministries as we speak, helping to provide Albertans with a better picture of where our resources are going.

This has already begun to see results. For example, because of this data we're planning an extension on highway 686 in northern Alberta. I'm sure my colleagues from Fort McMurray are wildly supportive of this. Thumbs up. The new route will connect Peerless Lake and Fort McMurray for the first time, Mr. Speaker. This is a game-changing project for the north. When built, it supports increased business development in sites west of Fort McMurray as well as connecting between the region and the rest of the province.

This government is already doing the research. In gathering this information, we will also be gathering data on resource revenue differences in different regions. This data will be published and available for every government department, businesses, and for everyday Albertans to use. The data will be invaluable in helping prioritize resource reallocation in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I come from a northern constituency. Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul is truly one of the most beautiful corners of the province. If you haven't visited yet, I would highly recommend everybody in Alberta, throughout the world to come and visit because it is an opportunity for you to see true beauty when it comes to the lakeland. Now, we're all happy to ensure that when it comes to the north, we want to share with the rest of Alberta. This is a big part of Albertans, a part of our heritage. We want to be a part of that. Recognition of the hard work that goes into these massive resource-extraction projects is something that is done through long hours of cold and in the heat. It is something that Albertans strive to continue.

Mr. Speaker, to my friends and colleagues in this Assembly: I ask that you give your nod to the northern neighbours. I ask you to support this motion that has been put forward by Lesser Slave Lake.

Thank you.

5:20

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We on this side of the House support more information about resource distribution and revenues for a few reasons. One is to ensure that rural and northern communities as well as First Nations get the support that they need in order to manage their resources. Sadly, the UCP has already lost the trust of First Nations, so providing additional transparency about these communities' economic interests will help future governments start the hard work to regain that trust.

However, this motion doesn't go far enough. Resource revenues are only part of the picture. Looking exclusively at resource revenues may not capture Alberta's other major economic drivers, including large innovation, service-based economies like Calgary and Edmonton, which is why I think it's really important to consider including things like property tax as well, like all of the sources of funding for government operations.

Since the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul was talking so eloquently about Cold Lake, I do want to talk about a major attraction in Calgary-Elbow as well, which people don't think about. We think about the river, of course. Chinook mall is the largest municipal taxpayer in Calgary, which means probably that it's the largest single municipal taxpayer in Alberta although I don't know that for a fact. That piece of economic infrastructure, though privately owned, pays for schools. It pays for roads. It pays for free utility systems. I most certainly urge every Albertan, if they need a pair of leggings, to hop over to CF Chinook and check it out. Not only are you getting clothed, but you're also paying for the critical infrastructure that the city requires.

This is very important. I'm hearing commentary from the other side of the House talking about the revenue problem that we have, which kind of puts me in a bit of a bizarre land. Of course, this government doesn't have a revenue problem necessarily; what it has is that it has a spending problem. It has a waste, inefficiency, mismanagement and corruption problem, none of which will be handled explicitly by resource revenue mapping.

There will be some unintended consequences of this mapping, and I want to talk about that a little bit. For the most part these unintended consequences are actually quite positive. One is that it will increase our understanding of where royalty income actually comes from. In my past, where I helped large investors invest in oil and gas companies, some of my most frustrating conversations were with geologists who would tell me where the resource was, but you know, I didn't really want to know where the resource was. I wanted to know where the money was. The two are kind of separate. Of course, whether you can get economic resource out of the ground or not depends on the costs.

As the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul pointed out, there is an enormous amount of data that exists in the public domain on what energy production, oil and gas production, hydrocarbon production at the well level looks like. Alberta actually has very good data on that. Part of what my job was was enriching that data by adding things like revenue, by adding things like costs, by looking at royalties and capital and all of the other pieces that would allow an investor to decide whether this particular prospective area was worth investing in or not.

This matters to the royalty owner, the royalty owner being the people of Alberta. This matters because simple economic theory indicates that the more information is available, the higher the level of development will be. The more development there is, the more the royalties will be. One of the positive consequences from such a resource revenue mapping might be to actually help investors figure out where the most prolific areas are.

One of the interested stakeholders in this are First Nations in the area. They have not only their reserve lands, but they also have their traditional territories. For this kind of communication to occur with First Nations stakeholders and Métis stakeholders, with the settlements in the area and with, frankly, municipal interests who are just kind of – some of them aren't getting their taxes paid. It would be a vast improvement to everybody's bargaining position to know exactly how much money these particular resources are making so that if somebody is making a ton of money on a well and still refusing to pay their taxes, well, the municipality in the area can have a conversation about that and, I hope, a fair and frank one that gets that tax paid. Frankly, the number of poorly performing oil companies that are not paying their taxes should be a matter of everybody in this province being exceptionally embarrassed at this government for allowing that to continue.

Now, when we think about property tax mapping, which I hope is part of what this eventual mapping looks like, I think that it'll make a really big difference in actually understanding where the money is made in this province and who's responsible for it. For that reason, on this side of the House we support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak at this time to Motion 507. I am pleased to speak in support of Motion 507. I don't believe we've even read it into the record, but I think it's important that we read the terms into the record and get an understanding of what the motion is focusing on.

“Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly,” so this Assembly, “recognize that communities in northern Alberta and in rural and urban areas across the rest of Alberta contribute significantly to provincial revenues through oil and gas, forestry, and other natural resource development,” and also recognize that “publicly available resource revenue mapping data is not presented in a manner that clearly identifies the contributions of these specific regions.” Then, with this Assembly recognizing that, under (b) we “urge the government to annually publish a report,” and that report is to provide “resource revenue data for the previous year disaggregated by geographical region within northern Alberta and rural and urban areas across the remainder of Alberta,” and

- (ii) outlines the methodology and data sources used to calculate the regional revenue mapping data, and
- (iii) considers utilizing the regional resource revenue mapping data to more equitably allocate infrastructure resources to northern Alberta and rural and urban areas across the rest of Alberta.

It’s really about recognizing what every community across the province, through their daily activities, is adding in value to the economy within Alberta. Recognizing that, but then the motion is asking for the government to publish a report with the relevant data and that the government also “considers utilizing the regional resource revenue . . . data to more equitably allocate infrastructure resources.”

It’s important to understand that in Alberta our economy is largely driven off resource income, whether that be nonrenewable resource in the oil and gas industry or whether that be a renewable resource in the forestry and agricultural industries, and that really truly the vast majority of the wealth that’s created in the province and that pays taxes is not the people. People add all the labour into creating that wealth, but it is truly about the harvesting of the resources that we’ve been blessed with this land.

5:30

Quite often we’ll talk about the breakfast conversation that the farmer is having with the chicken and the pig. They’re trying to understand whether to have bacon and eggs or chicken for breakfast. Of course, the pig figures we should have chicken; the chicken figures we should have bacon and eggs for personal reasons. But in this province the vast majority of wealth creation is based off the resource that we harvest. Whether it’s the barrel of oil, whether it’s a dec of gas, whether it’s the tree, the cow, the bushel of wheat: these are the resources that have helped to actually create wealth. We have the benefit of having it, and we have the opportunity to harvest it.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow recognizes that if the cost is more than what the benefit is, we won’t harvest it. For our industries, at this point in time, they have done an exceptional job of being able to drive a lot of the cost out of harvesting our natural resource, oil and gas products, and they’ve become leaders on the globe in how to harvest efficiently and provide value to the people around the world that really need the products that we’re able to produce for them.

I think what the Member for Lesser Slave Lake is trying to bring recognition to is to bring clarity around where the wealth is created and generated and to bring clarity around decision-making relative to that understanding. The reality is that decisions are made based off need. Decisions made can help grow an economy; decisions made can actually also cause an economy to falter. We’ve seen over the last decade or so where federal decisions made have really, really caused and hampered the ability for us to grow our economy here.

I think there’s a new recognition in the federal government that, whoa, they probably overdid their ideological moves and moved in

a direction that stifled growth and in the meantime grew population, and then we’re sitting with a lot more people and a lot less economic growth per person. It’s a balancing act in these decisions. We have to ensure that we can benefit and continue to grow our economy as our population grows so that we can be confident that people are going to be able to buy the groceries that they need, that they’re going to be able to put a roof over their family and meet the needs of their families.

I think getting clarity around these items can help to recognize – and I believe that the Transportation and Economic Corridors minister has a good handle on recognizing – the need to provide the infrastructure necessary to harvest the wealth that is so abundant in northern Alberta. We can talk about infrastructure such as the Smith Bridge. I know the Member for Lesser Slave Lake and myself have been involved with discussions with the Lesser Slave River municipal council on the need to replace the Smith Bridge. Currently it’s a bridge that’s outdated. It’s gone beyond its useful life and needs replacement. The transportation minister and the government have recognized the need as well and are partnering with the municipality to get that bridge replaced.

I have individuals there that are farming both sides of the river, and it causes them to have to go an extra 60 kilometres just to get from one side of the river to the other because they can’t bring their equipment over a bridge that’s not meeting the needs of today’s equipment. We have a lot of industry on the north side of the river there, in the Marten Hills area. Many of those tank trucks are not able to take that bridge because they’re too tall; they’re too high. The bridge is too low. So it’s great to see that we’re able to move in a direction that will replace that bridge and allow industry to thrive again in that area.

Like the Member for Calgary-Elbow says, it’s all about the cost. At the end of the day it’s all about the cost, whether or not you’re going to be able to actually realize benefit from harvesting the natural resource. I think that even the recognition of tying the north together, Fort McMurray to Peerless Lake, is kind of like we’re pioneering the north yet. That road is very much needed, and we have the technology nowadays to actually build that road. I would suggest that years ago, 50 years ago the technology was maybe lacking in the ability to build through that area, but now with the aggregate and the equipment that we have, we can move in a direction that helps to build that road.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am more than happy to support this motion and see that we continue to recognize the need to collect the data, to put it in a transparent manner to ensure that Albertans can see where on the map product is produced throughout Alberta and also then make decisions with that information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s a great pleasure to be able to speak to this motion. I am in support of this motion, so thank you, Member, for bringing this forward. I do think it’s important that we highlight northern Alberta and rural Alberta. This is a key aspect of what Albertans rely upon, and I look forward to talking a little bit more about this.

Some of the key aspects – I’ll speak about northern Alberta right now – are that we work hard, we are very entrepreneurial spirited, and we have can-do attitudes. I often speak about this, Mr. Speaker, but this really is what the core of many Albertans is, and that’s what we talk about on this side of the House. While I’m going to tie this back to this motion, it is these types of people that are doing the work, that are also driving the economic engine of Alberta, and that’s what we’re here to talk about, really driving down and getting in and discovering some of those huge economic values.

I want to talk about a couple areas that we as Albertans really highly value but also bring in, really, some practical applications

here. The first one I just want to talk about is forestry. I may have mentioned this prior, but in forestry right across northern Alberta, which is predominantly where we get most of our forestry products, there's obviously conventional lumber. That's where many of our houses get their lumber from in order to be able to build. As you've noticed, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has done record numbers of housing builds. Our mills in northern Alberta have participated in this as well. We in northern Alberta are helping literally craft the product in order for homes to be built across Alberta, western Canada, and the United States.

But it's not just conventional lumber. There are also other by-products that we are making in northern Alberta, fibres like paper, for instance. Just outside of Grande Prairie is Global Cellulose Fibre. One of the unique things about northern fibre is that it produces longer strands. There you go, Mr. Speaker; you're holding up a piece of paper now. There's short-strand fibre, which is often softer and fluffier, and then there are also long-strand fibres, which are predominantly slower growth areas. This is northern Alberta, and these are Alberta trees. A longer time to grow produces longer fibres.

If you don't have long fibres, you don't get the strength in paper products, so without northern Alberta, without some of our forestry industry we wouldn't necessarily have strong cardboard boxes. We wouldn't have strong toilet paper, and believe me, Mr. Speaker, that would be a disaster for everybody. This is just another area that northern Alberta contributes, building out some of these products here as well.

5:40

I also want to talk about energy. I want to talk about our natural gas market. I'll talk about natural gas in northwestern Alberta. My colleagues prior have talked about some of the other areas of energy. I want to talk specifically about the Montney and Duvernay. We have this huge opportunity as one of the larger gas fields across the world right under our feet in Alberta. The Canadian Energy Centre is projecting that between the Montney and Duvernay two-thirds of western Canada's gas is going to be produced from this area by 2030. In the next five years we're going to see an incredible expansion. We're still seeing expansion, and we're still seeing the opportunities. This is also where a significant portion of our natural gas is going to be produced for LNG, too. Mr. Speaker, that's helping power the world. That's helping power other conversations as well. This is an export opportunity, and we have the value here, both as Albertans and as Canadians, in order to do so.

Now I want to talk about and touch on one last area, too: agriculture. We have a significant amount of canola growers in northern Alberta as well as a significant aspect of beef industry. It's continuing to grow. Interestingly, red fescue grows in northern Alberta very well for seed. It's one of the few areas in Canada where you can grow seed for red fescue. So if you've planted your lawn with red fescue, the chances of that seed coming from the Peace Country are very, very high, in the 90th percentile. It's pretty amazing what northern Alberta is offering both to Alberta and also Canada as well.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to continue to say that I encourage this entire House to support this motion. We've stated a few obvious reasons on why, but I want to congratulate the member on a good motion here and look forward to the entire Assembly supporting this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake choose to close debate? You've got up to 5 minutes.

Is there anybody else that wants to speak before that? No one was on their feet, so I think people kind of indicated by sitting down.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank all members of this Assembly who've taken the time to speak to Motion 507 today. Just as important, I'd like to thank everybody for listening. I think that's the heart of a lot of what Motion 507 is about, the recognition of where the revenue in this province comes from and having voices from all over northern Alberta heard from. This means a lot to me personally, but more importantly it means a lot to the people of Lesser Slave Lake and the people in northern Alberta. Lastly, I'd just like to thank my wife, Shantelle, and my daughters Ryan and Sloane. They had to watch me not hang out with them and scramble to write a 10-minute speech this weekend. You probably have to zoom in on the cameras to see the grey hairs, but they're there because I got pretty nervous about it, but I was able to get through it.

I'm very, very grateful for all the support that I may get here. I hope that everybody supports Motion 507 in this Assembly, and I'm very grateful for all the support.

I would like to close debate, Mr. Speaker, if that's okay.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 carried unanimously]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader, Minister of Justice, and keeper of the Great Seal.

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My congratulations to the Member for Lesser Slave Lake on a job well done on Motion 507 and his continued advocacy for northern Alberta. [interjection] Thank you as well to all of the members of the Assembly. I don't know why the Member for Edmonton-McClung is shouting.

I'm here simply asking that we move to adjourn the Assembly until Tuesday, March 17 at 1:30 p.m.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there's a vote coming up on adjournment, but before that we all need to know that the legislative policy committees will convene this evening and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates.

This evening the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Children and Family Services in the Rocky Mountain Room.

Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Treasury Board and Finance in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Primary and Preventative Health Services in the Rocky Mountain Room. That is where we're at.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:45 p.m.]

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