



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 23, 2026

Day 36

The Honourable Ric McIver, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

Second Session

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Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)  
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## Party standings:

United Conservative: 47

New Democrat: 38

Progressive Tory: 1

Independent: 1

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Chelsae Petrovic	Parliamentary Secretary for Health Workforce Engagement
Jason Stephan	Parliamentary Secretary for Constitutional Affairs
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Justin Wright	Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Health (South)
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**Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future**

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**Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee**

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Ellingson  
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**Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

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**Standing Committee on Private Bills**

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

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**Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

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## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 23, 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, being the first sitting day of the week, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Sidney Manning. I invite all to participate in the language of their 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.

### 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, Sauteaux, 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 exists within treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10 territories and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** Members, I am pleased to recognize distinguished guests joining us in the Chamber today. Seated in the Speaker's gallery is Mrs. Evelyn Vera Barreto, consul of Mexico, who leads the Mexican consular office in Calgary, accompanied by Deputy Consul Sebastian Galvan Duque. The Mexican consulate plays an important role in strengthening the long-standing relationship between Mexico and Alberta and supporting Mexico nationals in Alberta. I would also ask that they please now rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Starting with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you the fabulous students of Duggan school. Could you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

**Member Hoyle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you two special guests from Edmonton-South, the wonderful and bright grade 6 students from Monsignor Fee Otterson and Hestia Drury, who's here to support Bill 206, accessibility act. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Members, it is my pleasure to introduce the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association board of directors on their advocacy day here at the Legislature, including their president, Randy Schroeder. The association represents fire chiefs from communities across Alberta and plays an important role in advancing public safety, emergency preparedness, and the well-being of Albertans. On behalf of the Assembly I welcome the members of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association. I thank them for their service to our province. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome.

I am also happy to welcome representatives from Alberta's heritage organizations and heritage councils to the Speaker's gallery. This morning they shared with members in the lower rotunda the wide variety of heritage services that they offer to Albertans. I ask that they all please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Okay. Other guests. We have the hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you some leaders in the disability community. First is Michelle Kristinson with Barrier-Free Alberta; next is Kat Hedges from Barrier-Free Alberta; Taylor Bauer and Wallace, her guide dog, from CNIB; and Hitomi Suzuta and Kelly Dumouchel from AUPE Human Rights Committee. I ask them all to rise if they can and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

**Ms Fir:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Jennifer Forsyth, CEO and executive director of the Alberta Museums Association, the AMA. The AMA offers extensive programs and services that respond to sector needs and supports hundreds of organizations and professionals across the province. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

**Mr. Ip:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you members of the Edo Community of Nigeria, Edmonton, who do incredible work to support our city. We have Mr. Sonny Ogbeide, a clinical provisional psychologist, and he serves as president. He is joined by members of his team: Isoken Odaro, general secretary; Mr. Ernest Edoimiya, speaker; and Mr. Kingsley Omwenyke, vice-president. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Mr. Haji:** It's an honour for me, Mr. Speaker, to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Ikjot Heer, Zachary Weeks, Sam Mason, and Susan Fearnley. All of them advocate for the disability community, and they have shown demonstrably their support for Bill 206, accessibility act. I ask all of them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly if they can.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Edmonton-Decore.

Next up is Leduc-Beaumont.

**Mr. Lundy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to introduce two constituents of mine living in Leduc, Tarita Youngberg and her daughter, Abby Carnduff. I was able to show them around the Legislature today. I'd ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Williams:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to introduce more members of Alberta Fire Chiefs Association. We have with us in the gallery today Chief VanWerkhoven, Chief Rosario, Chief Maure, Chief Munshaw, and Executive Director MacLean. Please all rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Grande Prairie.

**Mr. Dyck:** All right. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise and introduce Fire Chief VanWerkhoven. I believe I got that right. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Member Boparai:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mrs. Jessica Gill. She is a Mrs. Universe Canada, community advocate, and empowers women. I ask that she rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

**The Speaker:** Are there any other introductions? Now the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Williams:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to introduce Stacey Messner, who is the mayor of the town of Grimshaw. Not only as the Minister of Municipal Affairs but as her MLA I'd ask her to please rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** Okay. Well, let's go to Edmonton-Rutherford.

### Government Record

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Albertans have been told a story, a story about influence, about access, and about power. We're told about expensive trips partially paid for by the people of this province, that they were about opening doors, building relationships, putting Alberta on the world stage, but here's the truth. The Premier can't claim to be shaping global conversations when the people she says she is working with don't even recognize her name.

Mr. Speaker, this so-called international leadership has collapsed under its own weight. It's failed diplomacy. It's a failed performance and a complete and total waste of money because when you walk into rooms you claim you have influence in and no one knows who you are, this Premier doesn't just embarrass herself; she embarrasses all of us.

This government is a humiliating contradiction. These scandals tell Albertans everything they need to know: Turkish Tylenol, a golden cat, red rug, fancy china. These trips were a failed mission that did not secure agreements or real partnerships. These trips were about entitlement, ideological networking, bougie dinners, a taxpayer-funded tour of luxury seven-star hotels. All the while Albertans are told to tighten their belts as families struggle with groceries, extracurricular activities like swimming lessons, gymnastics. The government is abroad spending freely, chasing headlines while health care collapses. It's shameful, and to top it off, the UCP are promoting a serious and dangerous flirtation with separatism that is tearing the very fabric of our province and violating treaty and inherent rights repeatedly. Communities are being divided, and to say it plainly, these kinds of politics are fuelling hurtful racism.

That is the cost. This is the consequence of terrible decisions made by this government. Albertans are watching, and they are done. This government is going down. The UCP government has

lost public trust. They've blown the boom during a boom, and who does that? I'll tell you who does that. This UCP government does that. Call the election. Let Albertans decide.

### Food Prices and Affordability

**Mrs. Johnson:** Mr. Speaker, people in Lacombe-Ponoka continue to feel the pressure of rising food prices every time they visit the grocery store. I remember the day when eggs were \$1 a dozen, milk was about \$1 a litre, ground beef could be found for \$2 a pound, and a loaf of bread could be found for \$1. Those days, not that long ago, are long gone.

According to Sylvain Charlebois, a Canadian food supply chain expert and lead author of Canada Food Price Report, food prices in Canada are expected to rise by 4 to 6 per cent this year, adding nearly \$1,000 annually to the cost of feeding an average family of four. Canada now leads the G-7 in food inflation. This follows several years of increases, with grocery bills climbing well beyond what many households can comfortably afford.

Here in Alberta the impact has been especially clear. Food prices are still rising at nearly 5 per cent year over year and are now more than 25 per cent higher than they were just five years ago during COVID. Eggs are now \$4 to \$5 a dozen, milk is at least \$1.50 a litre, a loaf of bread might be found for \$2, and ground beef, a staple in the diet of many Albertans, might be found for \$6 a pound.

Global factors play a role, like energy price spikes caused by geopolitical events as well as federal policies like the industrial carbon tax. Processing our food is energy intensive, and the carbon tax only continues to add unnecessary costs to food production, forcing producers to absorb these costs. As Sylvain Charlebois rightly states, "Policy-induced inflation is a political choice, not an inevitability."

Affordability matters. Food security matters. That's why I'm proud to be part of a government that is investing \$5 million this year to improve food security and support organizations that help Albertans put food on their tables. Albertans expect practical solutions that reduce costs, support local producers, and strengthen the food supply chain, not policies that make life more expensive.

### Heritage Organization Funding

**Member Ceci:** Alberta's first Premier, Alexander Rutherford, founded the Historical Society of Alberta in 1907, and for nearly 120 years this unique nonprofit organization has been keeping our province's history alive. Heritage organizations, including the historical, genealogical, and archaeological societies of Alberta, all rely on volunteers who work thousands of hours to preserve, research, and share the vital stories that truly define who we are as Albertans, but on February 26 these societies were blindsided when they learned their annual funding was left out by the UCP government's freshly tabled budget.

Perhaps \$76,000 to the heritage society and \$29,000 to the Genealogical Society appear to be microscopic figures in the context of the government's multibillion-dollar budget, but the impact of these cuts is anything but small. This funding supported publications, microgrants, local heritage groups, heritage fairs, and the work of volunteers in regional chapters across Alberta.

Arts and culture are not extras. They're infrastructure, cultural infrastructure that underpins education, tourism, and community identity. At a time when the government claims to be investing in tourism and Alberta's global brand, cutting the very organizations that safeguard authentic local history is short sighted and contradictory. This decision sends a troubling message that Alberta's heritage is expendable. It is not

acceptable that our children, grandchildren, and so on will lose this vital education opportunity to learn from these important stories.

The government should treat historical preservation as a necessary component of the \$25 billion tourism goal, not a luxury expense. If we lose this knowledge, we're all worse off as a society. I urge the government to reverse this decision, restore this modest amount of funding to these PHOs, and reaffirm that preserving our past is essential to building a strong, inclusive future for our province.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

### Agricultural Exports

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP tried to suggest that they understand and support our industry best, but Alberta farmers, ranchers, and rural communities know the truth. United Conservatives are the only ones in this Chamber dedicated to growing and diversifying agriculture in Alberta. Let me share some facts. Under the NDP Alberta's annual agriculture industry exports hardly moved, but under the UCP those exports doubled, growing over 50 per cent, which is \$17 billion each year. Under the NDP Alberta agriculture was heavily reliant on primary commodities. Under the UCP more value-added products are exported, driven by gains in beef, pork, processed potatoes, oilseed and meal, and canola oil.

But wait, Mr. Speaker; let's talk about that some more. We sold potatoes and french fries, canola seed, and canola oil. Under the UCP these exports have grown significantly, exceeding \$2 billion annually in recent years. Under the NDP Alberta processed potato exports went up 15 per cent while under the UCP it more than doubled. That's over 120 per cent. Alberta wheat exports increased by nearly two-thirds, representing close to a 60 per cent rise. Under the UCP Alberta's exports of beef, pork, and crops all increased. Beef rose by nearly two-thirds, pork by 71 per cent, pulses and dry peas by over 25 per cent.

Let's not forget that one of the first things the NDP did when they were in government was try to shut down the family farms with Bill 6. Meanwhile our government is focused on growing and diversifying the industry. Mr. Speaker, when you look at the facts, it's clear. United Conservatives are doing the best job in Alberta agriculture. We will continue that excellent work in Alberta's most important industry.

**The Speaker:** We just need to remember to let private members' statements be heard on both sides.

### Government Record

**Ms Renaud:** After seven long years of a UCP government infested with questionable deals with shady characters, Albertans have had enough. They're sick of the money the UCP wastes on foolish, self-serving projects that everyday Albertans don't want like an Alberta pension plan or Alberta police force. This UCP government's arrogance is only overshadowed by their deep incompetence and sense of entitlement. What were once self-proclaimed conservative fiscal hawks, MLAs that wanted balanced budgets, smaller government, more freedom, now resemble MAGA-like backbenchers who as a party are seemingly incapable of independent judgment and thought.

We have nearly historic resource revenue during this government's tenure, and still they plunge Alberta's budget into a massive \$9.4 billion deficit. They have no visible path to balance other than crossing their fingers that oil prices go higher, and still

they waste more money on things like referendums and lawsuits to intimidate critics.

1:50

We have a Premier who has no issue taking lavish gifts and trips from a foreign government while turning her back on disabled Albertans, telling them they don't matter enough to pass legislation to improve access to basic government services. The UCP gives themselves raises, allowing more expensive gifts while telling disabled Albertans trying to survive on \$1,700 a month that the deep poverty they experience isn't real; their benefits are generous enough.

The UCP continues to erode public trust by a continual stream of misinformation and finger pointing while they look Albertans in the face and tell them what they see with their own eyes isn't true. The UCP tells that us jam-packed ERs aren't a problem; it's Justin Trudeau's fault, anyway. The UCP wants us to believe disabled Albertans aren't accessing food banks and shelters in record numbers because it doesn't fit their false narrative. The UCP government proceeded to take \$200 of the Canada disability benefit away from severely disabled Albertans who use food banks.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? A day of reckoning is coming, and this government will be replaced by one that wants prosperity for all and access for all.

### Oral Question Period

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

### Investigation of Health Services Procurement

**Mr. Nenshi:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The connections between this government and Sam Mraiche start with social hosting here and abroad but go way beyond that. The government employs so many members of the Mraiche family, more than any other family in Alberta. His nephews and sons worked for the public safety minister, the environment minister, the Multiculturalism associate minister. One relative even handled procurement for AHS at the moment where hundreds of millions of dollars of contracts were flying out the door to his uncle. Does the Premier think it's appropriate to have such a close relationship with this family?

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, we welcome the investigation by the RCMP and the great work that's being done by the RCMP. I can tell you this government is co-operating in any and all ways possible. I thank the members for their service. I can tell you that it would certainly be inappropriate to make any comments one way or the other because of the RCMP investigation.

Thank you.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Mr. Speaker, that same member has called the entire thing a conspiracy theory, wasn't shy about making comments before, and of course the biggest relative of Mr. Mraiche sits on the front bench of that government. The Premier also appointed Mr. Mraiche's relative and his CFO Sam Jaber to the Invest Alberta board in 2023. The Premier flew him to Dubai a few days later. Since it's been reported that Mr. Jaber's office has been raided by a dozen RCMP officers, has the Premier suspended Mr. Jaber from Invest Alberta?

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, again I want to thank the members of the RCMP for their investigation. Again, it's completely inappropriate to comment on an ongoing investigation by the RCMP. But I can tell you that Mr. Mraiche is, you know, the greatest donor to the NDP. I certainly have more to say on this as well.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Yet the NDP, when in government, didn't give an unqualified person with a bunch of lawsuits billions of dollars of contracts the way that the UCP has.

Now, the Premier claimed that she was hosted by Invest Alberta at a lavish suite in Vancouver. Invest Alberta denied the whole thing. It turned out it was only one of their board members. Which board member? Sam Jaber. The government has so many issues with conflicts of interest that they don't even see that this one is obvious. Why has he not been suspended from Invest Alberta, and does the government regret this?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you very much. You know, the NDP had no problem taking Mr. Mraiche's money. In fact, the Member for Edmonton-North West, along with other members of the NDP, had no problem bringing a cash machine to Mr. Mraiche's house in order to swipe the credit cards and other debit cards of the members within that house... [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. When I say "order," that's when you stop talking.

Okay. Now it's time to hear from the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Nenshi:** That's not the gotcha the member thinks it is, Mr. Speaker. Frankly, this party, when in government, didn't take Mr. Mraiche's and give him all Alberta tax money in a cash machine.

#### Children's Pain Medication Purchase

**Mr. Nenshi:** Now, last week I asked the Premier for the Wyant report's outstanding review for the total costs of the Turkish Tylenol debacle, \$71 million and counting wasted. Justice Wyant turned in that report in early March, but the government sat on it for a few weeks before I asked about it, and it's still missing at least a page. Did the government change it in that ensuing time frame? Can we be sure that these are government... .

**The Speaker:** The Justice minister.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a ridiculous assertion. I'll say that. Justice Wyant conducted an independent investigation that involved dozens of individuals, all of which who complied except for one from AHS. Having said that, he reviewed and had unfettered access to every document he asked for. Justice Wyant conducted a review with exemplary – he has an exemplary reputation. To allege that anybody changed his report is absolutely absurd.

**Mr. Nenshi:** Well, it's always entertaining to hear the minister defend his cousin in this House. Every Albertan sees that conflict of interest.

Let's be clear. It was the Premier who directed the Turkish Tylenol deal. She stood in front of cameras and bragged about it. She hired her buddy and his cousin Sam Mraiche to sell us the Tylenol at a massive premium, and he's still sitting on at least \$50 million of taxpayer money as a result of the Premier's deal, not AHS's deal. How is the government getting our taxpayer money back from the Justice minister's cousin?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've shared in this House, it is our expectation that our service providers, including AHS, will seek remedy if they order products and services and they ultimately do not receive products or services or the quantity or quality ordered. In this case there is \$49 million outstanding, and AHS is going through the processes, including exploring legal avenues, to receive that money back.

**Mr. Nenshi:** You know, the government continually blames AHS procurement for this debacle, but the Premier met Mr. Prasad, the head of AHS procurement, secretly while she was running for the leadership. His office has now been raided by the RCMP, and the Wyant report makes it clear that AHS procurement said, "Don't do the Turkish Tylenol deal," and it was political direction from the Premier and the health minister that said: do the deal anyway. When will the government take responsibility for this and admit that it was a political decision by the Premier, not AHS procurement?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear and it's been discussed in this House that the procurement and contract in this case were not done appropriately. They didn't even follow internal processes. That's why procurement is being moved to the Health Shared Services organization. I would highlight that the same organization that recently reported on the \$49 million outstanding, RSM, has been hired by the government of Alberta to enhance our procurement practices and align them with the best jurisdictions in the world. Again, the contracting procurement in this case was not executed to the standards Albertans expect, and we are improving it.

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

#### Premier's Acceptance of Gifts and Benefits

**Mr. Nenshi:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Twelve years ago this week Alison Redford was drummed out of office, and it was her own caucus that led the charge. They railed against entitlement and privilege and stood on the principle that they were elected as public servants. But Alison Redford's expense scandal is a tiny fraction of the entitlement that we see today, and this caucus remains silent. I've asked it before, and I will ask it again. Very clear question; clear answer. Did the Premier tell her caucus in advance that she was going to accept these gifts?

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

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, I can only assume that the Leader of the Opposition is referring to the Premier's visit to Saudi Arabia. It was an honour to be toured by the Saudi Arabian Minister of Energy and develop and increase trade and relationships with that jurisdiction between the second- and the fourth-largest oil-producing countries in the world. Now, the government of Saudi Arabia were the hosts, and they planned the itinerary to include touring some of the Aramco major oil facilities, which are located in remote areas, which require the use of noncommercial aircraft. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

**Mr. Nenshi:** So the caucus didn't know. I'd love to be a cat on the wall in their next caucus meeting talking about how they feel about being pulled into this scandal.

Now, when receiving gifts from foreign governments, politicians have to be really careful. When you get a gift, it either goes to the archives, or if you think it's really pretty and you want to display it in your office, you have to scan it, X-ray it, look for bugs, look for listening devices. So when the Premier received a giant golden cat from the Saudi government, did she scan it? Did she check it out? Or did she think it was just so darn pretty that she threw it on the wall?

2:00

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. First, I can say that the cat is not made of gold. What I can also say is that it is common protocol that when nations or subnational jurisdictions meet together, they exchange gifts. In this instance our gift in return was actually a sculpture. What I can tell you also is that it was received on behalf of the government of Alberta. It does not belong to the Premier. She's not taking it home. What I can also say, though, is that this is a common practice in exchanging gifts, particularly with a large jurisdiction like Saudi Arabia. I'm more of a dog person, I will say for the record.

**Mr. Nenshi:** I can't resist. This government is so scared of CAT scans.

I didn't write my last question. My last question was written in 2014 by the then Leader of the Official Opposition, and I'm going to read it to you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**The Speaker:** The hon. House leader.

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I could never assume that the member opposite has written anything of his own.

**Ms Gray:** Point of order.

**Mr. Schow:** What I can also say, Mr. Speaker, is that in this House we are going to continue to engage in negotiations with other jurisdictions to improve trade relationships with those jurisdictions. This also includes bringing businesses from Alberta along with us so that they can expand their footprint in other jurisdictions, which is good for Alberta. It increases their business opportunities. It increases taxation in this province. It's good for us, it's why we keep doing it, and we're going to do it for as long as we can.

**The Speaker:** The next set . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** Yeah. The point of order is noted at 2:01.

The next set of questions belongs to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

#### Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker, the UCP dodged these questions last week, but we're going to ask again because we have to. Almost half a million Albertans signed the Forever Canadian petition to support Alberta remaining in Canada. It took more than three months for the UCP to establish the committee to review it, and 10 days after I

called on the chair of that committee to call the first meeting, still nothing has happened. I hope the chair is allowed to answer this time. To the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, the chair of the committee: when will the first meeting of the committee be held?

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

**Mr. Schow:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for the question. I wish the member would take the answer from last week, as she will take the answer from this week, which is that on March 10 the Legislative Assembly passed a motion which stated that the committee must submit a report to the Assembly within 90 days after passing of the motion, which is June 10. If the Assembly is not sitting, then the report is due within 15 days of the start of the next sitting day. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Ms Pancholi:** The question is: when will the meeting be set? The Premier has repeatedly justified changing laws and overturning a court decision to make it easier for a small but very loud group of her separatist friends to ask for a referendum because they, quote, need to be able to blow off steam, but what about the steam of almost half a million Albertans who have spoken loudly and clearly that they are proud Canadians and Albertans while the UCP pretends they don't exist? Again to the chair of the committee because he is allowed to answer questions in question period: when will the first meeting be scheduled, and why hasn't it been called yet?

**Mr. Schow:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the committee chair will call that committee whenever he feels necessary. What I can say is that it's interesting the opposition hate the current petition that's circulating on independence while they are so eager to get to business on the one from Thomas Lukaszuk. You can't have it both ways. You cannot inhale and you cannot exhale at the same time.

**Ms Pancholi:** Mr. Speaker, only one petition has been tabled with this Legislature, and we deserve to have those voices heard. The chair is very aware that if the committee doesn't complete its work before the Legislature rises in mid-May, its recommendations will be delayed until November of this year, after the UCP's separatist friends' petition numbers are due and after the Premier's anti-immigration referendum. It would be awfully convenient for the UCP to slow roll this committee as much as possible, but half a million Albertans deserve to be heard by this government. Again to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, the chair of the commission. The Official Opposition is ready to get to work. Why is the UCP afraid?

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, it is wonderful to hear that members of the opposition are finally ready to get to work. It's only been seven years since they've been out of government. What I can also say is that it is interesting that the members want the public's voices heard on this petition only, but they rail against any other petitions with which they disagree. What I can say is that on this side of the House the committee will be called at the behest of the chair. That is the process we're going to follow. The member has already heard the answer, but if the member doesn't like it, I'm happy to repeat it again if the member has another set of questions.

#### Health Care System Capacity

**Ms Hoffman:** When you are sick or someone you love is sick, every moment matters. When you are living with a growing cancerous tumour, the time between diagnosis and surgery takes forever. The longer you wait, the less likely you are to survive. We used to report

wait times between diagnosis and surgery. It used to be easy to identify how long Albertans were waiting compared to medical guidelines, but those aren't reported in the UCP business plan and neither are the targets for this year. What percentage of patients got their bladder, prostate, and breast cancer surgeries outside of the medically recommended window?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that Albertans are waiting too long for surgeries, and that includes our cancer surgeries, which is why we're taking steps to hire more medical staff, say oncologists, and why we're partnering with Siemens over the next eight years to update our cancer fleet to modern technology, even integrating AI so that we can do scans faster, so that we can get to treatment faster. That's going to improve patient outcomes. I would also highlight that we're sharing our surgical information on our new dashboard. That's where you can see what our wait times are and how they compare to the national average.

**Ms Hoffman:** Given that the government of Alberta used to publicly report the consolidated number of hours that emergency departments were closed per calendar year but the data for 2025 still isn't available and given that in 2024 Alberta emergency departments were closed for more than 34,400 hours – that's the equivalent of shutting down a hospital for a whole year – will the minister responsible tell Albertans the number of hours for 2025 under the UCP and if that was indeed the highest number of hours emergency departments were closed in Alberta history?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Emergency departments are closed for a number of reasons, the most common of which being a lack of physician coverage or a lack of clinical staff. I'm pleased to report that we have been having success with our virtual emergency physician program, where a rural or remote facility that doesn't have a physician on-site can connect virtually with an emergency physician who can support the nurses on-site and other allied health professionals with caring for lower acuity patients. Of course, we have EMS available to transfer patients to major regional hospitals and urban hospitals to get the care they need if it's very serious.

**Ms Hoffman:** Given that if you're showing up to the Hinton hospital and there's a closed sign on the emergency department saying "take an ambulance" just doesn't cut it, Minister, and given that all Albertans should be able to trust the government but when this Premier tells everyone that there are enough doctors and that everything is fine but we know that nearly a million Albertans don't have a family doctor, emergency departments are closed on the regular, and middle-aged men are dying of heart attacks in emergency rooms after waiting more than eight hours, Mr. Speaker, it's not fine. We deserve more transparency, so will the minister answer today how many patients died waiting in Alberta emergency departments before they were admitted in 2025?

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

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the member opposite. This is not acceptable. That's why we have been recruiting record numbers of physicians to close these gaps. We've recruited over 2,200 over the last five years, including in all zones. We've had success recruiting physicians in all zones. Beyond that, we're also training more physicians in north and south Alberta because we know that people are more likely to live and practise in an area that they grew up in. We're also expanding bursaries, we're partnering with municipalities to provide housing for physicians, and we're reducing

barriers for internationally educated medical professionals. We will tackle this problem.

**The Speaker:** The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

### Agrifood Industry Investment

**Mr. van Dijken:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta farmers are getting ready for seeding season, so it's an appropriate time to reflect on the diversification in the industry that helps our producers feed not just Canadians but the world. Low taxes and less red tape are some of the benefits that help investors choose Alberta as the best place to start, move, or grow their business. These are benefits neglected under the NDP but prioritized under this government. Can the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation tell us what impact those policy decisions have had on investment in Alberta's agricultural industry?

2:10

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not just talking about investment; we're actively making it happen. We've attracted a record \$4.4 billion since 2022 in agriprocessing investment, which has created 2,000 high-paying permanent jobs so far. In 2024-25 alone we facilitated \$726 million in new investment in the value-added space, far exceeding our target of \$639 million. We're providing clear competitive incentives for companies to grow, and I look forward to the numbers increasing.

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

**Mr. van Dijken:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given agriculture has been a mainstay of our provincial GDP for over a century and given the exponential growth in agricultural investment in our province since 2019 and further given our government continues to prioritize creating the conditions for investment and job growth, can the minister highlight some of the specific programs and initiatives and incentives that are successfully attracting so much private investment in Alberta?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has made Alberta the best place in Canada to invest in agriculture. We have the lowest corporate tax rate, no PST, red tape reduction initiatives, and when you combine that with our 12 per cent agriprocessing investment tax credit, we've become a beacon for large-scale, value-added processing. Our AgriInvest team also has business development professionals who work directly with companies to get projects built right here in Alberta. That's a recipe for success, and it's delivering real results.

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

**Mr. van Dijken:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of those programs in supporting diversification in our agriculture industry since 2019 and given that Alberta is a celebrated provider of both raw and processed products and further given that major investments mean increased GDP growth for the province and job creation that benefits both job seekers and families at every stage of the production and processing of these products, can the same minister share with us some of the biggest success stories of investment in Alberta?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2019 Alberta has attracted major investments from companies that are adding value

to our products right here at home. We've seen companies like Parrish & Heimbecker build a new milling facility, G.S. Dunn expand their mustard milling facility, and recently Siwin Foods expanding their facility by 70,000 square feet right here in Edmonton. These investments create jobs and drive economic growth, clear proof that Alberta is the top destination for agrifood investment. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order.

### Crime Prevention

**Mr. Shepherd:** Mr. Speaker, municipal leaders, business owners, Albertans want this government to take real action to improve public safety, and that doesn't mean a new provincial police force. They're calling for partnership, investment, collaboration to support, yes, local policing but also evidence-based, locally delivered services and supports that help prevent crime and social disorder. Instead, the UCP's budget delivers cuts, chaos, and more provincial control. To the Premier: why is your government refusing to listen to Albertans about what they need to keep their communities safe?

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, there are no cuts to public safety. There are only increases to public safety. I can tell you that we're going from a \$396 million budget with the RCMP to a \$432 million budget with the RCMP. The only cuts that came to policing actually came from the NDP when they cut 12 and a half million dollars from ALERT.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Given the cuts are to social services that support crime prevention and given the minister has admitted that the \$22 million he's spending on his Sheriffs Police Service will yield only 30 new officers, new boots on the ground this year, and given that meanwhile his government has cut programs and supports across the province that help prevent and address domestic violence, mental health challenges, addiction, houselessness, and more and given both municipal and business leaders have said that those programs are essential in keeping safety in their communities, to the minister: why isn't he listening to them instead of creating more bureaucracy and provincial government control?

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I said this last week as well. Saying something over and over and over again that's not true doesn't make it true. We've only increased supports in law enforcement within the province of Alberta, and we're going to continue to support law enforcement. We're going to continue to speak with municipalities. We're going to make sure that the police have the tools that they need in the tool box to fight organized crime, which, sadly, was caused by Bill C-75 under the Trudeau-NDP government.

Thank you.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Given that Alberta Municipalities has called on this government to help reduce the cost of policing by significantly increasing investment in FCSS and that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta has called for the same but there's not one more dollar in this budget and given that even groups like the Business Council of Alberta have called for more investment in things like housing and wraparound supports but none of them have called for a new provincial police force, will the minister support my motion this afternoon to invest the money from his pet policing project in the things Albertans are actually calling for to keep their communities safe?

**Mr. Ellis:** Mr. Speaker, I can't wait to talk about that motion, but we're not going to do it at the moment here. I want to talk about the \$27 million that helped support folks in rural Alberta for the additional costs of policing. I'm going to talk about the – and thank you to all my caucus members – additional \$85 million in supports for rural Alberta because the cost of policing is just something that is becoming very difficult for folks within rural municipalities.

### Recovery Community Contracts

**Mr. Guthrie:** The government claims that once grant funding is issued, procurement decisions are no longer their responsibility. They wipe their hands clean. Yet in the case of recovery centres they made a deliberate policy change in early 2024. Instead of grants flowing directly to recipients, as is standard practice, the minister directed payments for nations only be routed through lawyers. To the minister of MHA: if millions in public grants are truly not your responsibility, why did this government change the payment process? [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. minister of social . . . [interjections] Order. Order. The hon. minister of social services.

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP loves me now. That's a big moment for me in this Chamber.

Again, the procurement issues around these recovery projects have been tabled in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there has been a legal process that was made through that procurement process, but at the end of the day it was up to nations to determine the location and to determine their construction provider. We are happy to provide that to First Nations. Unlike the NDP, we trust our First Nation partners to make the best decisions they can for their people. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Let's just hear from Airdrie-Cochrane right now, please.

**Mr. Guthrie:** Given that this government routed First Nations payments through a third party and given that six payments totalling over \$38 million were issued by the minister from Peace River to one curious intermediary and given that that intermediary was Bryan Ward, the lawyer for Sam Mraiche, the individual connected to the ongoing procurement scandal and the subject of an RCMP raid, to the same minister: how much of that \$38 million was taken in fees, commissions, or deductions before reaching the nations?

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, again, there are challenges with the federal Indian Act. It causes challenges when you build on-reserve, which means that we've had to work with First Nations as we work on-reserve because the federal housing minister and others won't make changes to legislation that require that money to flow through lawyers' offices. At the end of the day, the procurement decision is made by the chief and the band council, and every chief has submitted that process. It was tabled by the former ministers in this House, and I would encourage all members to read it.

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

**Mr. Guthrie:** Given that they have a fiduciary duty and given that Bryan Ward is the lawyer who transacted a property flip netting Sam Mraiche \$300,000 and given that he's the same lawyer that was identified in court as allegedly hiring online operatives to intimidate witnesses, including a former CEO of AHS in litigation

against this government, and given that this same lawyer handled \$38 million in taxpayer-funded grants through a process this government manipulated, to the UCP caucus. Silence is not an option. You have a duty to act. You swore. You took an oath.

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Order. When I stand up, you stop talking and sit down. That's how it works. Don't argue with me on this.

Go ahead, Minister.

**Mr. Nixon:** Mr. Speaker, talking about oaths, coming from a former cabinet minister who broke his oath of confidence to cabinet, is pretty rich.

That said, the procurement process, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to this relationship with First Nations is very, very clear. The former minister had every First Nation outline in writing how that procurement process took place, tabled it here. Unlike, it appears, the opposition, we trust our First Nation partners. We're proud to work with chiefs and others to make the best decision they can for their nations, and we won't allow them to continue to be attacked in this place by the NDP when they can't defend themselves.

**The Speaker:** The next question goes to the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

2:20

### Crime Prevention

*(continued)*

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents in Calgary are increasingly worried about rising crime, including robberies and violent incidents in Calgary such as shootings in different communities. Families in our community are looking for stronger action to improve safety and restore confidence in their neighbourhoods. To the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services: what steps is our government taking to better protect families and businesses in Calgary?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister of public safety.

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member, of course, for that question. You know, Budget 2026 provides 10 and a half million dollars in ongoing funding to maintain 50 additional officers for the Calgary Police Service. I can tell you that they have received probably over 10,000 calls for service in 2024 alone. Of course, we support our Alberta law enforcement response teams, our safer communities and neighbourhoods teams. We're providing the resources that Calgarians need in order to keep that community safe.

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

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that vehicle-related crime and theft of personal property place additional pressure on law enforcement and can erode public trust in community safety and further given that the loss of damage leaves families in Calgary vulnerable and deepens concerns about community safety, to the same minister: can you please share how our government is supporting police and front-line agencies to reduce vehicle thefts and targeted property crimes in Calgary?

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

**Mr. Ellis:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Despite what the member opposite seems to think, I can tell you that we've committed to an unprecedented \$1.5 billion in the public safety budget for 2026. ALERT, for example, is \$56 million, and it focuses on high-level organized crime, including vehicle thefts, and

they would typically investigate revinning and cloning and chop shops. I can tell you that between 2021 and 2025 ALERT-led teams recovered over 400 stolen vehicles and millions of dollars in stolen property.

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

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister. Given that long-term reductions in crime require collaboration, prevention strategies, and community engagement and further given that residents across the province want to see practical, results-driven measures that deter repeat offenders and enhance community safety, can the minister please provide an update on what long-term initiatives our government is implementing to improve public safety and help prevent theft, break-ins, and related crimes?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government has invested enormous resources in targeting organized crime networks, especially those that are behind the property crimes. Of course, we have our Alberta sheriffs. We have our ALERT expansion. Again, I mentioned \$56 million. We have our SCAN unit, which is growing at unprecedented levels. We're targeting repeat offenders through our 24-hour and 24/7 electronic monitoring program. There's always work that we need to do with this government regarding public safety, but we're doing whatever it takes to keep Albertans safe.

### Government Policies and Cost of Living

**Ms Sweet:** Mr. Speaker, Albertans are being pushed into impossible choices every single day. Families are stretching every dollar. Seniors are rationing medication. Young people are wondering whether they can afford to stay in the province they grew up in. These pressures don't happen by accident; they are a direct result of this government's decisions. Now on top of that, Albertans are being told to shoulder the weight of a \$9.4 billion deficit created by the UC government's own choices. Why are Albertans being forced into impossible choices between groceries and gas, rent and utilities while this government's own choices over the last seven years have driven the province into a \$9.4 billion deficit?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, the member is right. Budgets are about choices, and they're about priorities. What we chose to do in Budget 2026 was focus on what matters: huge investments in health care and education, 7.2 per cent in education, 6 per cent across the healths while shouldering this deficit on behalf of Albertans. We brought in a tax cut in this term. We didn't raise taxes. We know affordability is a major concern.

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

**Ms Sweet:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this is the first government to waste a boom during a boom and given that costs are rising faster than wages, supports are being cut or allowed to erode, families are paying more for housing, utilities, child care, everyday essentials, and when people look for relief, they find only short-term announcements instead of real, sustainable action, how can the government claim to care about affordability when its decisions over the last seven years have cut supports, increased out-of-pocket costs, and left families paying more for the essentials they rely on every single day?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, once again, what has this government done? Focused our priorities on the things that we've heard

Albertans care most about, and that's health care, that's education, and it is affordability. We're seeing this happen across the country. The member opposite said that we are in a boom. We were in a population boom, the first time Albertans have experienced this without an economic cause. People from all over the world and within Canada chose Alberta because we were more affordable. We had housing advantages. We had job opportunities. If it wasn't for Alberta, the private-sector jobs created in this country would be negative.

**Ms Sweet:** Well, given that Alberta wasn't calling for a \$9.4 billion deficit and that this is not just about a financial issue – it's about a statement on priorities – and given that during near record revenue the UCP has failed to stabilize public services, failed to make affordability a priority, and failed to plan for a diversified economy and given that Albertans are paying more and getting less, all while the government insists, "Don't worry; it's all under control," with a deficit of this magnitude, will the government not admit that this affordability crisis is not an accident? It is a failure to diversify the Alberta economy; instead, relying on the oil and gas boom and . . .

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. Member, you've got to stop when I stand up.

Go ahead, Minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy has never been more diversified. We've seen countless examples of companies from around the world choosing to make Alberta home. We can point to the De Havilland project. We can point to the Lufthansa project. We can point to the \$4.2 billion in ag investment over the last few years that the minister was just speaking about, choosing Alberta to bring that investment to create jobs, create wealth, and opportunity in this province. Affordability is still a major concern. That's why we're here to protect our broad advantages, which are low personal and corporate income taxes.

**The Speaker:** The next question belongs to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

### Provincial Firearms Policies

**Mr. Wright:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe along with his Justice minister, Tim McLeod, recently announced a new provincial law that allows gun owners to apply for an exemption certificate on the federal firearms prohibited list, a tyrannical program that does no service to public safety. Alberta's law-abiding gun owners expect similar protections from their government, and rightly so. Can the Minister of Justice please explain what this government is doing to protect Alberta's responsible, law-abiding gun owners?

**The Speaker:** The keeper of the Great Seal and the Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member. Since the beginning of the federal government's announcement on the gun confiscation scheme Alberta has not wavered. Alberta has led the country. This gun grab has nothing to do with public safety. We introduced a motion in this Assembly under the Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act that made it clear that we'll always stand up for law-abiding Albertans here in this province. We will not implement the federal gun grab, not now, not ever.

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

**Mr. Wright:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that Saskatchewan has used its provincial authority to create these exemption certificates, allowing lawful gun owners to keep their firearms that are prohibited by the federal government, and given that this government has stated that it will not participate in Ottawa's pointless and wasteful gun buyback program, can the same minister please explain how Alberta's protections for responsible gun owners differ from Saskatchewan's approach?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. We've done a number of things to lead Canada, and Alberta's approach has been an example all across Canada. Under that motion we've spoken to law enforcement. We've asked them to treat this as a very low priority. Targeting law-abiding gun owners is not a priority for this province. I've sent guidance to the Alberta Crown prosecution office not to prosecute where these charges are laid because it's not in the public interest. We've also introduced various guidance and protocols to deal with home defence. We want Albertans to feel safe within their homes and communities.

2:30

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

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that last week the media reported that the Supreme Court of Canada will hear appeals on the Liberal firearms ban and given that these appeals demonstrate just how far Ottawa will go to limit the property rights of law-abiding citizens and further given that this level of federal overreach into provincial matters sets a worrying precedent, can the same minister please let this Assembly know if Alberta will be joining the challenges of the Liberal firearms ban at the Supreme Court?

**Mr. Amery:** Mr. Speaker, without blinking an eye, Alberta is proud to be an intervenor in the Supreme Court appeal. We know, as I mentioned earlier, that this government will not waver in using every single legal and constitutional means to protect law-abiding gun owners here in this province. We look forward to joining in this important appeal at the Supreme Court and making it clear that Alberta will stand behind its law-abiding gun owners in this province and any policy that undermines law-abiding Albertans. These are ineffective policies, and when there's an ineffective policy, Alberta will lead the way.

### Affordability Measures

**Mr. Ip:** Mr. Speaker, high gas prices exacerbated by the war in Iran are fuelling an even greater affordability crisis. WTI has now been trading at over \$90 a barrel for much of March. The fuel tax exemption program was designed exactly for a moment like this, for Alberta gig workers who drive for their livelihood. A gas tax exemption could make a significant difference, yet the Premier has ruled out reducing gas prices. Will the government trigger the gas tax exemption and bring Albertans relief from high gas prices at the pumps?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge, the Premier didn't rule out anything. She simply said that there's a program in place and explained how we monitor the market through the middle of the quarter, and then we have a moment in time at the beginning of the quarter where the tax can be changed. That's the way you can implement this. They remit their taxes on the quarter, and the retailers need time to change. This last quarter of the monitoring period was \$75.25. The system remains legislated, and I'd remind

everyone that we have the second-lowest taxation on fuel in the country. This is a thoughtful program.

**Ms Hoffman:** Telling me it's cheap doesn't fill my tank.

**The Speaker:** Member. Member. Member.

**Ms Hoffman:** Sorry.

**The Speaker:** Member, when I can hear you more than the person that's on their feet, that's not good.

**Mr. Ip:** Given that the Strait of Hormuz blockade will affect more than just oil prices and that global supply chains have already been severely impacted, affecting critical Canadian imports and exports, which will lead to a rise in grocery prices, critical goods, and supplies for everyday Albertans, and given that this will inevitably worsen the ongoing affordability crisis, what is the government doing to help Albertans weather rising costs in the coming months, or will they continue to blame their fiscal mismanagement on Ottawa, immigrants, and their favourite bogeyman, Justin Trudeau?

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

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to be part of a government that puts Albertans first every single day, every single ministry. That's why our Minister of Finance led with an income tax cut to help every single Albertan who's working with \$750 a year, households often \$1,500 a year, making sure they have money in their wallets to make the choices they need to make. It's also why we stand up to a federal government that continues to layer on taxes like the carbon tax hidden on farmers, methane tax, strychnine laws, all these things increasing the price of fertilizer, all the things that add costs to food. We stand up for Albertans.

**Mr. Ip:** Given that high inflation means Albertans will face significant increases from gas prices to groceries and nearly everything they buy at the store this year and given that under this government food bank use is at unprecedented levels, up over 22 per cent since 2024, while this Premier continues with policies that push many vulnerable Albertans to the brink, including seniors, will the minister of seniors do the right thing and reverse the cuts to the Alberta seniors' benefit, or will the poorest Albertans be nickelled and dimed while the Premier takes lavish trips gifted to her by friends in the Saudi government?

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, Mr. Speaker, no matter how much the NDP keeps trying to make up cuts that ain't there, Albertans ain't gonna buy it. The budget is clear. It has increases in almost every major social services line item and health care line item because that's what we care about. We're spending over \$6.7 billion on seniors this year alone, which is a significant amount. We're going to continue to invest in that space. You know what? The biggest thing we did for seniors was that we got rid of the NDP's damaging carbon tax, which was punishing them disproportionately more than anybody else.

**Member Boparai:** Mr. Speaker, affordability isn't a buzzword; it's a daily struggle. But instead of throwing a lifeline to struggling Albertans, this government is only throwing them more bills. This year the average Calgary family is paying \$340 more in provincial property taxes, \$1,000 more for groceries, and 20 per cent more for auto insurance, all while the government stares down a \$9.4 billion deficit they created during an oil boom. Why is this government forcing Alberta families to pay the price for their fiscal failures?

**Mr. Neudorf:** Mr. Speaker, we're not going to take advice from an NDP government that drove out investment, drove out Albertans, and cost Albertans more money every single year as they never brought forward a single balanced budget, only debt and deficit. We've heard what a double-double is. I'll tell you what a triple-triple is. What do you get when you take the former mayor of Calgary, the Alberta NDP, and the federal Liberal government? You get triple the costs. You look at utilities; the NDP would triple it. If you look at the cost of groceries, the NDP would triple it. You took a look at the cost of time to approve . . .

**The Speaker:** Minister. Minister. Minister, when I stand up, you've got to stop.

**Member Boparai:** Given that the UCP promised to lower costs yet they have allowed auto insurance premiums to skyrocket by 20 per cent and locked Albertans into high-cost electricity plans, given that they are letting utility companies and insurers feast on Albertans' savings while the provincial government takes its own cut through sneaky fee hikes, when will the UCP government show a spine, stand up for Albertans, and start being a representative for the people who are struggling to afford the drive to work and to heat their homes?

**The Speaker:** The minister.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the NDP government is a government of triple-triple. They triple the cost of everything. That's why we're standing up for Albertans and fixing the mess they left behind when they got off coal without the rules to govern it. They cost Alberta taxpayers \$2 billion just to get off coal, and that's the gift that just keeps on giving. Every year, because their renewables contracts were so high and so bad, either Albertans pay for the high cost of electricity or, when we see success like our government has brought forward and a low cost of electricity, taxpayers pay to backfill those companies.

**Member Boparai:** Given that this budget is a betrayal to Albertans who need their government to be focused on affordability and given that this government is taking \$360 million in new fees and levies from Albertans this year alone and given that the UCP government has mismanaged our finances, driven the province into a planned \$137 billion in debt, and now Calgary-Falconridge families are faced with even more bills as a result of their bad choices, will the minister admit that the UCP has killed the Alberta advantage, burying it under a mountain of UCP debt?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Speaker, like I said earlier in this place, surpluses are theoretical to the members opposite. They know about deficits very well. They know about deficits when populations leaving this place at their encouragement go get a job in B.C. That's the kind of thing that we heard from this government. People are choosing here. They're moving to be here with their feet because of our affordability advantages. We're seeing in British Columbia right now personal income taxes increased, the debt trajectory being quite scary. That's under NDP leadership.

**The Speaker:** The next question belongs to the hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

#### Funding for Airdrie Schools

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Airdrie is one of the fastest growing communities in all of Alberta and Canada, and with that growth come increasing pressures on our local school system.

Families in Airdrie want to know that their children will have access to high-quality education, modern facilities, and the supports needed to succeed in the classroom. To the minister of education: can you please outline what actions our government is taking to support and improve education in Airdrie's schools?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education and Childcare.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget '26 invests \$722 million – that's a 7 per cent increase from last year – to help hire more teachers, educational assistants, and other support staff. A lot of those, of course, will find their way into Airdrie's schools, which, as the member noted, is indeed one of the fastest growing cities in Canada. More particularly, six Airdrie schools will see new complexity teams come to their doors as a result of our government's investment. The C.W. Perry school, Cooper's Crossing school, and other schools in the community will see these complexity teams.

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

**Ms Pitt:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Airdrie continues to grow, which means that planning for new schools and expanding our current capacity is critical to ensuring that students can continue to learn, and further given that my constituents are interested in how our government is working to identify priorities and plan for future builds, again to the minister: can you please outline and provide an update on new school planning or potential future school projects being considered for Airdrie?

2:40

**Mr. Nicolaides:** As part of Budget '26 we now have seven school projects under way in the city of Airdrie. Six of those projects are for new schools, and one of those is for an addition. More specifically, St. Martin De Porres high school will have an addition. As well, a new K to 8 school in Windsong is being developed, a new secondary school, a new high school as well, another elementary in Bayview, another elementary in Lanark. In addition, Budget '26 also approved a new elementary junior high school in Chinook Gate. All these projects ...

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

**Ms Pitt:** Mr. Speaker, given that Airdrie is super pleased to have seven school projects on the go, much needed, and we want to ensure that our existing schools continue to receive the support and improvements needed to meet the needs of our students and given that as the community grows, existing school facilities must continue to evolve to meet modern learning needs, to the minister: what steps is our government taking to modernize and improve existing schools in Airdrie so that students can continue to learn in safe, high-quality environments?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, in addition to building new schools, a key component of our schools now program is to modernize school spaces as well. Through our investment, though, the entirety of the schools now program, we aim to create and update 200,000 student spaces by 2032 with a total commitment of \$8.6 billion. We recognize that modernizing spaces is a credible priority, as is developing and building new schools where they're needed the most. Of course, over the last few years we've seen a significant increase in enrolment and pressure, and the schools now program is going to help to address that.

**The Speaker:** In about 30 seconds we'll continue with the daily Routine.

## Members' Statements

(continued)

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

### Wildfire Prevention and Control

**Mr. Dyck:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud to announce significant investments in Alberta's wildfire mitigation strategy in Budget 2026 that will have big impact for local communities. In 2023 my community of Grande Prairie had significant wildfires outside of town, and we also had them across the north and across rural Alberta. These forest fires, while significant, were put out, thankfully, through our hard-working firefighters from across Alberta and the many teams that support their work.

Now, over the next three years our government will dedicate more than \$200 million to strengthen prevention, preparedness, and response efforts across our province. This includes funding for enhanced fuel management programs, upgrades to wildfire detection and monitoring systems, and improvements to emergency response infrastructure. These include greater use of appropriate firebreaks, innovative nighttime firefighting with night-vision helicopters, detection, and other innovations from right here, across our province, and other areas. Together these are part of the ways that we will ensure our communities, forests, and public lands are better protected and that Albertans' emergency services can respond quickly and effectively when wildfires occur.

These investments also reflect our commitment to responsible forest management. As part of this work we understand the importance of reconciling caribou habitat needs, watershed health, and protection against natural threats like wildfire and mountain pine beetle with the need for forest companies to continue to access wood fibre and to continue to produce lumber that builds our homes and for Albertans, which also supports local communities. It means families, communities, and businesses will continue to have confidence that the province is taking proactive steps to reduce risks and protect lives and property.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2026 demonstrates our government's commitment to keeping Albertans safe while supporting a strong and sustainable forestry sector and supporting our wildfire response teams.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Member Irwin:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of an e-mail from an Edmonton resident named Nick, who is expressing his extreme concern around the cuts to housing programs co-ordinated through Homeward Trust.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you. I'm tabling 11 more letters, the requisite number of copies, from supporters and volunteers of the three provincial heritage organizations whose funding was eliminated in this budget.

**The Speaker:** The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Wright:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the five requisite copies of a CBC article titled Canada's Top Court Will Hear Challenges to Liberals' Firearms Ban.

**The Speaker:** Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Dach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of an article produced by the Calgary Chamber of commerce, making the Business Case for an Underground Green Line.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Points of order. One point of order at 2:01 p.m., I think called by the Opposition House Leader.

#### Point of Order Insulting Language

**Ms Gray:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), making allegations, imputing false and unavowed motives, and abusive and insulting language. At that time the Government House Leader, in response to the Leader of the Official Opposition – and I don't have the benefit of the Blues – implied that the Leader of the Official Opposition never writes his own questions, or he assumes he doesn't. We've had points of order like this in this Chamber. Implying that staff do all the work for MLAs is beneath the dignity of this Chamber and does, I believe, make it a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). We've had similar points of order around accusing people of using ChatGPT to do their work. I think this gets into personal insults, and I hope that you rule it out of order so it does not continue.

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

**Mr. Schow:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully disagree with the Leader of the – Opposition House Leader. Forgive me for mixing up the title. In my comments I said, "I [would] never assume that the member opposite has written anything of his own." I would start off by saying that he, by his own admission, said that he did not write the question. Furthermore, if I had said that the member is unable to, cannot, doesn't know how to write his own material, that, of course, would be a point of order. That'd be a personal attack.

In this Chamber we don't assume anything. I learned at an early age what happens when you do assume, and I won't repeat that adage here in this Chamber because it would not please the chair. In this instance this is not a personal insult. I was simply responding, in the nature of debate, that I would never assume the Leader of the Opposition does one thing or another and, in this case, referring to writing his own material. What I would say is that this not a point of order; rather, a matter of debate.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Well, here's what the Blues recorded, that I have here. "Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I could never assume that the member opposite has written anything of his own." Well, it's not helpful, what was said. The Opposition House Leader is not wrong that there have been times when essentially statements were made that suggested that either the staff, who are not here to defend themselves, didn't do a good job or that a member was unable to. Let me just say this. It's not helpful, Government House Leader. It doesn't quite reach the stage of a point of order today, but let me just say this. If you continue insults of this type, it will certainly reach the point of causing disorder in the House. So please receive this as an admonishment and a caution not to go there on a regular basis or, better yet, not again.

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, may I?

**The Speaker:** You don't get to reply to this.

**Mr. Schow:** Well, if it's helpful to the Chamber, I will just withdraw and apologize even if it's not a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Well, then, I'll make an exception based on what you just said. Thank you.

2:50

### Orders of the Day Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading Bill 206 Accessible Alberta Act

[Debate adjourned March 16: Member Tejada speaking]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

**Member Tejada:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise in support of Bill 206, the Accessible Alberta Act, brought forward by the Member for St. Albert, informed by disability advocates and community, which is how any legislation impacting Albertans should start.

I'd like to thank the Member for St. Albert for this legislation and also the champions in the disability community for never giving up hope, determination, and advocacy when it comes to equity and inclusion. You have carried an unimaginable burden in spite of this government. I thank you and applaud you. You are not alone in this, and we won't give up either.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The goal here is simple and critical, to create an accessible Alberta by 2040 through identifying, preventing, and removing barriers through the establishment of accessibility standards. Now, we've heard the Premier say recently that she doesn't wish for Alberta to be an outlier when it comes to benefits for folks with disabilities or for seniors, and I would suggest that the Premier can start by supporting this bill. Alberta is currently one of only two provinces without legislated accessibility standards. If this bill passes, it would bring Alberta in line with other provinces and protect the Charter rights of people with disabilities.

I'd like to point out in particular that this bill demonstrates what good governance and legislation looks like. Alberta's New Democrats are committed to equity and inclusion and well-informed policy, and none of that happens without consultation, especially when it comes to the standards that would be developed in collaboration with community representatives.

Now, I know that the UCP approach to folks living with disabilities is to centralize control, remove agency, impose legislation, and pocket any supports that they might rightfully receive as they try to survive this government, but that is not the approach of the Alberta NDP. In any legislation impacting folks with disabilities, accessibility legislation is where they should have started.

Bill 206 is consultative, informed by community, and proactive rather than reactive. It will identify, remove, and avoid barriers rather than rely on a complaint-focused approach. It starts with the development of an accessibility standards committee tasked with consulting on and developing accessibility standards to allow the full participation of Albertans with disabilities. The majority of its members would be people with disabilities, and it must be representative of Alberta and include Indigenous representation. Why? Because representation is not just an afterthought; it is critical if the standards

created meet the needs of those we have sworn to serve. The legislation proposes that this committee will develop and propose accessibility standards in a broad range of areas, including employment, built infrastructure, information and technology services, government housing, transportation, education, and procurement; in other words, all those critical areas that impact the lives of all Albertans.

I will say that what Bill 206 does really is universal. It benefits us all. I've heard it phrased that at any time any one of us could become a member of the disability community and need the world we live in to be more accessible, be it our physical surroundings or any other way we interact with the world.

Alberta's New Democrats will always consult with Albertans and especially Albertans with disabilities about any decision that directs their day-to-day life. Again, this legislation is an opportunity for every member of this House to meet the moment and think beyond platitudes when it comes to inclusion and to start with respect and consultation.

For this reason, I urge every member of this Assembly to live up to that parliamentary prayer we say every day and legislate to improve the lives of all Albertans, and they can start by voting for Bill 206.

**The Acting Speaker:** I'll recognize the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services.

**Mr. Nixon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise. Maybe, through you, I could just check with the table how much time is left.

**The Acting Speaker:** You've got about five minutes.

**Mr. Nixon:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep it to five minutes, then. I'm excited for a quick opportunity to respond to this legislation. Let me start off with that I think the intent of this legislation comes from a good spot though, unfortunately, at times it's hard for the Official Opposition to drop their partisan lens and their partisan attacks to be able to move forward legislation of this magnitude. The challenge, though, Mr. Speaker, is that it comes with some very unthought-out processes, which, frankly, could end up hurting the very people that it's trying to help.

First off, Mr. Speaker, let me start with the fact that the opposition often says that there are only two provinces without accessibility legislation. That's incorrect. In fact, the only provinces with full, across-the-board accessibility legislation in our country are Ontario, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia. What's very interesting is that Ontario's most independent review concluded that accessibility in the province has reached, and I quote, a crisis point, citing nonexistent enforcement, limited accountability across both public and private sectors, fragmented regulatory oversight, and insufficient use of data to drive policy. This is the problem when you create legislation that can't do its role across the system.

That is what this legislation does. First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, it legislates the wrong ministry to be responsible for accessibility. That is probably where they should have started if they wanted to make this legislation work. They also say that Alberta's disability advocate, somebody that the Official Opposition has had a prolonged war with for some reason, is in support of this legislation. There's no such quote from the disability advocate that says that anywhere. In fact, I'll tell you what the disability advocate is in support of: it's Alberta's budget, it's ADAP, and it is the unprecedented disability supports that have been invested by this government to be able to help support people that face disabilities.

I also want to correct, Mr. Speaker, the record when it comes to accessible housing, something that the Official Opposition used in many of their remarks on this legislation as the reason why you

would need to be able to pass this legislation. Alberta already has taken that step, something the NDP did not do, to put into regulation how much of our builds, for affordable housing and elsewhere inside government-subsidized housing, had to be built accessible. That number is 10 per cent. We actually exceed it each and every year so far, at about 14 per cent of all of our units. We would increase that number if we started to see challenges inside that space, but we have not, and again we continue to exceed it.

The biggest issue with the Official Opposition, though, when it comes to this is that they claim that this will not come with a significant price tag. The reality is that they haven't consulted with anybody. This legislation, if passed, would have far-reaching impacts on every aspect of society, on health care and on business, but also, most importantly, on private property, which they have not consulted on and would come with a significant price tag. When you want to come and make legislation of this magnitude, you need to make sure to consult to make sure that we can get it right, or it won't work, just like what took place in Ontario.

I do also want to quickly correct them when it comes to AISH and ADAP, which are not part of this legislation, Mr. Speaker, but were spoken a lot about by the Official Opposition in their debate here. The reality is that if they really want to help Albertans who are facing disabilities, they would support ADAP because ADAP will provide benefits for a tremendous number of disabled people who were never able to get AISH, including under the NDP. It will give more access to disability supports for thousands of Albertans who could not have got it under the AISH program, something I suspect that the Official Opposition will vote against.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, Municipal Affairs has done a good job working with Accessibility Canada, as promised, to make sure that our accessibility standards here continue to meet and exceed all standards, and we're going to continue to do that work with Municipal Affairs. But the number one thing that this Chamber can do if they truly say they want to stand with people with disabilities is support the Alberta government's bill, the budget, over the next couple of days, which will invest \$3.7 billion in the disability sector, \$1 billion more than the Official Opposition did. That's a 40 per cent increase over the NDP. If they truly care, they'll stand up and vote with the government when it comes to that.

**The Acting Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for St. Albert to close debate on Bill 206.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I get going, I'd like to actually, first, thank some of the people that made this bill a reality. I'd like to thank Barrier-Free Alberta, that's powered by Cerebral Palsy Alberta. It's a grassroots movement that really pushed to get this legislation here. Now, that involves advocates with lived experience, legal experts, accessibility consultants, Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre, Alberta Human Rights Commission, Cerebral Palsy Alberta, CNIB, Deaf and Hear Alberta. This is a movement that actually has been pushing for 10 years to get this legislation here. Now, there are a number of giants in the disability community who have pushed for this legislation who are no longer here with us but we would like to recognize posthumously because their work was invaluable and we stand on their shoulders: Cal Schuler, Marlin Steiner, Larry Pempeit, Ken Thomas, Gary McPherson, Donna Martyn, and Louise Taylor.

3:00

Today is a historic day in Alberta. We have the ability to throw the doors open and open wide Alberta government services to every

person with a disability in this province. Right now we have barriers all over the place that we don't even know because we don't have the disabilities that encounter the barriers, but we can change that.

Now, I'm going to really briefly explain what this bill does because clearly the minister has not even read the bill and doesn't have a clue what we're trying to do. What this bill does is create a committee based primarily of people with disabilities with experience, whether it's in law or in a specific area of expertise of this bill. It creates a committee that creates these subtables of experts that will develop and prioritize accessibility standards in all kinds of areas – the built environment, IT and communication, procurement, housing, employment, transportation, all of these things – and then they're given to the minister, who then decides how to implement them. We monitor them, they're reported publicly every year, and then every five years there's an independent review that is published for all Albertans to see.

Now, we heard from the minister: well, the disability advocate doesn't approve. That's a crock. That's a bald-faced lie, Mr. Speaker, and let me tell you why. In 2023 . . .

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

**The Acting Speaker:** A point of order has been called.

#### Point of Order Parliamentary Language Exhibits

**Mr. Schow:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on two points of order, the first of which is, of course, that we cannot use the word "lie" in this Chamber in relation to the caucus or specifically a member. That would be a point of order, standard practice in this Chamber.

The other practice is that we don't use props in this Chamber. As magnanimous or as important as the prop may be, we don't use them in the Chamber. There happens to be a stuffed animal sitting on the lectern of the member's desk, and that animal is gone since I have looked away. It's because the member took it away, understanding that it is also against parliamentary procedure to have a prop. Review the footage. It's there, Mr. Speaker.

There are two points of order. I encourage you to rule in the government's favour on both.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for St. Albert to defend.

**Ms Renaud:** I apologize and withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

**An Hon. Member:** Prop.

**Ms Renaud:** The service dog prop, yes, is gone. It's been removed. You okay now?

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue. [interjections]

**The Acting Speaker:** The apology does not reflect well when the prop is utilized during the apology. I would ask that the member re-address the Chamber with a proper apology.

**Ms Renaud:** I apologize and withdraw. Let's move on.

**The Acting Speaker:** I accept the withdrawal. You may now continue.

#### Debate Continued

**Ms Renaud:** Now, we know that here in Alberta we have a patchwork of legislation. The members will say: "Well, we already take care of it. We have safety standards. We have building standards. This should go in Municipal Affairs." That is not true.

Building standards and safety codes are part of it. We have always had that, we are always updating them, and we're always using that. That is not what this is. This is about identifying, removing, and preventing barriers in areas that we don't even think about so that people who are blind can have their screen readers access every document that the government of Alberta puts out, because right now that doesn't happen. We don't have ASL for anything other than question period, so this important debate: if you are deaf and only use ASL, you cannot access this. These are simple things.

Now, government says: "What about the private sector? That'll cost millions." Had they read the bill, they would understand that this bill is about government purview, all of the things that are in the government's purview, not the private sector. Now, what is alarming, Mr. Speaker, is that this government doesn't even have enough respect for the people with disabilities in this province, almost a million of them, that want this legislation, that have been asking for it for decades. They're asking to have access just like everybody else. This is not about the private sector and making difficulty for them; this is about doing what we do here, everything that we do here, opening the door so that everyone has access.

This government will stand up and say that we didn't consult. How dare they? We have spent the last year and a half consulting. We have consulted with Alberta chambers. We have consulted with the Alberta Human Rights Commission. We have consulted with businesses. We have consulted with disability groups. We have consulted with our neighbours, with our communities. We talk to them every day, and what they say is: "We need access now. Not tomorrow."

Now, this government's own disability advocate in 2023 began a process of doing a consultation and came up with a report in 2025, and this government hid it. They hid this entire report. This disability advocate asked for this legislation to be brought forward, this very act that I have put together, that we have worked on, and is now before us for a vote. He called for this. He said: we need this, and the risk of not passing it now is great.

Please support this bill. It is a change-maker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert has moved second reading of Bill 206, Accessible Alberta Act.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:06 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Al-Guneid	Eremenko	Metz
Batten	Gray	Miyashiro
Boparai	Guthrie	Nenshi
Brar, Gurinder	Haji	Pancholi
Brar, Gurtej	Hayter	Renaud
Calahoo Stonehouse	Hoffman	Sabir
Ceci	Hoyle	Shepherd
Chapman	Ip	Sigurdson, L.
Dach	Irwin	Sweet
Deol	Kasawski	Tejada
Ellingson	Kayande	Wright, P.
Elmeligi		

Against the motion:

Amery	LaGrange	Sawyer
Armstrong-Homeniuk	Loewen	Schow

Boitchenko	Long	Schulz
Bouchard	Lovely	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Lundy	Singh
de Jonge	McDougall	Stephan
Dreeshen	Nally	Turton
Dyck	Neudorf	van Dijken
Ellis	Nicolaides	Wiebe
Fir	Nixon	Williams
Glubish	Petrovic	Wilson
Horner	Pitt	Wright, J.
Hunter	Rowswell	Yao
Johnson	Sawhney	Yaseen
Jones		
Totals:	For – 34	Against – 43

[Motion for second reading of Bill 206 lost]

### Bill 205 Non-Disclosure Agreements Act

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mrs. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour to rise today to move, pursuant to Standing Order 74.1, that Bill 205, Non-Disclosure Agreements Act, be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities for further consultation and review.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Additionally, it is also a great honour to provide some context about the content of Bill 205, legislation designed to close gaps, gaps that stand in the way of justice and dignity for survivors of sexual misconduct and sexual exploitation, and legislation that ensures our laws reflect reality, not the past but the present.

3:20

I will begin with the second part of the bill. Section 9 amends the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, PSECA, by finally defining sexual exploitation. Today it isn't defined. Instead, the law tells us a child is in need of protection if they are engaging in prostitution or attempting to. That's it. That definition is not just narrow; it's outdated. It reduces exploitation to a transaction, to money, to prostitution, but we know now that exploitation is far more complex. When PSECA was first enacted, that may have reflected our understanding, but our understanding has evolved, and after consulting directly with survivors and advocates working on the front lines, we heard something very clearly. Exploitation does not always look like a transaction. Sometimes it looks like grooming. An adult builds trust, offers gifts, provides attention, fills emotional gaps, and slowly, deliberately manipulates a child into sexual activity. There may be no exchange of money, but let me be clear. It is exploitation all the same.

Bill 205 corrects this. It expands the definition to reflect reality, including coercion, luring, and manipulation, where a child is drawn into sexual activity for shelter, for food, for drugs, for affection, for survival. No longer will offenders slip through the cracks because the law failed to keep up. No longer will outdated language protect modern exploitation. If passed, this bill will give law enforcement the tools they need to do what we expect of them, protect children.

Now to the second and equally important part of this bill. At its core, Bill 205 proposes something simple, a small change but a profound impact. It prohibits the use of nondisclosure agreements, NDAs, in civil settlements involving sexual misconduct and/or sexual exploitation.

**The Acting Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt, Member, but under Standing Order 74.1 the motion to refer to committee should be the body of your explanation at this point. We need to speak to the motion to refer to committee. Need to wrap it up.

**Mrs. Johnson:** So five minutes?

**The Acting Speaker:** It needs to be referral – like, the motion is to refer to committee. The body of your explanation now is to refer to the motion that you have made, to refer it to committee. You bring it just towards the referral to committee and the reasons for that as opposed to – so it's, essentially, just bring it down.

**Mrs. Johnson:** The bill does apply retroactively, which does require more consultation, and that is why this is part one of the reasons that this is being referred to committee. The bill will ensure survivors cannot be pressured into silence. Maybe I should stop there.

**The Acting Speaker:** It's good.

**Mrs. Johnson:** With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude and leave it there.

**The Acting Speaker:** Okay. Thank you.

The MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka, the sponsor of Bill 205, has moved the motion to refer to committee with regard to Standing Order 74.1. This is nondebatable.

[Motion carried]

### Motions Other than Government Motions

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

#### Public Safety

508. Mr. Shepherd moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) recognize that
  - (i) addressing rising crime rates by enhancing public safety is a top priority for all Albertans irrespective of where they reside in the province,
  - (ii) both businesses and individuals are bearing significant costs due to rising crime rates and social disorder,
  - (iii) the government's insufficient action has contributed to those costs by exacerbating the issues of crime and social disorder, and
- (b) urge the government to redirect all resources allocated for the Alberta provincial police service initiative towards enhancing services and programs that address crime and social disorder and increase public safety.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, there is no question that communities across our province continue to face a crisis in public safety. Last summer, ahead of the fall municipal elections, the Alberta Business Council surveyed their members, everyone from top CEOs to some of the largest companies in our province to owners of local businesses in rural areas. They found that 94 per cent of business leaders were concerned about public safety and crime in their communities and that they wanted to see governments tackle crime, invest in mental health and addiction supports, and keep public spaces clean and welcoming. That reflects what I've been hearing right here in my community for the last few years both from residents, businesses, the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce,

and it reflects what I hear from residents and leaders in communities across the province, mid-size cities and rural areas.

It's something I think we agree on across the aisle, as government members have repeatedly stood to speak about the need for government action to improve safety in their communities, even if we disagree at points on what action government should take. We all recognize that crime and social disorder are affecting businesses, making it harder for them to operate, to ensure their staff and their customers feel safe enough to come in, to protect their product and their properties from theft and damage, and that, in turn, it is hurting vibrancy in our community. There's no disagreement about the existence of the problem; we disagree about the solution.

The UCP have insisted on pressing forward with the creation of a provincial police force, something a strong majority of Albertans have clearly and repeatedly said they don't want. Now, let's be clear. Police are an essential part of building and maintaining safe communities. But when it comes to policing, what are Albertans and their representatives asking for? Well, from the Rural Municipalities of Alberta's position statement on policing and rural crime, the creation of a provincial police force "should not take place unless a detailed feasibility study proves that such an approach will reduce provincial and municipal policing costs and enhance service levels across the province." "Municipalities should not be required to incur additional costs to support the creation and operation of" a provincial police force.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there's been no feasibility study, detailed or otherwise. There's been no consultation with municipalities. Instead, the minister has pushed forward with multiple pieces of legislation and gone ahead and created a whole new provincial entity. The municipalities have absolutely been forced to pay more as the UCP have downloaded a wide range of additional costs while stripping streams of revenue that help pay for local policing, all while spending millions to create their new provincial policing agency. The RMA continues: "while policing is critical to addressing rural crime, adequate investments in Crown prosecutors, Family and Community Support Services, and victim services is important to supporting safe rural communities."

That's similar to Alberta Municipalities, their response to the minister of public safety's new police funding model in December, where they said: "Alberta Municipalities believes something needs to be done to bend the 'cost curve' down on policing. We know that investing in prevention is one of the best ways to [do] this," and they call on the provincial government to significantly increase annual funding for FCSS to support costly services to "reduce demand on more costly services like crisis intervention and policing."

Similarly, the Business Council of Alberta, whose president, Adam Legge, said that "investments in tackling social disorder are investments in local prosperity." Accordingly, the key recommendations from the BCA to support safety were "building local mental wellness and addiction strategies [and] partnering with other levels of government to expand housing and wraparound supports."

Sadly, none of that has come to pass. This new budget does not include a single new dollar for FCSS. It includes debt, and it includes plans to make it even harder for people to access supports, and it continues the pattern of this government, a record of cuts to community partners who deliver front-line, evidence-based preventative support services. I don't think there's a community in our province that hasn't seen a program or organization, people from their community who are helping their community, lose funding in the last year, often on incredibly short notice, some in the middle of the fiscal year. It's unprecedented and it's unconscionable, but it's the pattern of this government.

You know, for their first years in government they refused to take any action at all even as we saw numbers of people living houseless explode, numbers of people dying from drug poisoning grow. They struck task forces and committees, issued reports, but they took no action. In fact, they stripped funding from groups and organizations working on the front lines to support those most in need, that were mitigating the impacts in our communities. They made big promises about these new systems and supports, this recovery-oriented system of care, but they did next to nothing to actually address the crisis on the ground across Alberta. By the time they actually took any action, the crisis had just gotten worse, and here we are seven years later, three under this Premier, and we still have little to show for it other than layers and layers of new bureaucracy, a whole new industry full of contracts for their friends but next to no impact for those suffering on our streets.

Five of the 11 recovery communities but nowhere near the capacity required to meet the level of need. I'm told by folks on the front lines that if they need to get someone off the streets into treatment, they're still facing six to eight weeks of waiting to get them there. We have a clear timeline of when these others are going to be built, but we don't have evidence that they're going to be – the evidence we do have is that they may be tied up in the same web of corruption that we see surrounding private surgical facilities.

The government has never met a crisis they aren't willing to exploit. Using the opioid crisis as an excuse to build this new empire and bureaucracy entrenched in their ideology and controlled by their friends, both creating and using the crisis in health care to tear apart the system, quadruple bureaucracy, and impose an ideology of privatization, and now using legitimate concerns about rural crime and public safety across the province to create a provincial police force that Albertans have been absolutely clear they don't want. And just as their actions and their lack of action on housing and social services and mental health and addiction and health care have failed to make things better, have in fact made things worse, their new provincial police service is not set up to deliver.

### 3:30

The minister has confirmed that his \$22 million increase to the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service will only provide 30 new officers, 30 pairs of boots on the ground in the next year for the whole province, an increase of about 2.5 per cent. Now, he may point to his commitment to transition 200 Alberta sheriffs to become fully trained police officers, but that does not increase capacity in the communities because those officers, according to the minister himself, are already fulfilling policelike functions. Again, a small amount more capacity in that they'll no longer require, you know, support from another officer of jurisdiction to complete some of their arrests and do some of their work, but that's not going to make a notable increase in boots on the ground available to respond to a call, the whole reason the minister said that he's creating this whole new provincial entity.

The fact is that, despite a significant increase in funding, the minister's new provincial police force isn't in any position to make a material difference in safety in our communities today or this year. The dollars being spent would have a much bigger impact if they were invested in proven programs and services: the community partners, municipalities, and nonprofits who work on the front lines of prevention and support, who mitigate and prevent crisis. These are the folks in municipalities, Mr. Speaker, who have been calling for investment in – they asked this government to increase FCSS, to empower local municipalities, to empower the people they know are making effective progress in their communities. Instead, what we have seen with this government is that they centralize these services.

They take away local funding. They cancel programs mid-year. They are taking more and more power away from municipalities while they're increasing their costs.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we support policing. Indeed, police are an important and essential part of keeping public safety in our province. The RCMP, local police jurisdictions, and indeed Alberta sheriffs make a contribution, too. But municipalities have been very clear that they do not want the ministry's new provincial police force. What they want is real action that will make a difference in their communities now, today, in the next year, that will make an impact on what we are seeing in our communities and on our streets. What we've had from the minister instead are multiple pieces of legislation, big promises, slow progress, and interest in building an empire rather than delivering what Albertans need. That's why this motion calls for taking those dollars and investing them instead where municipalities, where municipal leaders or community leaders, where Albertans are calling for them to go, in things that will make a real difference on the streets of our community today. Local empowerment, not provincial bureaucracy.

I look forward to the debate on this motion, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

Are there any others who wish to speak? I will recognize the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

**Mr. Ellis:** Super. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A lot to say, a lot to unpack, I think, on behalf of certainly my friend the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services. I just want to touch a little bit on FCSS, a preventative service program that do not want to be police officers. Forcing social workers to do law enforcement is extremely wrong, extremely dangerous, and exactly what you see in New York when it comes to defund the police and the movement that is going on there.

I can tell you that in Saskatchewan when they had that unfortunate incident where in a First Nations community a person, you know, went on we'll call it a spree where multiple stabbings had occurred, the first person that died was the crisis response worker. So I can tell you that nobody, certainly on this side of the House, is going to put a social worker or anybody in a position of danger when responding to very serious, potentially dangerous calls to service when it comes to mental health and/or addictions, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about the motion here. "Addressing rising crime rates by enhancing public safety is a top priority." Yes. I mean, certainly, rising crime is, of course, a concern throughout Canada. I think you've heard me talk about this before as to how we got to this situation when it comes to C-75 and the broken bail system and the fact that we've had to really think outside of the box.

But on a positive note, I do want to talk about some of the good things that are happening. It's some of the stuff that is, I would say, a little bit misleading, especially by saying, "addressing rising crime rates." As I look at some of the crime statistics between 2022 and 2024 in Alberta, they're down 12 per cent. In rural they're down 5 per cent. Urban, they're down 13 per cent, in Calgary 18 per cent. In Edmonton they're down 11 per cent. When I look at the crime severity index, which a lot of people tend to look at as a bit of a gauge, I see that in Alberta we're down 9 per cent. In Calgary we're down 20 per cent. In Edmonton we're down 1 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Not a very big number, but, you know, we can tell that NDP policies don't tend to work when we're talking about law and order and sort of crime and addressing some of the crime that we see.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will say that I'm actually very excited, and I encourage all members on our side of the House to stand up when

it comes to a vote because I really want to get the members opposite on record here with this defund the police motion that we have here. I mean, nothing is more evidence than what I have read, quite frankly, in this particular motion. I know they don't like it when I belabour this regarding the C-75. You know, both businesses and individuals are bearing a significant cost due to rising crime. Yes, I agree, and people are less safe in Canada because of the Trudeau-NDP alliance. One thing I would say that we have very much learned is that as we're able to work with the federal government, as we're able to see some maybe positive changes coming forward when it comes to bail reform, I'm starting to think here and I'm going: what really is the problem? Well, the problem was Justin Trudeau and the NDP. That is what has left us unsafe in this province and this country.

Then we talk about the insufficient action that has contributed. Mr. Speaker, we have been trying to think outside – why do you think we have a 24/7 electronic monitoring program? It's because of the bail system that the members opposite had broken in Canada. This is why we're having to protect people who are out on bail and think outside of the box.

I can tell you that we have heard this time and time again regarding First Nations communities and how they have been disproportionately affected by policies of the NDP when they broke the bail system. I can tell you that, especially when it comes to domestic violence and women. Women are extremely vulnerable because of the system that they created in the bail hearing system. Those offenders are let out. Guess what they do. They go and wreak havoc on the person that calls the police. And then you have the drug dealers. The drug dealers go and they – you know, the people in the community, the chiefs, and the council all do the right thing and the bad guy gets put into jail, but because of NDP policy and because they broke the bail system, the bad guy gets released, and then we have a crisis again in the First Nations communities.

I would love for all of us to stand up on this particular motion because I just, quite frankly, want it on record, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP are, of course, the defund the police party. You might be wondering: how do I know that? How do we know this? Well, we already know about the 12 and a half million dollars that the NDP cut out of ALERT. [interjections] Yes, we all know that, but we also have the Leader of the Opposition. While mayor of Calgary when he pushed to redirect \$20 million away from the Calgary Police Service budget, he called it a framework. We call that, of course, just resource drain, right?

Mr. Speaker, yes, I would love to actually talk about some of the other members, of course. We have the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who famously stood in this House and called this, quote, defund to rebuild, which is exactly what this motion is about. Now, I'm sure the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre would love an additional \$432 million to his budget, but as an MLA I'm pretty sure defunding all law enforcement out of his community is something that probably won't get him re-elected.

Now, we can also talk about Lethbridge city council, right? Lethbridge city council voted, of course, to defund the police as well by a million dollars, notably the Member for Lethbridge-West, Mr. Speaker. We also have the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. He characterized our efforts to put more boots on the ground as an ideological program. Ideological. Making sure that we have police to respond to 911 calls. Making sure that we have the fugitive apprehension team, where we have surveillance units, where we put money into fighting organized crime because of the system that the NDP broke. I can tell you that organized crime is thriving in Canada – right? – because of the soft-on-crime policies of – guess who – the NDP. That's right. That's right. If anything, this is a road map to just

empty cars on the streets of both Calgary and Edmonton and, quite frankly, rural Alberta.

**3:40**

Now, I also want to talk about the (b) here, “urge the government to redirect all resources allocated for the Alberta provincial police service initiative towards enhancing services and programs that address crime and social disorder.” Well, Mr. Speaker, we all know that the provincial police service is the RCMP. I just signed them, gave them \$17.3 million, and apparently the members opposite aren’t happy about that. They’re also getting an increase from \$396 million to \$432 million, and apparently they’re not happy about that either. So, no, I am not going to defund the RCMP despite what is being urged on this particular piece of paper here. We won’t do that.

Now, the members opposite: “No. Wait a second. It’s not about the RCMP; it’s about the Alberta sheriffs.” Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the Alberta sheriffs provide an actual role in this province, and do you know what that role is? They provide court and prisoner security and prisoner transport. The judge deserves to feel safe within his courtroom. We need to make sure we have safety in our courthouses. We need to make sure that they are performing the duties which they are doing on a regular basis and, quite frankly, have been doing since the 1980s.

Let me talk about a little bit of history. In Alberta in the 1980s we had what was known as the Alberta highway patrol, Mr. Speaker. Now, decisions made by a particular government went, and they kind of went back on that, and that’s fine. But I’ll tell you what happened in 1988. In 1988 the RCMP transferred all of the responsibilities for court and prisoner security and prisoner transport to – who? – the Alberta government. That’s right. Do you know why? They couldn’t handle the responsibility to do it. Then they continued to get more and more responsibilities over the years, and then in 2006, when the RCMP required more assistance on the highways, the government at the time kind of reinvigorated the highway patrol. Guess what. That’s what created the Alberta sheriffs. What we have been doing, whether we’re talking court and prisoner security, whether we’re talking about highway patrol, has been to augment and support police services since the 1980s.

I can tell you that in this motion, when I read this, it’s not only defunding the RCMP, but it’s defunding, quite frankly, the Alberta sheriffs. Mr. Speaker, we are not going to defund the RCMP. We are not going to defund the Alberta sheriffs. We are going to make sure the people in this province have proper public safety.

**The Acting Speaker:** I’ll recognize the Member for Sherwood Park, followed by the Member for Camrose.

**Mr. Kasawski:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. You know, I learned a while back that the person that argues the most aggressively often has the weakest argument, position.

The motion is to “urge the government to redirect all resources allocated for the Alberta provincial police service initiative towards enhancing services and programs that address crime and social disorder and increase public safety.” Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of Motion 508. It’s about public safety, how we deliver it, how we strengthen it, and how we ensure every dollar we spend actually makes our communities safer.

In my community of Sherwood Park and across Strathcona county we already have a model that works, a model built on collaboration, a model built on trust, a model built on results. Mr. Speaker, in Strathcona county the RCMP do extraordinary work every single day. They are on the front lines responding to emergencies. They support victims, they engage with youth, and they build relationships with our community. But what makes our region particularly effective is not

just the RCMP; it’s how they work together with the sheriffs and the community peace officers because public safety is strongest when agencies collaborate and not compete.

Let me give a concrete example. Over the past year Strathcona county ran a pilot project to tackle impaired driving, one of the most serious and preventable threats on our roads. Community peace officers were given expanded authority to conduct roadside alcohol screening and issue sanctions, and the results were clear. Nearly 9,500 roadside screenings were conducted; 89 impaired driving sanctions were issued. Importantly, there was an 11 per cent reduction in collisions involving impaired drivers in Strathcona county. Very good work of different agencies working together in Strathcona county.

That’s real impact, and it’s lives that are protected, but here’s the most important part. The pilot didn’t replace the RCMP. It supported them. Before this program peace officers had to call in the RCMP when impairment was suspected. Now they can act immediately, freeing up RCMP officers to focus on more serious and complex policing work. That is what smart public safety looks like. It’s not about tearing down one system to build another. It’s about making the system we work with better. This is exactly what we see in Strathcona county every day. RCMP officers and sheriffs along with community peace officers operate a co-ordinated team. They share responsibilities, they reduce duplication, they enhance each other’s capacity, and, most importantly, they deliver better outcomes for the public.

This stands in stark contrast to the direction this government is taking, Mr. Speaker. Instead of building on successful partnerships like the one we see in Strathcona county, the government is spending significant resources to stand up a new provincial police service through the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service. But Albertans are not asking for that. The survey data shows 77 per cent satisfaction with RCMP policing, 86 per cent support for keeping the RCMP, and 84 per cent of Albertans say that there are more important priorities than changing police services. This is an 80-20 issue. In Sherwood Park I am sure we would say that keeping the RCMP is as popular as stopping coal mining in the eastern slopes, another activity by this government which nobody asked for.

The question becomes: why are they spending hundreds of millions of dollars to replace the RCMP? Imagine if those resources were invested instead in what we know works. In Strathcona county we’ve already seen that expanding the role of peace officers reduces pressure on RCMP, targeted enforcement reduces crime, collaboration improves outcomes. Instead of duplicating services, why wouldn’t we expand on this model across Alberta?

Mr. Speaker, every dollar matters. Every dollar spent on building a new police bureaucracy is a dollar not spent on hiring more front-line officers, supporting victims of crime, investing in mental health and addictions services, preventing crime before it happens. Every dollar we put towards standing up this new police service is dollars that are not put to these other police activities. As we’ve seen in Strathcona county, even relatively modest investments like empowering peace officers can deliver measurable improvements in safety.

That is the choice before us. Do we pursue an expensive and unnecessary restructuring of policing in Alberta, or do we invest in proven, evidence-based approaches that make our communities safer today? Mr. Speaker, before I wrap up, I’ll just say that I think Motion 508 gives us that choice. It calls on this government to redirect resources away from the creation of a new provincial police service and toward enhancing the services and programs that actually improve public safety. It is practical, it is evidence-based, and it reflects the priorities of Albertans. I thank the Member for Edmonton-City Centre for bringing it forward.

Mr. Speaker, in Sherwood Park and Strathcona county we are proud of the RCMP. We are proud of our sheriffs and our community peace officers, and we are proud of how they work together to keep our community safe. Let's build on that success, let's invest in what works, and let's support Motion 508.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for Camrose, followed by the Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Motion 508. While it may sound reasonable on the surface, it is deeply disconnected from the realities facing many Albertans, particularly those in rural communities like the Camrose constituency. Motion 508 is framed as a reconsideration of public safety priorities, but its actual effect would be to divert resources away from front-line policing, specifically from the RCMP. This motion presents a false and dangerous premise, that public safety can be improved by cutting or redirecting policing resources. For many Albertans this simply does not reflect lived experience.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, it's important to recognize that public safety looks very different depending upon where you live. For members who represent large urban centres, police response can often be measured in minutes. The presence of a city police force provides a level of immediacy that rural Albertans simply do not have. In rural Alberta that reality is very different. Constituents in rural Alberta regularly report break-ins where no police officer attends due to limited capacity, and residents are advised to contact their insurance company instead. I've heard this many times from constituents. That is not a failure of our officers; it's a failure of resources, and it underscores exactly why motions like this are so concerning.

The argument made in Motion 508, that removing or reallocating police funding will make communities safer, does not hold up when viewed through the lens of rural crime. In my constituency the volume of theft is high and growing. Copper wire theft has become a recurring and serious issue. These are not minor crimes. They have paralyzed portions of the Battle River railway, disrupted agriculture and commercial activity, and, most recently, targeted the Daysland cell tower, cutting off critical communications for residents. This is not acceptable.

These examples matter, Mr. Speaker, because they show what happens when crime outpaces policing capacity. These are precisely the kinds of incidents that require co-ordinated, well-resourced enforcement. Weakening police services, especially those designed to fill gaps in rural Alberta, will not make communities safer. It will make criminals more confident.

Motion 508 presents a false choice between policing and social supports. Albertans do not need to choose between safe communities and strong social services. We need both. Social supports play an essential role in addressing the root cause of crime, but they do not replace the immediate need for trained officers to respond when crimes occur. In the rural portion of the Camrose constituency when infrastructure is targeted and communities are left without rail service or cell coverage, those situations demand a law enforcement response.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 508 further misrepresents the government's action on public safety. It suggests insufficient action while simultaneously calling for cuts to policing resources. In reality, Alberta's government is actively modernizing policing. Amendments to the Police Act and the creation of an independent agency police service are intended to enhance capacity, not duplicate it. Approximately 1,200 existing law enforcement professionals are being

modernized under consistent provincial standards to better serve municipalities and Indigenous communities. That matters in places like rural portions of the community I represent, where geographic distances, highway corridors, and rural crime patterns require specialized attention.

Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure members of the opposition are aware, police services that exist today – Alberta's provincial police service is, in fact, the RCMP. The motion reads, "redirect all resources allocated for the Alberta provincial police service." This is just another attempt of the opposition to defund not just the police but directly defund the RCMP. This is not acceptable. Who – and I will make clear for members of the opposition – is the provincial police service of Alberta? Our government is supporting not just the RCMP but police services across Alberta. The Alberta police service is designed to augment and support local and federal policing partners.

Mr. Speaker, police funding is not simply about the number of officers deployed; it's about training. Proper training must be given. It needs to be the central focus of modern policing. Funding ensures officers receive ongoing education in de-escalation, mental health response, cultural competency, and trauma-informed practices. Well-trained officers are better equipped to respond safely and professionally, especially in complex rural environments where officers often operate alone and over great distances. Cutting or redirecting funding makes that training harder to deliver. It makes recruitment more difficult, retention more challenging, and accountability more fragile. If we truly care about improving policing outcomes, then stable funding and modern training must be a part of the solution, not casualties of policy experiments.

Mr. Speaker, public safety is not theoretical in the Camrose constituency. It is lived every time infrastructure is targeted, every time response times stretch longer, every time residents wonder whether help will arrive when they call. Motion 508 overlooks these realities and risks making already stretched services even thinner, and it's just another attempt from the NDP to defund police.

For these reasons, I cannot support Motion 508. A responsible public safety approach strengthens police capacity, improves training, recognizes the very differences between urban and rural Alberta. Weakening front-line policing will not make communities like the Camrose constituency safer; it will make them more vulnerable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for Calgary-Edgemont, followed by the minister of social services.

**Ms Hayter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At its core, Motion 508 I would say is about priorities with public safety. All of us here want safer communities and safer constituencies. All of us know that crime and social disorder have real impacts on individuals, families, workers, small businesses, and neighbourhoods across Alberta.

Wanting safer communities is the easy part. The real question is whether this government is willing to invest in what actually helps people feel safer. Right now this government is spending \$36.9 million in Budget 2026 in implementing the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service. The total amount being spent is now \$200.8 million. At the same time, there's no evidence that this is a new police force that will really make a difference for public safety. Albertans are being asked to watch millions of public dollars go into a major policing restructure while so many of the supports that help prevent harm earlier are being left unfunded, cut back, and ignored altogether.

That is why I support this motion. It asks the Assembly to recognize what Albertans already know: public safety matters, rising crime and social disorder are hurting people, and the government has a responsibility to respond in ways that actually

improve safety. It also asks government to redirect all resources allocated to this provincial police initiative towards services and programs that address crime and social disorder and increase public safety. I think that this is exactly the conversation we should be having.

Public safety starts long before a police officer is ever called. It begins with whether people have stability in their lives. It begins with whether children and youth have support, whether people can access mental health care and addiction treatment, whether women and families can get help before violence escalates, whether communities have the resources to prevent crisis instead of just reaching to it after the damage is already done. We know crime does not happen in a vacuum. We know risk factors include property, low educational attainment, mental illness, drug and alcohol use, poor family conditions, negative peer influences, low resiliency, and barriers to employment. We also know that protective factors matter, stability matters, connection matters, opportunities matter.

If the government is serious about reducing crime, it should be serious about reducing those risk factors, too. That is what prevention looks like, and that is what the government continues to treat as optional. The government is willing to spend tens of millions of dollars on this new police structure while the budget line for community and public safety services, which includes crime prevention, Indigenous programs, anti human traffic work, community initiatives, and victims' services, is only \$11.848 million. That comparison should stop every member in this House in their tracks. This government is prepared to spend far more on police restructuring than on community-based services and prevention work that would actually reduce harm and improve safety earlier.

There are real examples of what that choice means on the ground. In Grande Prairie the Cool Aid Society announced it would shut down after provincial cuts. This was a 45-year-old organization providing no-cost after-school and evening programs for children and serving over 300 registered families. It lost about 90 per cent of its budget after Recovery Alberta, Mental Health and Addiction, shifted its funding approach from prevention to intervention.

4:00

This is not just a budget line. That is children losing safe spaces. That is a family losing support. That is a community losing one more place where young people could be connected, supervised, encouraged, and supported before problems grew into crises. That should concern all of us because youth prevention matters, after-school programs matter, evening programs matter, safe places for young people matter, positive adult relationships matter. If the government is willing to spend millions on police restructuring, it should also be willing to invest in the kinds of programs that help keep kids and children and youth from ever being in contact with the justice system in the first place.

We can see the same pattern in family violence supports. The provincial government cut funding for the circle of safety program through Aboriginal Counseling Services of Alberta, a program that supported Indigenous mothers who had experienced domestic violence. The women's program lost \$135,000 in funding. The executive director described it as almost like a treatment program for clients involved with domestic violence. Even after funding was cut mid-year, they kept trying to make it work because they simply could not turn families away that were relying on it. That tells us everything we need to know. These programs are not extras. They are part of what safety looks like for women and children.

The same is true in Red Deer, where Turning Point reported that its vulnerable women's program had seen strong results, including 90 per cent of participants reporting improved health and 85 per cent reporting reduced substance use where applicable. And still

that work was closed after cuts to core programming and without proper continuity for its clients who relied on it.

Again, this is what the wrong priorities look like. Government cuts community support that is producing real outcomes. Then they turn around and tell Albertans that they're serious about public safety because they're building out a more expensive police framework. Violence prevention is bigger than crisis response. If we are serious about reducing domestic, family, and sexual violence, then we have to look at what leads to that harm in the first place. We can't keep waiting until families are already in crisis and then call that a complete safety strategy.

Prevention matters. It means paying attention to the conditions that allow violence to take hold, including equality, exclusion, discrimination, and the social norms that make harm easier to excuse or ignore. If we want to reduce domestic, family, and sexual violence, we have to pay attention to the conditions that produce and reinforce violence in the first place. That means changing systems, laws, practices, beliefs, and social norms that allow violence, inequality, exclusion, and discrimination to continue. Primary prevention is about preventing the first act of violence, not simply responding once harm is already under way.

It is long-term work, but it's exactly the work that creates safer communities over time. It means money could be spent on healthy relationship education. It could have been spent on social-emotional learning. It could have been spent on antibullying or antiharassment work. It could have been spent on safer public spaces and safer transit. It could have been spent on community programs that reduce isolation and support belonging. It could have been spent on programs that help women and families get stable before violence escalates. Those are public safety investments. They have to do far more for just real safety than spending money on rebranding or millions more on vehicles, salary differentials, and transition costs for a new police structure that government will still not show will improve outcomes.

We also cannot separate this conversation from gender inequality and economic security. The Shift primary prevention playbook makes this connection so clearly. Where gender inequality is higher, gender-based violence is higher. When women have less access to decision-making resources, fair pay, and economic stability, the risk of violence increases. For Indigenous women, racialized women, and women with disability, those barriers are even sharper. When we talk about prevention, we also need to talk about affordable child care, after-school care, fair wages, income supports, housing, and the policies that make it possible for women and caregivers to live with greater safety and stability.

This is not a side issue. This is part of what public safety means in everyday lives. When public dollars are limited, that matters. Every dollar tied to this project is a dollar that is not going to prevention. It's not going to mental health supports. It's not going to addiction treatment. It's not going to youth programs. It's not going to domestic violence prevention. It's not going to victim services. It's not going to Indigenous-led community safety programs, and it's not going to the local organizations already doing the work. These things are all very deeply important, and keeping people safe before the crisis takes over is what we need to be focused on.

It's about the choices that this government is making. We can keep spending millions on a political policing project with no clear evidence that it will improve safety, or we can invest in the services and programs that actually address crime, decrease social disorder, and make Alberta feel safe. I support 508 because I believe public money should be spent where it will do the most good. I believe prevention matters, I believe community safety is

built long before a police officer is called, and I believe Alberta deserves a government that understands the difference.

**The Acting Speaker:** I recognize the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services.

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Anybody who listened to that speech will now understand why the NDP oversaw six credit downgrades when they were in charge of the government. Clearly, the official . . .

**Member Ceci:** We had the same number.

**Mr. Nixon:** I know the former Finance minister for the NDP is heckling right now.

**Member Ceci:** The same number of downgrades.

**Mr. Nixon:** He's quite upset. Mr. Speaker, I'd be quite upset and yelling on my way out of the Chamber, too, if I had six credit downgrades that were brought up.

**Member Irwin:** Point of order.

**Mr. Nixon:** But that's his legacy, not mine. When I was Finance minister . . .

**The Acting Speaker:** A point of order has been called.

#### Point of Order

#### Referring to the Absence of Members

#### Language Creating Disorder

**Member Irwin:** Okay. Well, a couple of things there. There was a reference to a member leaving the Chamber, but also, just under 23(h), (i), and (j), the minister is clearly trying to create disorder. I think on both of those cases this is a point of order, and we'd like to continue with what is to our communities an extremely critical motion. I'd ask the member to consider raising the level of decorum so that we can continue.

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

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We were all in this Chamber when we saw the member from the NDP side walk and heckle repeatedly the minister of assisted living.

**An Hon. Member:** Calgary-Buffalo.

**Mr. Amery:** The Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Thank you for that.

Mr. Speaker, the member's conduct was obnoxious as he was walking out of this Chamber. We could all hear him in this Chamber. I'm certain the microphones could hear him as well. The only person that was offending the decorum of this Assembly was the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. The minister was engaged in active debate. Certainly, raising the issue of six credit downgrades that the NDP's legacy remains is something that is a matter of debate. They may not like it. I understand that. I'd be embarrassed, too, if we were in that position, but we certainly are not. Having said that, this was a matter of debate. The decorum was reduced significantly by the conduct of that opposition member, not by the minister.

**The Acting Speaker:** Okay. Thank you.

I will rule that it's not a point of order. The minister in referring to a member in the action of leaving does not identify an absence or presence of a member, and I will also ask for all members to recognize that decorum is important. Judge yourselves accordingly.

But in this point at this time I will not recognize this as a point of order.

The minister may continue.

#### Debate Continued

**Mr. Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I appreciate the hon. former Finance minister for the NDP being upset about me pointing out his six credit downgrades. I won't spend much time on that. I'll be happy, though, to say that I've been part of a government, including Finance minister for a government, that didn't have one credit downgrade.

We could read a budget, and what we continue to see from the NDP is that they're just incapable of it. They continue to stand up in the Legislature, and the last speaker just said – I was flabbergasted – that all that was being spent on the social services issues that she laid out was \$12 million. Mr. Speaker, my budget alone, my ministry's budget, Assisted Living and Social Services, with capital is somewhere around \$14 billion, and that's just one social services file. The main issue that was raised by the member who moved the motion was around FCSS funding. That line item is \$105 million. When you have an Official Opposition who can't put together simple aspects of income statements and balance sheets, you continue to see problematic statements like you just saw from that hon. member that clearly show they have absolutely no idea what's going on with Alberta's budget, which explains why, when they oversaw it, they saw the largest debt in history. It got so bad under them, they finally gave up and just told everybody to move away from the province.

#### 4:10

This side of the House is the opposite, Mr. Speaker. We continue to invest heavily inside social supports, things like health care, education, and other social supports. We also at the same time know that we have to fund our police. Why I rise today is that I find it deeply troubling that a caucus that is predominantly policed, with the exception of one or two individuals, by municipal police forces and not by the RCMP – and even the ones that do have RCMP inside their constituency all live within 20 minutes or so of a city that is policed by municipal police forces. To be able to rise in this Chamber and say that they want to support a motion that calls to defund the police, to defund the current provincial police force and any other police forces in the future, is appalling.

But it fits with the record of the NDP on this issue, Mr. Speaker. It fits with their record. When they were on this side of the House and the rural crime epidemic was taking place across the province, the former leader of the province, Premier Notley, with her cabinet laughed at the Official Opposition when they started to bring it up. Laughed. We had to fill the galleries full of rural Albertans to say: this is what's happening inside our constituencies.

It took, in my constituency, a young mother having a home invasion done on her. The local sheriffs and the fish and wildlife officers were not connected to the RCMP. She and her kids had to go through hell, Mr. Speaker, as a result of that. Still the NDP would not do anything. They wouldn't do a thing. They don't have a clue what it's like to be a rural Albertan. They don't like rural Albertans because we want to be policed by who we want to be policed by. What we want are police officers who can get there when we're in trouble. We want to make sure that our police departments can be fully funded and care for our province.

For the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, who is policed by the Edmonton Police Service, Mr. Speaker . . .

**Ms Hoffman:** Do we have interventions, Mr. Speaker?

**The Acting Speaker:** No.

**Mr. Nixon:** No, I don't want an intervention. I'm quite happy about this right now.

Listen, I mean, we've been listening to interventions from the NDP for this entire period of time. They've missed the plot. They are asking to defund the police service. They're trying to stand up and tell rural Albertans how they want to be policed. The Member for Edmonton-City Centre, who's policed by the Edmonton Police Service, who probably lives within five minutes of his house while sitting in this Chamber, is going to tell my constituents, who sometimes have to drive two hours from work or right now myself almost four hours away from my family if they were in trouble, and the law enforcement would take at least an hour and 20 minutes to get to my family right now unless they just happened to be down the road – and they would have the nerve to tell rural Albertans what we want when it comes to policing, Mr. Speaker. It's appalling.

Further to that, their solution is to put more money in FCSS. That, again, is also a secret attack on the people of rural Alberta. If we were to increase funding to FCSS to deal with law enforcement despite the fact that FCSS is a preventative services organization, and I guarantee you they don't want to go door to door dealing with things like domestic violence and burglaries and those types of things that are taking place in our community, even if we did that, 80 cents of every 1 of the dollars that the hon. member asked for would go to Calgary and Edmonton; only 20 cents would go to rural Alberta. While he stands in here and says that he's trying to help them, he not only wants to defund the police, make it worse for my constituents, Mr. Speaker, he then wants to take it all and put it into Edmonton and Calgary, a place that receives, for example, a quarter billion dollars alone to help with homelessness issues, a place that receives a disproportionate amount of housing money and other resources than it does in the rest of the province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, just simply, it's not even the hon. member's fault. I don't think he's ever been to rural Alberta except for maybe camping or participating in some sort of recreational activity. He wouldn't even know what it was. As I joke with him all the time, he doesn't even know which side of the cow gets up first. It's clear they don't understand how our communities work. If we took that proposal, we would disproportionately – we would disproportionately – impact rural Albertans more. [interjections] They laugh about it, just like they laughed at my constituents when they were having home invasions done on them when they were in government. They laugh. They think it's funny.

The Member for Lethbridge-West, who's policed by – what? – a municipal police force, not by the RCMP, has the nerve to tell the people of Rocky Mountain House, Bergen, Sundre, Three Hills, Trochu, Drayton Valley, and Camrose how they should be policed, has the nerve to stand up in this Chamber and call on defunding the police service that we count on. Mr. Speaker, they should be standing in this Chamber supporting the government giving resources to police officers. They have no idea what it would be like to be sitting in Caroline and every officer in the RCMP detachment is on-reserve dealing with a crisis situation over an hour and 20 minutes away and your store is being robbed or a D6 has driven through the bank and pulled out the bank machine and they're trying to take it apart in the middle of the street.

But don't worry; the Member for Edmonton-City Centre is going to defund them. He's going to put 80 per cent of the money into FCSS in Calgary and Edmonton, 20 per cent into rural, and he's going to send social workers around to make sure that we have our police officers. This is exactly what was tried in places like New York during the defund the police movement, which I know is now the leadership of their campaign and the ones who put together their messages, though they can't seem to keep a campaign manager. That's a real bad sign that's probably – well, being 18 points down in the polls usually does that to you.

They don't care about our part of the province, and it comes up each and every time. [interjections] If they could be policed – the Member for Edmonton-Glenora says: check the polls. I did. She feels safe because she lives in downtown Edmonton, which is an NDP stronghold, but let me tell you that if I was anybody else in that caucus, I'd be pretty nervous right now, particularly if you're going to keep coming up with ideas like this, to go and tell the rest of the province how they should be policed, ignore their issues, defund their police when they're already short resources, and then tell them that FCSS is now going to be the thing that solves the problem for rural crime. Great idea. Let's load them up.

Now, last I just want to close with housing. The Official Opposition continues to bring up housing, that we need to invest in things like social supports, which we do; the highest amount in history. That's coming in this budget, something voted against by the Official Opposition. Their idea, when it came to social disorder and housing, was not to do things like the navigation centre – they spoke against it, Mr. Speaker – was not to help people get into shelters and put record shelter in place. In fact, they stood with protesters who were blocking the police from being able to get people help that were being burned to death inside tents. Their plan for that was do nothing. That was what their plan was. Now, you can build upon what that means. They hate when I bring it up, so fine, no problem, but their plan was do nothing, not to do the approach that we did. We took the opposite approach. We saved a lot of people's lives.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, then they came in and they said, "Hey, there's this great housing crisis that's taking place in the country." There was, and their idea was cap the rent. Shut down your industry and make sure nobody has any homes to go to. We took the opposite approach, and they don't want to bring it up in this Chamber. We took the opposite approach. We rejected the socialist ideas of the members opposite that would bring in rent control, that would have stifled the rental market, would have stifled new units being built, and for 10 consecutive quarters we have record-breaking housing.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, we have the best housing anywhere in the country. We have almost a quarter of all housing starts taking place in Alberta. We're responsible for 12 per cent of the population. Better yet, we're responsible for 80 per cent of all the housing starts in the prairies, and one-third of all those builds are purpose-built rentals. And what happened? Rent went down. So, as always, do the opposite of what the NDP say and we're going to be okay.

**The Acting Speaker:** The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Member Ceci:** Thank you very much. Just to address in the last few minutes Motion 508, I certainly appreciate my colleague from Edmonton who brought it forward, and I also appreciate the shadow minister of status of women, who clearly talked about the prevention of crime. If there's anything I stand for, it's prevention. It's not waiting until there's a crisis. It's trying to do something beforehand.

We all know that police are often called when there is a crisis and the public and people need them to come, and I'm glad they do. I know there's a challenge in rural Alberta, and I know there is a desire to fix. I have a desire to fix what we already have in place, and that's the RCMP. I know it's not an easy thing, but the alternative that's being presented to us will cost hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars over time. The question is: would that money be better spent trying to fix the issue with the RCMP and trying to invest the rest in prevention?

4:20

You know, the previous speaker talked about FCSS, and I certainly appreciate talk about FCSS because when we were government, we put 25 million more dollars into FCSS, and this government, starting with the Kenney government on, has done nothing to invest in FCSS, which is a preventive social service which helps Albertans at a very early age. That's how you intervene on people's living situations, the potential they have, potentially, to get involved with crime, to address their needs. Public safety starts far before the police are involved.

I was listening to the radio today. Mr. Speaker, is there about one minute left? Is that what you're seeing? Okay. I'll maybe skip down to the bottom here.

You know, the multimodal approach to addressing crime is what is seen as the gold standard. Police alone – and they will tell you that they're not the gold standard alone to address crime. A multimodal approach means that you address people's needs far earlier than waiting till they're criminals. I would be interested to know, Mr. Speaker, what the number of police personnel per 100,000 as a best practice is. We never get that information from our Justice minister or any other minister over there to make an informed decision about this.

I will say, Mr. Speaker – I know you're counting down the seconds – that Motion 508 is a proactive way to address this issue. Let's invest in what we have already. Let's not spend hundreds of millions of dollars with possibly no outcome or a bad outcome.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

Under Standing Order 8(3), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I invite now the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre to close debate on Motion 508.

**Mr. Shepherd:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've certainly seen some interesting debate here this afternoon, I'd say some somewhat disingenuous, I would personally find embarrassing, performances from the ministers of public safety and Assisted Living and Social Services. Volume does not equal fact. The fact is that the only government in Alberta that has defunded police in Alberta is the UCP government. In 2019 they cut the EPS operating budget by \$5 million due to taking a larger portion of the money generated from traffic tickets and charging them more for DNA services. They also cut funding to the Calgary Police Service by 10 and a half million dollars. Based on an average police officer's salary, that's about 297 fewer officers across the province due to their cuts, which also affected rural areas.

The fact is that the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services talked about FCSS, and he talked about the fact that, hey, giving more money to FCSS disadvantages rural communities. Guess who's been in power for seven years, Mr. Speaker, and has not made any change to that formula to address that impact on their constituents? If this government wanted to fix it, they could. The fact is that they haven't.

And the minister suggesting that I'm telling folks in rural Alberta how they want to be policed? Mr. Speaker, I quoted the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, folks I spoke with just last week, when those municipal leaders were here in town. I quoted Alberta Municipalities, which also represents communities outside of our major cities here in Alberta, and neither of those organizations, those folks elected by rural Albertans to represent them, are supporting this minister's call. None of them are supporting a provincial police service. The vast majority of them, in fact, still continue to express support for the RCMP, who are not affected in any way by this motion.

Now, of course, that's what this government does. They interpret everything in the worst possible faith because they act in bad faith. The minister can yell, and he can bellow, but the fact is that he knows he is offside with the vast majority of Albertans, as is the minister for public safety.

As they try to simultaneously stand in this House and talk about how crime rates are dropping across the province of Alberta so we should not be talking about that in the motion, at the same time it's absolutely essential that they spend \$22 million to create 30 new officers in the next year. That's what they're going to get under the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service, 30 officers. That is this grand solution that they have spent years putting together. Millions of dollars, new bureaucracy, new provincial control – not local control, Mr. Speaker; let's be absolutely clear about that – provincial control under the minister: that is the best that they could put forward.

Now, the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that we again hear the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services undermining everything that his minister of public safety says, who talks about how much they support the RCMP and they just want to supplement the RCMP, but the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services is telling us how much he dislikes the RCMP and does not want to be policed by them.

This is a government that talks out of both sides of its mouth, but what they're not doing is anything effective to address the problem on the ground. That is why when they stand up and make their announcements about the Alberta Sheriffs Police Service, they're not surrounded by municipal leaders who are signing up and getting on board. This government did not talk to them. This government has not consulted with them. This government has not provided them with any actual details about what it is doing.

What we know is that those municipal leaders, Mr. Speaker, have been very clear about what they want this government to do. They want this government to expand FCSS. The minister, if he likes, can adjust that formula to take more dollars to rural Alberta, something he hasn't done in seven years. He can take it to the cabinet table and tell his colleagues that what these people in our province want to see are real initiatives that will actually build safety in our communities, not performative actions by this government based on separatist referendums. [interjections] These members, this minister can bellow all he likes. He can pull numbers out of thin air. The fact is that he is not doing anything to increase safety in our communities.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, again, that the only ones that have ever defunded police was this government. We support police. We support proper funding for policing, social services, all things which support public safety.

**The Acting Speaker:** Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 508 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:27 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Boparai	Hayter	Miyashiro
Ceci	Hoffman	Sabir
Chapman	Hoyle	Shepherd
Dach	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Gray	Kasawski	Sweet
Haji	Kayande	Tejada

Against the motion:

Amery	Jones	Sawyer
Armstrong-Homeniuk	LaGrange	Schow
Boitchenko	Loewen	Schulz
Bouchard	Long	Sigurdson, R.J.
Cyr	Lovely	Sinclair
de Jonge	Lunty	Singh
Dreeshen	McDougall	Stephan
Dyck	Nally	Turton
Ellis	Neudorf	van Dijken
Fir	Nicolaides	Wiebe
Getson	Nixon	Williams
Glubish	Petrovic	Wilson
Horner	Pitt	Wright, J.
Hunter	Rowswell	Yao
Johnson	Sawhney	Yaseen
Totals:	For – 18	Against – 45

[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 lost]

#### 4:40 Committee of Supply

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

**The Chair:** Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of Supply to order.

Before we commence consideration of supplementary supply, I would like to briefly review the standing orders governing the speaking rotation, as provided for in Standing Order 59.02. The rotation order in Standing Order 59.01(6) applies, which is as follows:

- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
- (b) for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (d.1) for the next 20 minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (e) for the next 20 minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak, and
- (f) for the time remaining, to the extent possible, the rotation outlined in clauses (b) to (e) shall apply with the speaking times set at 5 minutes as provided in Standing Orders 59.02(1)(c).

During the first rotation, speaking times are limited to 10 minutes. Once the first rotation is complete, speaking times are reduced to five minutes and, provided that the chair has been notified, a minister and a private member may combine their speaking times, with both taking and yielding the floor during the combined period.

Finally, as provided for in Government Motion 33, approved by the Assembly on March 19, 2026, the time allotted for consideration is three hours.

The Committee of Supply has under consideration the 2025-26 supplementary supply estimates. I will now recognize the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move the estimates.

#### Supplementary Supply Estimates 2025-26 General Revenue Fund

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move the 2025-2026 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund.

In total, the supplementary supply estimates will allow additional spending by 13 government departments, seven of the Legislative Assembly offices, and allow for transfers of spending authority between eight departments. If passed, the estimates will authorize approximate increases of \$326 million in expense funding, of which \$113 million is off-set by increased revenue; \$18 million in capital investment, of which \$10 million is off-set by federal funding; \$202 million in other financial transactions; \$18 million for the offices of the Legislative Assembly; and \$734 million in expense transfer between ministries.

The estimates include additional funding for the following government departments: Advanced Education; Arts, Culture and Status of Women; Assisted Living and Social Services; Children and Family Services; Education and Childcare; Energy and Minerals; Forestry and Parks; Indigenous Relations; Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration; Justice; Mental Health and Addiction; Municipal Affairs; and Public Safety and Emergency Services.

The funding in these estimates helps provide for various programs, services, and obligations, including legal settlements, purchasing water bombers for wildfire fighting, early learning and child care support, enhancing health care supports for seniors, capital grants for mental health and addiction recovery, communities and municipalities, and supports for gender-based violence victims and prevention and training programs. The document I'm tabling today reflects the government's ongoing commitment to support Albertans and their communities.

Arts, Culture and Status of Women requests \$5 million to provide community and recreation capital grants and supports for Albertans who are victims and survivors of gender-based violence, both off-set by federal revenue. Alberta's 10-year strategy to end gender-based violence is the most comprehensive strategy in Canada, supporting survivors, addressing root causes, and creating long-lasting change. Projects supported by the investing in Canada infrastructure program see cash flow changes to match their financial requirements and deliver meaningful community impacts.

Assisted Living and Social Services requests \$15 million for enhanced health care for seniors and development of a navigational portal for assisted living services. This is off-set by federal revenue and will support more community-based care, strengthen the elderly care workforce, and raise the quality of care in the continuing care sector.

Education and Childcare requests \$27 million in expense and \$9 million in capital investment for early learning and child care, off-set by federal revenue and funding. This will help child care providers lower fees for children up to kindergarten age who attend eligible licensed daycares, family day homes, and preschool programs.

Energy and Minerals is requesting a net \$213 million in expense to deal with the legal settlements made late in '24-25. The ministry is also asking for \$1 million in capital investment to update and modernize IT supporting revenue initiatives and \$95 million in financial transactions for legal settlements.

Recent fire seasons have lasted longer and covered greater area than in the past. In response, Alberta averaged more than 1,000 annual wildfire starts in the last decade, behind only British Columbia. For this reason, the government has chosen to acquire five advanced DHC 515 water bomber planes from De Havilland of Canada. These aircraft will be built at De Havilland Field in Wheatland county east of Calgary and will start to arrive in 2031. To facilitate this purchase, a financial transaction of \$107 million was necessary to make the required deposit.

The Ministry of Forestry and Parks is also requesting \$1 million in expense for rangeland sustainability, off-set by external revenue, and \$3 million in capital investment for the watercourse crossing program. These funds will support conservation programs that promote sustainability of Alberta's rangelands and support long-term stewardship of Alberta's fisheries respectively.

Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration requests \$9 million for ongoing skills training and tariff-specific labour market initiatives, off-set by federal revenue. This provides targeted support for employed workers in industries affected by tariffs and global trading shifts. The funds will support employers and industry associations in sectors such as manufacturing, forestry, and agriculture other training to upgrade skills or retain.

Justice requests \$17 million for a number of initiatives, off-set by federal revenue. This includes funding to support Legal Aid Alberta since Albertans need access to a justice system that is accessible, affordable, and efficient now and into the future. Legal aid is an important tool for many Albertans who face financial barriers in access to legal supports. Alberta Justice is working to enhance the ability of the justice system processes to respond more effectively to gender-based violence. Supplementary funding supports the Indigenous court worker program and supports for Albertans who are victims and survivors of gender-based violence. Justice is also requesting \$2.5 million for the justice digital project, which is modernizing and transforming legal processes through online services to improve efficiency and reduce time in the court system.

Mental Health and Addiction requests \$9 million for recovery community capital grants and youth mental health services, off-set by federal revenue. The mental health and well-being of young Albertans is a top priority, and our government is focused on providing accessible mental health supports to children and youth across the province. Alberta's government also continues to invest in the wellness of Albertans and providing treatment and supports to those struggling with mental health or addiction challenges.

Municipal Affairs requests \$14 million for federally funded capital grants to municipalities. This will help build and revitalize public infrastructure while addressing housing challenges, supporting jobs, and fostering long-term prosperity for Alberta's municipalities.

Public Safety and Emergency Services requests \$11 million for wildfire response, security services for the G-7 summit, and support to fight gangs and organized crime, off-set by federal revenue. The federal guns and gangs initiative provides provincial law enforcement agencies nationwide with funding to combat gun crime and gang activity through enforcement, prevention, and community support. This funding will also support forensic DNA analysis services, off-set by federal funding.

Finally, \$6 million is requested for several smaller program initiatives, including Indigenous community facilities and training, French language programs, and gender-based violence prevention and women's shelter support, off-set by federal revenue.

Moving on to the offices of the Legislative Assembly, these offices are requesting a combined \$18 million. This will help the offices to address the impacts of approved salary adjustments and cover additional costs of auditing new health entities and implementing referenda and MLA recall legislation.

#### 4:50

Two transfers are requested in '25-26. A total of \$721 million must be transferred from Hospital and Surgical Health Services to Assisted Living and Social Services for the provision of continuing care services. Another \$13 million must be transferred from Arts, Culture and Status of Women to various ministries for federally funded gender-based violence prevention and victim support. This includes \$7 million to Children and Family Services, \$2 million to Justice, \$2 million to Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration, \$1 million to Indigenous Relations, and \$1 million to Advanced Education.

The amounts in these supplementary estimates address a wide variety of priorities for Albertans. Our government is committed to

meeting Albertans' health care and education needs where and when they need it. We remain focused on preventing, responding to, and mitigating the effects of natural disasters for Albertans. Above all else, we are committed to ensuring Alberta remains the best place in Canada to live, work, and raise a family.

With that, my colleagues and I will now be pleased to answer questions from the members here today. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, hon. member.

Okay. We'll enter into our first 60-minute block with the Official Opposition. In our first 20-minute block, would you like to go back and forth with the minister?

**Ms Hoffman:** Normally, but I had so much fun in block in estimates with you, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Stephan:** Block is best.

**Ms Hoffman:** I think this morning I will take the advice of the Member for Red Deer-South and do block for this first chunk of time if that's agreeable.

**The Chair:** Perfect. Is that amenable, Minister? Okay.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, your time starts now.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I want to begin by acknowledging where we're at here today in Alberta's Legislature on Treaty 6 territory. I'm thinking about all of those who've stewarded this land since time immemorial for all of us but also have stewarded the medicines and the ecosystem to make sure that we can live here in unity as long as the grass grows, the rivers flow, and the sun shines.

I want to reflect on the fact that I know that we are not doing right by the Treaty 6 medicine chest agreement. It was the first time, I believe, that health was really written into a treaty, and it is on Treaty 6 territory where we are today.

I would certainly hope that as we move forward the remainder of the supplementary supply investment – there's only a few days left in this fiscal year, which we're considering today – and as we embark upon the next fiscal year, which the government just passed late last week, that we keep the place we're at and the conditions upon which we are all here top of mind . . .

**Member Irwin:** Hear, hear.

**Ms Hoffman:** Thanks.

. . . particularly as it relates to Indigenous life expectancy and infant mortality for Indigenous folks.

There's really only under Hospital and Surgical Health Services one line item, one transfer, and it's moving money from Acute Care Alberta, or what was under Acute Care, under Hospital and Surgical Health Services, in this budget over to Assisted Living Alberta. It seems like it's very clear, an accounting thing, now that we have even more ministers of health than we did when the budget was first created. In creating additional areas, some money needs to be moved over, and I welcome the minister and his department officials who are here today to elaborate on that as we ponder it.

I do want to touch briefly on assisted living and acute care. Of course, they very much go hand in hand. When people aren't well served in long-term care or assisted living or even independent living with home-care supports, they end up in acute-care hospital spaces. They end up in the emergency room. Making sure that we're doing everything we can to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to live safely in their place of choice, I think, should be a high priority. I appreciate that this accounting measure needs to be done

to move money from one line item to another, but what I really would love to see is enhanced care in those assisted living facilities.

It was only maybe a month or two ago that I had the opportunity to meet with a spiritual care worker from a beautiful facility, in my mind, anyway. It's somewhere where my grandmother lived her last several years of life, the Edmonton General hospital, just a few blocks from here, not far at all if anyone wants to go visit it. Sadly, it is and has been overrun with mice now for quite some time, and the evidence was appalling. Even when I went to go visit somebody there recently, I could see evidence of mouse droppings in the room.

We did flag this for public health, we did flag it for senior leadership, and I want to acknowledge in that situation that the staff are doing everything they can with the resources they do have. They only have a budget allocation right now for them to clean the floors of the rooms once a week. I want you to imagine if you came into your bedroom, through you, Madam Chair, or your child's bedroom, there was evidence of mouse droppings, and it was Tuesday and you weren't supposed to mop the floor until Friday, what you would do. I'm confident you would get out the materials. I google what to do to clean up mouse droppings because it can be dangerous if you don't do it properly and make sure you clean it right away. We just don't have the resources in the front lines for them to be able to do that.

We also need to invest in things like expanding the addressing of vermin that are living in health care facilities. I know that this is reported as just being a transfer, but I think this does give us an opportunity in this place for the Minister of Finance to talk to health care investment in maintaining. I've heard him say about the importance of maintaining existing infrastructure. I will say that hospital buildings that are long-term care centres, I think, deserve that type of investment to make sure that everyone who lives there can do so safely, with dignity, and that all of us, should any of us end up living there one day – and it's mostly seniors, but there's also a number of young people there who have chronic illnesses and it's not safe for them to live on their own anymore. It could be any of us at any point in time. What kind of life would we want for one another? I would love to hear a little bit about that.

I was also hoping that we'd have a bit of a breakdown as it might relate to some of the other areas because, of course, there's these big bundles now under acute care. In estimates I talked about how I'd really hope that we'd have a breakdown for Cancer Care Alberta and what we're doing to address some of those significant gaps that we're seeing between, for example, diagnosis and first treatment. There isn't anything in supplementary supply about that, but I certainly would welcome opportunities to be able to ponder that a little bit more deeply with all of my colleagues.

The other piece that I was expecting to see in supplementary supply, actually: there were a number of announcements made mid-year, there were some announcements made in the fall around building much-needed acute-care capacity, particularly in Edmonton as physicians have been raising alarms for months about being on diversion. It's been over a year, basically, that Edmonton zone has been on diversion for its hospitals. Let me give an example of what that means for somebody that I talked to. She lives in Alberta Beach, not far from here. Her husband was very ill. They presented at the closest hospital at that time, were transferred to another hospital, to another hospital, and eventually he ended up living his final days in Grande Prairie, which is quite far from home, because the Edmonton hospitals were so full. She had to literally move to another city to be able to be within a reasonable commute to spend her husband's final weeks with him.

That, to me, is not sufficient capacity. I don't think it is sufficient capacity in the mind of the government, either. That's why in the fall they announced that they were going to be building new spaces for acute care within the city of Edmonton. They weren't going to move

forward on what had already been developed and the plans and the land secured and the land prepped at the south Edmonton hospital site; they were going to start from scratch, and they were going to do it at the Mis and the Nuns. They made this announcement at least six months before today and did nothing between announcing it and coming forward with a budget. The budget that was brought forward only has, I believe, \$7 million over two years, so planning money. Really, that announcement that was so quick to announce back in the fall got reannounced and reannounced, and they're drops in the bucket for addressing the capacity that we all need today.

If the south Edmonton hospital would have gone forward as originally planned and announced and department officials had worked towards, it would be open now and we would have increased capacity. The government reannounced those beds that were announced in the fall in early January, January 15 to be exact, when the minister finally responded to the very public concern that was being raised about emergency departments in our capital city. Mr. Sreekumar had passed away on December 22, his family documenting his final moments. A report was completed by Acute Care Alberta and brought over to the minister's office weeks later. It was January 14, and then January 15 the government came out and promised two things, that they would be moving forward with triage liaison physicians by February 1, the government said, and that the government would be moving forward with building more acute-care capacity. Again, nothing in supplementary supply to address either of those needs. Those physicians haven't been hired, and we are no closer to having acute-care beds being opened at the Nuns or the Mis.

5:00

The other piece, I think, that is important to highlight is the government says: well, we can't start announcing details until we've done all of the work to cost it out. Well, the government said that this is going to be more efficient, more effective, that all we'll have to do is open bed towers. Every hospital expert I say that to says that's not possible because the core structure is designed for a certain number of beds. So if you're opening extra beds, you have to expand the things that are in the core structure. Whether it's lab, whether it's food services, those types of things need to be scaled out, too, to be able to meet the demand.

I do think that whatever we can do to increase capacity as soon as possible should be done. I had expected that government would be coming forward, since they've announced this many times over many months, with some concrete pieces that they'd started investing in to address the acute-care crisis that we're facing, particularly in Edmonton. They've also announced that they're going to be opening new beds in Calgary. They say, "Don't worry; it'll be at South Health Campus," and there was nothing in the budget to make that a reality, no dollars at all and definitely nothing in supplementary supply. It's hard to know what to say to people who are crying, who are asking for some hope and some confidence, when what we get is one line item, and it says, basically, for accounting purposes: because we thought it was a priority to create another ministry and to make another logo, we've created another branch and therefore we need to move \$721 million.

**The Chair:** The hon. Minister of Hospital and Surgical Health Services.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to speak to the supplementary estimates for Hospital and Surgical Health Services. I can confirm that acute-care funding and services remain fully intact. This transfer does not reduce hospital, surgical, emergency, or cancer services in any way. What is changing is where budget authority resides, not the care Albertans receive. The \$721 million transfer reflects Alberta's health system refocus by aligning

funding with program responsibility. Continuing care services are delivered and managed by Assisted Living Alberta, which directs appropriate funding to Acute Care Alberta to ensure uninterrupted service delivery.

Hospital and Surgical Health Services remains fully funded and focused on acute care with clear accountability within the ministry responsible for continuing care operations. This realignment is a clear signal of progress in Alberta's health system transformation. It strengthens accountability, improves system co-ordination, and ensures each part of the system is responsible for the services it delivers while continuing to work together to support patients as they move seamlessly through care. We also recognize that more work is required to ensure patients designated as alternate level of care receive the right care in the right setting. That is why continuing care services were transferred to Assisted Living Alberta. It is also why Budget 2026 includes significant investments through the Ministry of Hospital and Surgical Health Services to improve emergency department diversion programs, enhance internal triage and patient flow, and ultimately reduce ALC lengths of stay.

This includes a \$61 million investment at the Royal Alex hospital to strengthen triage processes, improve patient flow, and support more efficient movement of patients through the system. These measures will reduce wait times, improve patient experience, and ensure timely access to appropriate care. This work also enhances alternate level of care strategies, including the cohorting of patients into dedicated units and working closely with Assisted Living Alberta to transition patients into more appropriate care settings. This facilitates safe and efficient discharges and is a critical component of reducing pressure on our acute-care system, particularly during periods of increased demand such as respiratory virus season.

In addition, \$91 million over three years is being allocated for AHS priority task force initiatives, including expanding emergency department treatment spaces, increasing operating room capacity, and advancing other key system improvements. We are also working in close partnership with Assisted Living Alberta and social services to advance a comprehensive ALC strategy supported by targeted capacity investments. This work is focused on accelerating safe transitions from hospital to more appropriate settings such as continuing care, home care, and community supports. These efforts reduce overcrowding, shorten emergency department wait times, and ensure that acute-care beds are available for those who need them the most.

Since Assisted Living Alberta became operational in September of 2025, there's been a co-ordinated effort to transition patients who no longer require acute care out of hospital and into more appropriate, community-based care. These efforts are delivering measurable results. Province-wide, the number of ALC patients has decreased by approximately 20 per cent since September of 2025. In Edmonton, actually, it's higher; the ALC numbers have been reduced by about 22 per cent. Importantly, these reductions have been sustained through the respiratory virus season, despite historical trends that typically see ALC numbers rise during this period. This reflects stronger co-ordination, improved system flow, and a more effective use of resources across the continuum of care.

Madam Chair, these actions demonstrate a clear and focused approach to strengthening Alberta's health system. By aligning funding with responsibility, investing in patient flow, and improving transitions of care, we are ensuring that Albertans receive timely, appropriate, and high-quality care.

Madam Chair, the member opposite highlighted some of our recent announcements to expand capacity all across the province, but in particular in the Edmonton and Calgary zones. We announced in-patient tower expansions at the Grey Nuns hospital

and Misericordia hospital here in Edmonton. Each of those towers would double their hospital's capacity with an increase of 350 beds, or 700 for the Edmonton area. At the South Health Campus we're planning an in-patient tower and a women's health tower, which would add a net 400 beds.

We can all agree that we need to expand acute-care capacity, and it's worth noting that Edmonton and Calgary both serve broader areas than their cities. Edmonton covers the north side of the province, a catchment area of over 2 million people. It's true that increasing capacity in Edmonton will actually benefit all of north Alberta and even neighbouring provinces and territories that often send patients here to our world-class facilities.

Madam Chair, we all agree that a facility doesn't serve you unless you have workforce to meet, and that's why I'm so pleased that we've been successfully recruiting health care professionals across the board. We've added over 2,200 physicians since 2019. We've added about 12,000 registered nurses, 10,000 health care aides over the same period. This is a testament to our investment in our public health care system. These are all public dollars supporting health care professionals working in public facilities.

At the same time, Madam Chair, I'm pleased to share that the acute-care plan committed additional funds to do record numbers of surgeries. We achieved a record last year of 318,000, and we're already on pace to doing 330,000 this year. That's been achieved by leveraging both our internal ORs, which are seeing increased activity, but also our chartered surgical facilities. These are private surgical providers but fully publicly funded, with the same health care professionals working in both settings and caring for Albertans.

Madam Chair, we do have too many people in this province waiting for a surgery, 75,000, and 35,000 of those are waiting longer than clinically recommended. If you look at those 35,000, there are 177 different procedures. This incremental envelope of funds, which is over \$500 million, is going to help us reduce the surgical backlog. We're going to be working through those hips, knees, cataracts, and hernias, and we're going to get people the surgeries they need to improve their quality of life. That's a commitment that we've made, in addition to the capital and workforce expansion.

Madam Chair, we're also taking steps to recruit to rural and remote Alberta. We're doing this in a number of ways. We know that if we train people who live in northern or southern Alberta, they're more likely to stay there and practice there, so we're expanding our medical schools. There are 100 additional seats in northern and southern Alberta. We're also providing bursaries with return-of-service commitments. In other words, we're going to subsidize or help pay for your education in return for you providing care in your own community. These are very successful programs.

We're also looking at doing things differently, Madam Chair. For example, in emergency health services, we need to free up our ambulances to respond to genuine emergencies. Too often they're being sent around the province to do interfacility transfers. Now, there are several ways that we can address this issue. One of them is to have step-down units, which can transport patients safely from facility to facility without occupying a full ambulance. In some cases 30 per cent of a community's ambulance availability is being consumed by these interfacility transfers. I think these step-down units for interfacility transfers are going to make a world of difference when minutes matter, as the member opposite highlighted earlier today.

5:10

We're also looking at addressing this on the acute-care side. One of the reasons we transfer patients from smaller community hospitals to major urban centres, tertiary hospitals is because we don't have the equipment or the workforce needed to do diagnostic

imaging, some form of scan or test. What if we could stand it up closer to those rural facilities? Maybe we could avoid some of these interfacility transfers. Or maybe we could expand things like our virtual physician programs. We could care for people where they're at, or we could send a mobile integrated health unit. We could send care to a person or provide it in their home, relieving pressure on our emergency departments and providing Albertans the care they need in the most convenient way possible.

Madam Chair, there are a number of ways that through Budget 2026 we are investing to build a better health care experience for Albertans, but it will take time. The members opposite often criticize that we are taking time to plan and design billion-dollar health care facilities before building them. That to me is an odd criticism. I think we should take the time to work with health care professionals to design the spaces they're going to work in.

**The Chair:** Okay. Back to the – got a jump over there almost. The hon. Member for Calgary-Beddington, would you like to share your time or block time?

**Ms Chapman:** I'm happy to share if the minister wants to share. Sharing is caring.

**The Chair:** Which minister?

**Ms Chapman:** Minister of education.

**The Chair:** Perfect. Are you amenable to sharing time?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Sharing is caring, so yes.

**The Chair:** Oh, wow. Look at this. This is a great start to the next 20 minutes.

Hon. member, you have the floor.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think I'd just like to start on page 59, line 3.6. The document shows that a million dollars was spent to set up the online portal for parent payments during the strike. We know the cost of those payments, of course, was \$204 million. You know, definitely the government made a choice rather than being amenable to the request of teachers to avoid those payments altogether – it wasn't going to be all sharing and caring, Minister – spending this hundreds of millions of dollars on the strike. But on the portal, in particular, if I can ask: who was contracted to set up the portal? Did the government receive a cost estimate before it was set up?

**The Chair:** The hon. Minister of Education and Childcare.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't have those direct answers for you at this moment but happy to provide you with some more detail. You're correct. As you noted, the \$1 million that we have allocated there was for the establishment of the parent payment portal. That, of course, enabled families to receive specific payments as a result of the labour disruption affecting their children.

**The Chair:** The hon. member.

**Ms Chapman:** So you aren't aware at this point, Minister, whether it was an internally created website or contracted out, if it was a sole-source contract. Is the minister able to provide answers to those questions in writing if he doesn't have them available now? I don't know if that's something I can ask for here.

**The Chair:** You can ask whatever you want.

**Ms Chapman:** Then I have to ask . . .

**The Chair:** Well, actually, that's not true. That's actually not at all true.

The hon. minister.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I can follow up with my team and see if I can get an answer to you here while we're debating this.

**The Chair:** Just a reminder to speak through the chair at all times.

The hon. member.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The minister might not have this at his fingertips, but since he's messaging his team, if he does not have the answer now, if he can provide it during our time here: how many families accessed the payment portal during the strike? Was the website accessible, and when I say accessible, I mean: was the site available in multiple languages? Were translation services provided for Alberta parents so that they were able to understand and access the parent payment portal?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Madam Chair, I do have some information here regarding the number of applications we received through the portal and some of our payment statistics. We received 225,997 applicants through the payment portal, 331,798 children were included in the applications, recognizing of course that one applicant may have had multiple children, and that equated to 225,545 e-transfer payments that were successfully deposited. Again, as a reminder, eligible parents and guardians were able to receive \$30 per day, per child for every day of labour disruption.

In addition, families receiving family support for children with disabilities who were affected by labour action were also eligible for additional daily funding of \$30 per day for children 12 and under, and \$60 per day for children 13 to 17.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Minister. So 331,798 children. Now, I believe that we have around 800,000 students enrolled. I'm wondering if the minister can give it to me as a percentage. How many of the eligible students actually received the payment parents through this – payment parents? The parent . . .

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Parent payment.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Minister. How many children who are eligible to receive this payment to their parents through the portal did not receive the \$30 per day funding?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** It is a tongue twister, Madam Chair. I've gotten it wrong myself. The parent payment program, yeah.

**An Hon. Member:** Did you name it?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** I did. I think we could have chosen a better name there, but that's what we have.

I don't have those details that the member's asking for, but as I noted 225,997 applicants applied through the portal and 225,545 e-transfers were made. Again, 331,798 children were captured, and so you can do the math with respect to the total number of students. We have about 800,000 students in the province, but that was the number of applications that we received, and that's how many e-transfers we successfully deposited.

**The Chair:** The hon. member.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I would request that the minister, if he is able to, submit in writing the number of students. It's hard to math because it was based on an age number rather than a

grade number for students 12 and under. If the minister would be able to table in writing how many students – oh, gosh, I'm sorry; I don't know why this word is vacating my brain right now – were able to receive that payment. We know that 331,798 got the payment, but how many folks actually missed out on receiving it when they were eligible? Thank you. That's the word. How many children were eligible but did not receive the payments?

Then I just want to circle back around on the website accessibility. I think those two items are connected. If the minister is able to address what kind of accessibility the website has, whether it was available in other languages, or were there translation services provided through the government so that all parents could access the website?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** We have a few hours here in committee so I'd be happy to track down some of those answers, and I can provide a little bit more detail on the – I'm going to get it wrong even though I have it right here in front of me. The parent payment portal. We, of course, worked very closely with Tech and Innovation, who helped to develop and design the portal in-house. I should say, with a combination of in-house talent and some outside contracting for labour, as they do typically. I think that is the process for all in-house procedures and practices. I won't speak at length to the processes that Tech and Innovation employ, but I know it was standard in terms of the approach that Technology and Innovation undertakes with these types of projects and these types of initiatives.

5:20

I was really happy, though, Madam Chair, that we were able to co-operate with them in such a short timeline and develop something to help get the funding and supports to parents. Of course, so many parents and students were affected by the labour disruption and had to incur additional costs for child care or to help support the continued academic learning of their children. We believed that this was a priority for us, to continue to support those parents and those children who, through no fault of their own, had to endure the costs of the labour disruption. I'm glad that we were able to do that. Of course, the program was available for many weeks and open to the public, to all individuals to be able to apply. As I mentioned in some of the numbers that I provided earlier, a significant portion of the student population and parent population were able to take advantage of it.

**The Chair:** The hon. member.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I didn't hear an answer to the question about website accessibility, but usually I give up after I've asked twice because I think I probably just won't get an answer to that.

I am just going to pivot over to a couple of questions about child care. The one-year extension for the Canada-Alberta agreement was signed by the minister in December 2025. Can the minister tell us how an extension agreement was completed without knowledge of what it would cost? Was the extension negotiated without understanding the costs of providing access to low-cost child care? What hidden costs arose after the budget completion and that December 2025 agreement that necessitated the supplementary request for \$27 million?

**The Chair:** The hon. the minister.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to provide some details with respect to 6.2 on page 59 of supplementary estimates. Twenty-seven million dollars is the variance there. Of course, the forecast is higher than budget. What happened here is that additional revenue was provided by the government of Canada because of population-related adjustments under the federal child

care agreement, and so we are requesting that spending room to reflect the additional funding from the federal government. Since we were able to receive that additional funding due to population changes, we want to make sure that we can spend it and get it out the door to families. That's why you see that change reflected there.

**Ms Chapman:** During estimates '26 the minister shared that there was need for a comprehension strategy and that the original agreement with the federal government presented some restrictions and lack of sustainability. Does the additional \$27 million that was sent to us from the federal government move the needle at all?

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, Madam Chair, as I just mentioned, the \$27 million was provided by the government of Canada because of population-related adjustments under the agreement. Of course, there's more work that needs to be done to ensure a longer term, more sustainable child care agreement for families. But as it relates specifically again to 6.2 of the main estimates, you see that variance reflected there from current estimates to a final of \$27 million.

As I've explained, we had some population changes and adjustments, thus the province was eligible for additional funding, which we received from the federal government, and we need to update our targets so that we can continue to spend those dollars.

**The Chair:** The hon. member.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Line 6.1 on page 59 is the additional \$8.5 million. In estimates, again, the minister shared that the one-year extension on the program allowed for an additional 5,000 child care spaces to for-profit providers. What portion of the \$8.5 million is being provided to those for-profit operators? What portion is being allocated to not-for-profit operators?

**The Chair:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The \$8.5 million reflected in line item 6.1 on page 59 is, of course, a forecast that is higher than budgeted. This funding, though, allows the government to continue to implement the child care accountability program. That's what that additional spending is there for.

In March 2025 we launched the child care accountability program to reduce red tape for providers, maintain quality care, and ensure responsible use of public funds. One of the really cool things about the child care accountability program is that the program allows for the creation of a unique child care participant number for every child enrolled in licensed child care in Alberta. This helps to ensure that we're able to streamline the process for providers to receive government funding and strengthen financial accountability for public funds. It also allows us to support the government's ongoing monitoring efforts to ensure that programs are delivering child care services that promote safety, security, well-being, and development of children, and it provides parents with clear information on government funding that is being used to help reduce their fees beginning later this year.

Additionally, the child care participant number enables an enhanced claim system, launched in the summer of '25, to help streamline provider reporting and improve financial accountability. As I mentioned, overall that eight and a half million is to help ensure the development of the child care accountability program. I think all Albertans want to see accountability when it comes to funding that's being allocated to child care programs and services, and this will ensure that we're able to do that and, of course, is in alignment with the expectations that the federal government has as outlined in the child care agreement.

**The Chair:** The hon. member.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Accessibility is a huge concern for Albertans attempting to secure child care for their children. In estimates I know that we brought forward concerns coming from Alberta parents where their children are being removed from for-profit child care centres due to their child's perceived needs, and the minister at the time indicated that he would need to get a little more information from his team about some of those current practices. I'm wondering if the minister is able to provide that information now, or if he can speak to how the additional supplementary requests in here are being allocated to address those important concerns around accessibility.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Well, Madam Chair, as I've mentioned, we're dealing with three specific variances in supplementary estimates, page 59, line item 6.2, 3.6, and 6.1. I think I've just articulated how each one of those lines is affected. I talked just a moment ago about the eight and a half million variance for the child care accountability program. I've talked about the \$1 million that was allocated for the development of the parent payment portal, and as well the additional \$27 million. Of course, when we're discussing supplementary estimates, we're looking at those specific items, which I've had the opportunity to talk a little bit about. We already spent over six hours in budget main estimates, and I know the member had the opportunity to ask many questions, and I was able to do my best to answer them as best as possible.

**The Chair:** The hon. member.

**Ms Chapman:** Thank you, Madam Chair. What a fast six hours it was. It zipped by. So many questions to ask about what's going on in education.

One thing, when I was reviewing the supplementary supply estimates here, that felt missing to me was – it's been a tough year for education. It's been a tough year for educators. We have had many years of a government, of course, that has chosen to fund education below population growth and inflation. It's put a lot of stress on our school systems and certainly on our teachers and specific underfunding amounts for school boards such as transportation – you know? – where school boards are only receiving funding to cover not even half the cost, sometimes, of what it actually takes to transport kids to school.

5:30

I mean, we know that the cost of everything is going up. Fuel: we all see that at the pumps now. The cost of a bus, actually, in the last 10 years has more than doubled, so of course for the school boards that are having to build their own buses, this is a very significant cost to school boards.

I didn't see an amount in supplementary supply here to add some extra dollars into our education system, which feels like a missed opportunity. I wonder if the minister, you know, is just comfortable with us being the lowest funded in the country, Madam Chair, or if there was any consideration to actually increase operating funding to relieve some of that pressure in our school systems.

**The Chair:** The hon. the minister.

**Mr. Nicolaides:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to talk a little bit more about some of the investments that we're making to education. Budget '26 provides \$722 million in operating funding increase from last year. That represents a 7.2 per cent increase. Just to put that into context, my team have been unable to find a year-over-year increase of this magnitude.

I want to take this opportunity just to provide Albertans with more information. This is a significant and historic investment that is being made into our education system. This funding is going to ensure that

we're able to hire thousands more teachers. In addition to that, we've also increased funding to support student transportation.

We've increased funding to support students with other specialized needs. In fact, this budget cycle we'll be spending over \$1.8 billion specifically for students with specialized needs. As a part of that, we will also be increasing funding to English as an additional language; to the refugee grant; to the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit grant; and several other targeted grants that exist within the education system.

**The Chair:** Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but we're at the end of that 20-minute block.

We will now enter into the next 20-minute block. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, which minister would you like to speak with, and would you like to go back and forth or share time?

**Mr. Sabir:** Sure. Why not go back and forth with the minister?

**The Chair:** With the Minister of Justice. Is that amenable? Are you okay to go back and forth?

**Mr. Amery:** Back and forth is fine, yeah.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, your block starts now.

**Mr. Sabir:** The Ministry of Justice is looking for \$16.5 million, and some of that money is going to strengthening supports for Albertans who are victims and survivors of gender-based violence. Madam Chair, when it comes to gender-based violence, Alberta ranks above the national average, and from '23-25 we were the third-highest in Canada.

A fairly straightforward question. How will this money be spent? What supports are being offered with this funding specifically to the victims and survivors of gender-based violence? What existing supports are being strengthened? And how are we measuring the effectiveness of these programs? Are we expecting that our ranking will change with this funding or that we'll need additional funds from the government? Essentially, how this money will be spent, and how we will measure progress: that's the question.

**The Chair:** The hon. the Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I do appreciate the question from the hon. member. Included in the supplementary estimates that we're seeking is, of course, an injection of \$1.888 million for supports aimed at targeting or persisting victims and survivors of gender-based violence. Of course, that is part of a very comprehensive strategy that is led, I think, by my colleague behind me, the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, who is leading a number of ministries and working towards the important work that the member mentioned.

Of course, there are a number of different strategies, as a collective, that are happening all across the country, but the idea here is to ensure that the supports are available from multiple ministries, Madam Chair, in order to combat this very serious issue. The work that we're doing as a collective between the Ministry of Justice, of course, the ministries that are involved – I certainly think that the colleagues on this bench are all working collectively together, are aimed at making sure that awareness is raised, including addressing the root causes of gender-based violence, gender inequality, and systematic discrimination.

Support for survivors: programs that are directed directly through the funding, that go to a number of different ministries, the programs that we're working on. In Justice we've got a number of programs, a number of supports that flow through to various organizations,

various not-for-profits, and those that are working on the ground directly with victims and their families in order to help them address and navigate through some of the very difficult challenges that they and their families are dealing with, Madam Chair.

There's increased accountability, of course, with this funding, and we're hoping that we can continue to strengthen our legal responses and improve reporting processes and make sure that not only victims are supported but perpetrators are held accountable, and also creating and fostering an environment where perpetrators also receive supports should they need it. The funding that comes through Justice, again, which is part of a bigger program led by the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, will also go to collaboration, data collection, research, improving the understanding of gender-based violence trends, and measuring progress.

Madam Chair, when we talk about the initiatives that we're working on, Alberta Justice is one part of a much bigger program, again, that is being led by the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, but the idea is to satisfy a bunch of core pillars: once again, support for victims, survivors, and their family; the prevention of this happening in any household here in Alberta; of course, making sure that the Alberta justice system is responsive and that it addresses some of the core, root causes of what is happening, working with our infrastructure as well to make sure that we create a comprehensive, province-wide crossministry approach that incorporates and embraces some of the work being done by other provinces as well, and making sure that gender-based violence initiatives address the true root causes of what we're dealing with here.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

**Mr. Sabir:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I heard that it's a crossministry, crossgovernment initiative. What I was asking was the specific program that will be strengthened with this funding, and sadly I didn't hear any answer. But let's move on to legal aid. Ever since the UCP government took over government, they have cut legal aid a fair bit. It used to be around \$110 million back in 2019-2020. Now I think it's down to \$102 million, and out of that the federal government share of legal aid is \$14.1 million. A couple of questions.

The reason for those questions is that the government has also taken over Alberta Law Foundation funds and has increased the Alberta Law Foundation portion of legal aid. My question is: how much money in the previous year came through Alberta Law Foundation funds? Was it 25 per cent or an increased rate of 50 per cent? Also, while Alberta Law Foundation funding has been taken over to pay for additional legal aid and government cuts to legal aid, that has impacted the Alberta Law Foundation supported access-to-justice initiative. Have we seen any impact on legal aid caseload due to cuts to the Alberta Law Foundation initiatives that have resulted from the recent government decision to take over Alberta Law Foundation funds?

5:40

**The Chair:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you to the member for the questions. There is a serious set of misunderstandings that I'd like to correct for the record before we begin. First off, Alberta Legal Aid is better funded now than it ever has been, and that is because of the hard work that Alberta Justice has put into making sure that one of our most important organizations that is delivering access to justice to eligible Albertans is receiving the appropriate funding it needs.

Let me walk the member through a little bit of history perhaps, if I may, because it's important to understand in order to make sure

that the member understands the foundation of why his questions simply don't make any sense.

Madam . . .

**Mr. Sabir:** Madam Chair, my question is simple. How much funding is coming from Alberta Law Foundation?

**The Chair:** Sorry. The way this thing works is . . .

**Mr. Sabir:** The history of this program is not relevant to supplementary estimates.

**The Chair:** Sorry. I can appreciate that, but the minister still has the time to answer the question that was asked. You might not like it, but unfortunately that's where we're at. I'm certain the minister is wrapping up.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. We certainly are answering the questions, but the question has to make sense in order for us to provide an appropriate answer to that question. The fact of the matter is that Legal Aid Alberta delivers legal services to thousands of Albertans who need it here in this province, and part of that money comes from funding from revenue from the Alberta Law Foundation. Now, the Alberta Law Foundation receives interest that is collected on all of the lawyer trust accounts in this province, and over the course of the past few years the interest that was derived and sent to the Alberta Law Foundation was a significant number.

What we've done is we've worked with the foundation, and we've worked with Legal Aid and, collectively, between the government of Alberta, the federal government, Alberta Law Foundation, the funding to Legal Aid is as good as it's ever been, and that means more Albertans are receiving legal services. Eligible Albertans are receiving better legal services. The lawyers on the roster are receiving more money than they ever received before, Madam Chair, and the financial eligibility guidelines for legal aid eligibility are lower than ever. So we're in a great period of time to answer some of the questions that the member asked. The Alberta Law Foundation contributed 25 per cent of its revenues to Legal Aid Alberta. In recent legislation, passed here in this Assembly, that number was increased to 50 per cent. That number meant more money going to Albertans who need it, and that's, I think, an important move forward.

The other misconception that the member continues to perpetuate in this Assembly and outside of this Assembly is that government quote, unquote, took over the Alberta Law Foundation. That is simply not true, Madam Chair. The Alberta Law Foundation operates as an independent organization with an independent board that is very capable and competent of doing the great work that they've been doing, and they'll continue to do that. Every single Alberta Law Foundation recipient is receiving funding. These are recipients that we all know and love in the legal community. Every single one of them has received the funding that they are entitled to under the grant program. While the member tries to paint a doom-and-gloom picture here in Alberta Justice, we know that that's not the case. We know that the foundation is being managed by a great board.

I don't know why the member is standing up, Madam Chair, but if he wants to go with the back and forth, he needs to give me the opportunity to give my full answer or else we'll just revert to block time.

In any event, what we said about the Alberta Law Foundation is great. The board is operating at full capacity right now. The Law Society of Alberta took steps to improve their representation on the board. There is a full board now, and everything is full steam ahead. Contrary to that member's questions, contrary to that member's eagerness to ask additional questions, everything in the Alberta Law Foundation and Legal Aid Alberta is quite

good right now, and we will continue to oversee that and make sure that eligible Albertans receive the support that they need.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Sabir:** That's so good that the minister has immunity from the Law Society's oversight. That's really good.

I think what happened in this House is that legislation was passed to increase forcibly Alberta Law Foundation's share from 25 to 50 per cent. Everybody opposed it, and then the entire staff of Alberta Law Foundation resigned in protest. They were pushed out. Then government also gave themselves the ability to control any funding over \$250,000 that Alberta Law Foundation can give out. Based on that power, almost 80 per cent of the applications were denied by this minister's office, and here the minister comes with all kinds of things, that it's at arm's length and it's now controlled by somebody else and whatnot.

There are some other questions that I do want to ask which relate to 5.1. That supports policy, legislative planning, and those things. That's the line item, justice supports and strategic services. With respect to that, a number of questions. The first question relates to overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the justice system. We do know that that's an issue, a long-standing issue, so I just want to ask the government to, I guess, say on the record whether they see that as an issue. If they do see that as an issue, it would be helpful for us to know: how do they know that? What's the data that they rely on to know that there is overrepresentation of Indigenous people? Does the government collect race-based data to know that? If not, how can they inform their programs and policies that are directed to restorative justice and Indigenous services programs?

Then another question, I think, that will also come as support policy. Recently, Madam Chair, Justice Feasby of the Court of King's Bench handed down a decision. He said that any referendum that will offend treaty rights, or separatist referendums, will be outside the purview. They will be unconstitutional. So the question I have is: with this money will there be any policy work done to analyze the constitutionality of these referendums or any work to analyze the application of the federal Clarity Act, which relates to referendum questions?

This question also relates to another page in this supplementary estimate, where government is giving the Chief Electoral Officer \$13 million in this supplementary estimate. I don't think that will be relating to Justice, but whoever wants to answer this, maybe the Finance minister: how will this money be spent? What amount will be going to fund these referendums? How much will each referendum cost? If we don't know about the constitutionality of these referendums, why are we spending public money on these referendums when we could be spending that money on so many other things? Hiring nurses, hiring doctors, hiring teachers, supporting Albertans with disabilities, supporting people with food insecurity: there are so many better uses that we can put this public money to.

Here their initial budget was \$12 million, and we are adding \$13 million, so almost from that current estimate we are giving them more than what was originally included in their office budget. That's certainly due to some of these referendums as well.

**The Chair:** Sorry. I hesitate to interrupt, but we are not to discuss the independent offices in this. This is mainly on the supplementary supply for the main estimates, not the independent offices.

**Mr. Sabir:** That was just the context.

**The Chair:** Okay. Fair enough.

**Mr. Sabir:** In 5.1 the justice policies still have room, whether or not they will use this money, to do some of the policy analysis about these referendums. Line 5.1 does support policy, legislative planning, agency oversight, justice initiatives, including legal aid and all those things.

**5:50**

Another question with respect to, again, the Indigenous court worker program. From this program, I guess, what are some of the outcomes? Again, if we are not collecting any race-based data, how are we informing justice programs, justice policies as they relate to the issue of overrepresentation in our justice system?

With respect to legal aid one more question. The minister claimed that legal aid is at its highest. I think people are entitled to their opinions but not to their facts. If we look at the Justice budget back in the day when the Justice minister – there were so many. Kaycee Madu . . .

**Ms Hoffman:** Tyler Shandro.

**Mr. Sabir:** Tyler Shandro. There were some others, too.

At that time it was \$110 million, so claiming that \$102 million is the highest as it ever has been: I think nothing can be further from the truth.

The reason I ask a number of questions is because the Justice minister thinks it's funny to dodge questions and not answer and not be accountable to this House, and that is truly shameful.

**The Chair:** Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but that concludes the first 60-minute block for members of the Official Opposition.

We will now go to a 20-minute block for members of the government caucus. [interjection] Sorry, Minister. That concludes the time.

I'm looking for a member of the government caucus who would like to join in the debate. I see the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. Which minister would you like to ask questions to?

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you. The Minister of Advanced Education, please.

**The Chair:** Advanced Education. Would you like block time or to go back and forth?

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Whatever the minister prefers.

**The Chair:** Okay. Perfect. That sounds good.

Hon. member, this starts your time.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you, Chair. Through you to the minister. On page 42 of the supplementary supply estimates the Ministry of Advanced Education is requesting \$857,000 in new funding to advance French language postsecondary initiatives fully funded by dedicated revenue under the Canada-Alberta agreement on French language services at no cost to Alberta taxpayers. On a ministry base of over \$2.8 billion this is a mid-year provincial ask of less than one-tenth of 1 per cent, reflecting a ministry that planned well, held its budget, and is now delivering on a targeted federal partnership exactly as the agreement intended. To the minister through the chair: can you speak to what this level of fiscal discipline reflects about the government's approach by budget management and how the Alberta-Canada agreement on French language services is delivering for Albertans pursuing postsecondary education in French?

**The Chair:** The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

**Mr. McDougall:** Thank you for the question, Madam Chair. The French language initiative fund, as is indicated by the question, was funded under the Canada-Alberta agreement on French language services. While our department works very hard to make sure that expenses are kept within budget allocations initially, the federal government did provide us after the budget an increase in funding available to the French language program. Of this, \$707,000 will be going to a recruitment and retention bursary program at the Campus Saint-Jean, and another \$150,000 will be going to the creation of an educational assistants program at Campus Saint-Jean's college. Those funds are totally funded by the federal government. They came after the budget was originally presented and passed and therefore passed on to those institutions to be used for their purposes.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you, Minister.

Chair, through you to the minister. Page 42 also shows a transfer of \$1,050,000 arriving at Advanced Education from Arts, Culture and Status of Women for "gender-based violence prevention initiatives . . . provided by the federal government under the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence." Can the minister speak on how inter-ministry transfers of this kind, where federal funds are directed to the ministry with the strongest program fit, reflect the government's commitment to ensuring federal investments deliver real outcomes for Albertans?

**Mr. McDougall:** Thank you to the member for the question. The expense transfer was originally allocated to Arts, Culture and Status of Women to provide the \$1,050,000 to fund gender-based violence prevention initiatives. This funding is provided by the federal government under the national action plan to end gender-based violence and is allocated to publicly funded postsecondary institutions to support eligible activities such as awareness activities, including campaigns and information fairs; prevention and bystander training for students, staff, and faculty; and reporting tools. A decision was made to allocate this funding from Advanced Education as opposed to the Department of Arts, Culture and Status of Women; therefore, it is now included as part of supplemental funding.

**The Chair:** The hon. member.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you. Just give me a second here. Sorry about that.

Okay. It looks like this question would be for the Arts, Culture and Status of Women minister. Chair, through you to the minister. On page 46 of supplementary supply estimates the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women is requesting \$5.055 million in additional expense funding, including \$1.231 million for the national action plan to end gender-based violence, fully off-set by federal funding, and \$3.824 million for the investing in Canada infrastructure program, community, culture, and recreation. In addition, there is a transfer of \$13.196 million to several ministries, including Children and Family Services; Justice; Jobs, Economy,

Trade and Immigration; Indigenous Relations; and Advanced Education to support the implementation of the national action plan. Chair, through you to the minister: can you explain how this funding and these transfers will strengthen Alberta's co-ordinated response to gender-based violence across multiple ministries and service areas?

**The Chair:** The hon. Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

**Ms Fir:** Well, thank you, Chair. This funding supports the implementation of Building on Our Strengths: Alberta's 10-year Strategy to End Gender-based Violence, which is a co-ordinated crossgovernment plan involving more than 100 concrete actions. The supplementary funding and interministry transfers ensure that programs and services are delivered where they are most effective across Justice, Children and Family Services, Indigenous Relations, postsecondary education, and economic supports. Critical investments include prevention grants, women's shelter modernization, postsecondary awareness campaigns, advancing the Alberta Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Roadmap, elder abuse prevention, workplace safety research, and justice system supports.

Rather than duplicating efforts, this approach aligns policy, funding, and service delivery across ministries so that survivors can access supports regardless of where they live and prevention efforts are strengthened province-wide. This co-ordination reflects the reality that gender-based violence is complex and requires a whole-of-government response, not isolated programs.

**The Chair:** The hon. member.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you, Chair. Through you to the minister: how is the ministry ensuring that funding is being delivered in a timely and effective manner to front-line organizations and community partners?

**Ms Fir:** Funding is being delivered through established ministry programs and trusted delivery partners that already work directly with survivors and communities. This includes women's shelters, sexual assault centres, Indigenous-led organizations, community-based prevention programs, and front-line justice partners. By following funding directly to partner ministries and organizations with existing infrastructure, we're cutting red tape, reducing delays, and ensuring survivor-centred services can be delivered quickly and effectively. Implementation is guided by the actions set out in the 10-year strategy, with clear accountability for delivery across government and ongoing engagement with service providers to address emerging needs.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, I am going to recess this committee until 7:30 tonight.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]



## Table of Contents

Prayers .....	1155
Indigenous Land Acknowledgement .....	1155
Introduction of Visitors .....	1155
Introduction of Guests .....	1155
Members' Statements	
Government Record.....	1156, 1157
Food Prices and Affordability .....	1156
Heritage Organization Funding .....	1156
Agricultural Exports .....	1157
Wildfire Prevention and Control .....	1165
Oral Question Period	
Investigation of Health Services Procurement.....	1157
Children's Pain Medication Purchase.....	1158
Premier's Acceptance of Gifts and Benefits.....	1158
Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee .....	1159
Health Care System Capacity .....	1159
Agrifood Industry Investment.....	1160
Crime Prevention.....	1161, 1162
Recovery Community Contracts.....	1161
Government Policies and Cost of Living.....	1162
Provincial Firearms Policies.....	1163
Affordability Measures.....	1163
Funding for Airdrie Schools .....	1164
Tabling Returns and Reports .....	1165
Orders of the Day .....	1166
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 206 Accessible Alberta Act.....	1166
Division .....	1168
Bill 205 Non-Disclosure Agreements Act.....	1169
Motions Other than Government Motions	
Public Safety.....	1169
Division .....	1177
Committee of Supply.....	1178
Supplementary Supply Estimates 2025-26 General Revenue Fund.....	1178

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