



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 26, 2025

Day 92

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 1

Vacant: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a school group to introduce.

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to introduce to you and through you Devon and area home-schoolers. I'm excited to have the youngest and brightest, the future of my constituency, in attendance today. I would like to ask them to stand up and please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Children and Family Services has a school group to introduce.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce the amazing kids from the Meridian Heights elementary school in Stony Plain. I appreciate being able to talk to them as well as my constituents, Spencer and Jennifer Bennett. Please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier has an introduction.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to introduce to you and through you some of our wonderful Invest Alberta board members that are in attendance today, including Don Hubble, Robert Fernandez, Ian Gunn, Bob Dhillon, and Jennifer Berglund. With their help Invest Alberta continues to attract investment and support business development while promoting and advocating Alberta industries around the world. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Chamber.

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

Member Tejada: Hello, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you three very special people in my life: my loving partner, Todd, and my two daughters, Ana and Soleil. They represent the kindness and love and potential of this province. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a couple of my favourite Albertans who continue to inspire me with their knowledge and passion for land-use planning and conservation in this province: Stephen Legault, the senior manager of Alberta Energy Transition for Environmental Defence fund; Dave Poulton, director at the Alberta Land Institute and founder of Poulton Environmental Strategies; and Steph's wife,

Jennifer Hoffman. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Legislative Assembly Adam Kozakiewicz, the CEO of the county of Two Hills; Ruven Rajoo, my CA board president; and Lavi Gidwani, an investor in my constituency and a president of several companies. Gentlemen, I'd ask that you all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you somebody the Premier already got ahead of me on, but I'm happy to do it again: a true Albertan, an incredible entrepreneur, a great employer in our province, and the name behind Dhillon School of Business at the University of Lethbridge. That's just one example of his great community leadership and a northeast Calgary guy just like me. I'd like to ask Bob Dhillon to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has an introduction.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you a very favourite constituent of mine and a friend, Danielle Bothwell, who's here today joined by her two daughters, Layla and Isabella. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has a statement to make.

Provincial Response to U.S. Tariffs

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When U.S. President Donald Trump first announced his threatened tariffs against Canada and began musing about our country becoming the 51st state, many Canadians and Albertans feared for their futures, and why? Because regardless of our political stripe we all knew that the imposition of 25 per cent tariffs on all Canadian goods to the U.S. would cost the jobs of hundreds of thousands of Canadians, would depress our economy, devastate our budget, and damage the sovereignty of our country.

In the roughly four months until just before last weekend's federal election call, Premiers, party leaders, and Canadians were united, other than perhaps the Alberta NDP, and working as hard as we could to convince the U.S. President and Congress to reconsider these unjustified actions against our country. In fact, Premiers were all encouraged by each other as well as by the former Prime Minister and his ministers to visit the U.S., to get on U.S. media, to speak with every U.S. official and influencer we could to convince the U.S. President to refrain from imposing these tariffs. It was all about working as Team Canada for the greater good.

Enter Liberal Prime Minister Mark Carney. Now all of a sudden it's apparently treason to talk to American media personalities that we disagree with. It is disloyal to try and persuade high-profile Republicans holding influence with the President to abandon his tariff policies on Canada. Indeed, it's a high crime to try and convince U.S. officials to refrain from imposing tariffs until after our country has elected a leader with a strong mandate. "Shame on all who dare to speak with the enemy," they now say. These are the Team Carney and NDP talking points. Their endgame is quite obvious: frighten and divide Canadians, try and make Canadians forget the utter incompetence of Liberal and NDP policies that have

been inflicted on this country over the last 10 years, associate conservatives with President Trump. If they play their cards just right and sprinkle in just enough anti-Alberta rhetoric, presto, Canada might elect another Liberal majority government.

Well, the Carney Liberals and the Nenshi NDP are right about one thing: our country is indeed vulnerable right now. The reason why is as clear as a sunny Alberta day. It is because for the last 10 years Liberal and NDP leaders across this country, both federal and provincial, have repeatedly sold out Canada and Alberta with policies that have land-locked our immense natural resources, made nation-building projects practically impossible to finance and build, and have made securing access to our ports an exercise in frustration and futility. These Liberal and NDP leaders from Trudeau to Singh and now to Prime Minister Mark Carney have done everything in their power to sow investment uncertainty, to add impossibly high costs on the development of our resources, and have disastrously weakened our security and military all in the name of their green extremist religion and its cult leaders named Guilbeault, Suzuki, Gore, and Thunberg.

The results are obvious. Canadians are poorer than Americans, overly dependent on the Americans, and vulnerable to many nations, including the Americans. Canada has indeed been sold out big time. It's been sold out by the utter incompetent, self-righteous, and extreme policies of Liberal and NDP leadership across this country, including the Nenshi NDP right here in Alberta. From C-69 to oil and gas production caps to tanker bans to a dozen other examples, the Liberals and their allies have attacked the Alberta and Saskatchewan economies mercilessly.

Despite all that, despite the ten-year attack on Alberta by our own federal government, when tariffs were threatened on our fellow Canadians and the federal Liberals realized they had no contacts or allies anywhere in the new U.S. administration, what did the Alberta government do? Did we cower in the corner madly texting our tweets about hating Donald Trump on X? Did we turn into part-time TikTok rage farmers to stir up as much fear and loathing of Americans as humanly possible? Did we give up, throw our hands in the air, express righteous indignation but do nothing to fight against the threat imposed on our province and country? No. That's what the Nenshi NDP did, of course, but we, Alberta's UCP government, did not. Instead, our government did exactly what Albertans expect us to do. We decided to fight tooth and nail for Albertan and Canadian jobs and sovereignty.

My ministers, officials, and I have spent hundreds of hours over the last several months talking with, lobbying, educating, and persuading every U.S. lawmaker and media influencer that was willing to listen about how damaging and wrongheaded imposing tariffs on Canada would be for Americans and for the millions of American jobs that would be lost because of them. I've made this case repeatedly to the American people and their leaders, especially Republican leaders, from the U.S. President personally to members of his cabinet, to senators, to governors, to members of Congress, to podcasters, to media personalities.

I've lost track of how many nights I've spent in uncomfortable hotel beds and airports doing everything humanly possible to stand up for Canadian and Alberta workers and families, convincing U.S. officials to refrain from putting tariffs on any Canadian goods, asking that they respect the current free trade agreement, and not begin renegotiations until Canadians elect a new Prime Minister with a strong four-year mandate, doing all we could in Alberta to secure the U.S. border and urging the Liberals to do the same across the country so that we could further delay the implementation of tariffs.

1:40

It hasn't just been Alberta. Several other Premiers, particularly Conservative Premiers – Premier Scott Moe, Premier Tim Houston, Premier Doug Ford – have been doing the exact same thing. And the results: it has been almost four months since the President first threatened tariffs on Canada, and although steel and aluminum are wrongfully being tariffed at this time, the tariffs on remaining Canadian goods sit at zero today rather than 25 per cent.

What has the Nenshi NDP done to contribute to this effort? Not a single thing other than raging against this government for every effort we have taken to protect Albertans. Needless to say, there is not a doubt in my mind that had the Nenshi NDP been in charge during this period, we would likely have long ago been hit with across-the-board 25 per cent tariffs and lost thousands of Alberta jobs already. The NDP have no idea what diplomacy is as they don't know how to talk constructively or effectively with anyone they disagree with. Glad we never need to find out. Our government's advocacy has made a massive difference for Albertans and for Canadians, and that is a fact.

But now we have another tariff deadline looming on April 2, and I am now off to the U.S. yet again to try and speak to Americans, this time through the second-largest podcaster in the world whose audience is made up of exactly the people we need to persuade, to convince their President to change course on tariffs against Canada. What does Team Carney want me to do? They want me to abandon my post, remain in Alberta, and do absolutely nothing to defend our province. They want me to cower in the face of eastern media pundits and politicians who favour political grandstanding to effective diplomacy. I'm fiercely criticized for going into the lion's den to change the hearts and minds of the very Americans that we need on Canada's side to avoid a trade war with the most powerful economy on earth. They want this lady and Alberta to just sit down and shut up.

Well, here is my response to that. I will not be silent. Alberta will not be silent. We will not be pushed around and called traitors for merely having the courage to actually do something about our nation's and province's predicament other than merely indulging in self-righteous tantrums. I for one will never be silenced by the party in Ottawa that has sold out our beloved province for the last 10 years with the help of their NDP collaborators. I have and I always will put Albertans first, and until this danger to Alberta and our economy has passed, they're going to have to roll me off in a stretcher before I will stop fighting for our province and our people. So they can call me and my caucus whatever name in the dictionary they want. As long as Albertans know that we are fighting for them and their families, we could care less what the members opposite or Liberal politicians in Ottawa have to say about us. Albertans expect their Premier and government to always put Albertans first and lead them through this storm with fearless determination.

As Winston Churchill once said: "Fear is a reaction. Courage is a decision." We on this side of the House have made the decision to act with courage so that Alberta may remain forever strong and free.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, the threat posed to Canada's sovereignty, economic security, and way of life by U.S. President Donald Trump and his administration is real and profound. While it's nice to hear the Premier finally step up and say that she's on Team Canada, it's a little late, and it's a little hard to believe considering she just gave a federal campaign speech. Meanwhile, the Alberta NDP have always been onside with Team Canada since

day one. Albertans deserve a response that is strong, aligned with Canadians across the country, and commensurate with the impact tariffs will have on our jobs, our industries, and Albertans.

This is why Alberta NDP leader Naheed Nenshi has put forward a five-point plan that Alberta should be following to fight tariffs alongside all Canadians. First, we need to strengthen Canadian markets. The Premier and the UCP must broaden their focus from what's happening down south and stop neglecting the opportunities that exist right here in our own country. This is a chance to bolster our internal trade and customers across Canada. By reducing interprovincial barriers and working with the crediting bodies to standardize licensing and building codes, we can create a more integrated and competitive national economy.

Second, we must have strategic engagement with the United States. The Premier was busy taking pictures at cocktail parties and speaking to far-right social media influencers but has failed to secure any actual meetings or impacts on decision-makers. In fact, Premier Doug Ford is the only Premier to date who has secured any backdown from the Trump administration. We must be smart, building long-term relationships with U.S. stakeholders that support Alberta's interests on all sides of the political spectrum, not just ideological buddies. When we engage, we must be strong and effective about Canada's value.

Third, we must diversify global trade relations. The Trump tariffs offer a moment of opportunity for Alberta. Alberta produces some of the world's best agricultural products from meat to canola. We need to focus on new international markets for these goods, and the world needs more Canadian energy in all its forms. We need better access to global markets, and we can only achieve that by working with other Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Fourth, we must protect Alberta workers. Trump's tariffs will displace workers and harm our industries. We need a plan to protect Alberta workers, including income support, retraining programs, and investing in education to support displaced workers. The government must proactively work with federal partners to implement these measures.

Fifth, we must seize this moment to attract global talent. Alberta should be using this crisis as an opportunity to recruit top talent, including doctors, scientists, engineers, and other professionals. With our world-class postsecondary institutions like the universities of Alberta and Calgary, American talent should be coming to Alberta. We can position Alberta as a global leader in innovation and attract talent now. After six years of a UCP government, well, Alberta desperately needs to attract more health care professionals.

Mr. Speaker, let's add a sixth point. We would not threaten a national unity crisis and call for the separation of Alberta from Canada.

This is the plan we need to have in place with a cool head, meeting with the right people, and doing the right work. While the Premier is pretending to be a skilled diplomat, she's actually achieved nothing for Alberta. We may love theatre, but the Premier's performance is not doing Albertans any good. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has a statement to make.

Compensation Model for Primary Care Physicians

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 1 Alberta will launch a new primary care compensation model designed to

strengthen access to health care across the province. This new compensation model will modernize how family medicine and rural generalist physicians are compensated, recognizing their contributions, extensive training, experience, and leadership in delivering sustainable primary health care to Albertans.

The new compensation model is designed to ensure that physicians are fairly compensated while incentivizing actions that improve access and quality of care. Family physicians will be encouraged to maintain larger patient panels to ensure more Albertans have consistent access to a family doctor. The model also includes incentives for providing after-hours care, which will reduce the strain on emergency departments and urgent care centres, ensuring patients can get the care they need when they need it.

Developed in partnership with the Alberta Medical Association, this model has already received a strong response from physicians, with 789 family doctors currently signed up to participate. This shows that there is broad support for a model that not only supports physicians in their essential work but also improves access to primary care across the province.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, we are implementing changes to the Alberta international medical graduate program, which is responsible for assessing the qualifications of Alberta international medical graduates. By adjusting the graduation deadline and removing the requirements for an externship assessment, we are making it easier for more Albertans to complete their residency closer to home. This change will help to retain our talented health care professionals by providing more opportunities to practise in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, these initiatives reflect our ongoing commitment to our health care system. By listening to the needs of health care providers and responding with meaningful change, we are paving the way for better access to care and a stronger, more resilient health care system for all Albertans.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Response to U.S. Tariffs

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, on January 13 the Premier said, quote, I haven't been arguing for a particular carve-out. End quote. Now she says that that's exactly what she's been asking for all along. It's just like the accusations of political interference. She's on tape March 8 saying that she called for political interference to help Pierre Poilievre, but now she says it's the opposite. Why does the Premier always have to explain that what she's been recorded saying isn't actually what she said?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been asking for a particular carve-out for all of Canada in all of our products, in all of our provinces. We just happened to have success in making the argument to the United States that energy resources were such a valuable product and the markets were so integrated that they should receive a different tariff rate; indeed, what looks like it might be a zero tariff rate. We can make the same argument on food, and we have; on timber, and we have; and on intermediate goods, and we have; and I intend to continue to make that argument until every Canadian good crossing the border is tariff-free.

Ms Gray: Yesterday the Premier claimed she's met with many in the U.S., but on March 18 the Premier said, quote, by definition, all

meetings and conversations I had were of a social nature, where I indicated I would love to have a sit-down meeting with those individuals as soon as we were able. End quote. So which is it? They were either meaningless cocktail parties of a purely social nature, or she was attempting to influence U.S. administration officials to interfere in our election. Was the Premier wasting time and money on junkets or soliciting campaign interference by a foreign government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's both. I'm able to meet with U.S. governors and I have: Texas governor, Greg Abbott; Montana governor, Greg Gianforte; Nevada governor, Joe Lombardo; North Dakota governor, Kelly Armstrong; Wyoming governor, Mark Gordon; Arkansas governor, Sarah Huckabee Sanders; Louisiana governor, Jeff Landry; Utah governor, Spencer Cox; Colorado governor, Jared Polis; Hawaii governor, Josh Green; and New Mexico governor, Michelle Grisham. The reason why you meet with governors is because each of them from different political parties have their own circles of influence, and we need to influence every single person so that they can influence the American President.

Ms Gray: Cocktail parties do not count as meetings.

Now let's review the Premier's claims: she wasn't calling for tariff pauses, but she was; she wasn't currying political interference, but she did; she wasn't meeting with officials, but she met with officials. The Premier's lack of results for all of that speak for themselves. Trump's tariff threats continue and are having a still-destabilizing impact on our investment and the Canadian economy. Why has the Premier been so ineffective at standing up for Team Alberta and so good at doing whatever Team Trump demands of her?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I can tell, obviously, that the members opposite have done absolutely zero to try to lobby on our behalf because they don't seem to understand who to call, how to get a meeting. We do. We have had somebody in our Washington office since 2005. We have had countless delegations that have gone down to have countless meetings.

This is just a fraction of the number of people that I have met with in the United States in the last year. The reason we are doing it, Mr. Speaker, is so that we can make the point to every single person who may have influence on the U.S. President that tariffs against Canada are wrong, so that no Canadian goods are tariffed.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition for question 2.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier seems to think that the entire Alberta public is completely in the wrong at being incensed at her behaviour. Commentators are incensed because she won't do the right thing and cancel her fundraiser with the American far right in Florida. The *Calgary Herald's* Don Braid writes that "her strategy is guaranteed to be hugely controversial, especially when it tangles her up with [pro-annexation] characters like Shapiro." Why does this Premier continue to spend her precious time hanging around folks who call Canada the Puerto Rico of the north and think it's ready to be annexed?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We had 1,500 people come to our Edmonton Leader's Dinner last week. I bet they wouldn't be

able to do the same thing under today's circumstances. We had 500 people at a town hall last night when we were in Sherwood Park. I can tell you that we're getting positive feedback from people who appreciate my diplomatic approach because they understand that by taking a diplomatic approach, by using persuasion, by using influence, we've already had an impact in having a breakthrough on energy resources. We have to continue with this diplomatic approach so that we can have an impact on ensuring tariffs are not levied against any Canadian goods.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, what impact? She just admitted that she's been unsuccessful in pushing for tariff relief in every other industry.

At least the Premier has her chief of staff to defend her. He raged on social media, saying that Albertans who don't appreciate this waste of taxpayer money are cowards. Fact: Ben Shapiro found it funny to refer to Canada as the 51st state. Fact: Ben Shapiro insults us as a silly country. He also threatens us by saying that we will be annexed. Standing up to someone making those attacks would make Albertans proud, not cowards. Why won't the Premier cancel her trip to Florida and save Albertans this embarrassment?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has the call.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because when you look at a personality like Mr. Shapiro, who has the second-largest podcast in the world, a reach of 25 million people, says things like: I am still unclear as to what the actual demand is against Mexico or Canada that would get rid of tariffs; Canada, by the way, is the number one trade partner with the United States. He has been onside with the Canadian position, that tariffs against Canada do not make sense. He has a very wide circle of influence. The people who listen to his podcast are close to the U.S. President. If we can convince them, we may be able to convince the administration.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, she's not going on a podcast. She's going to a fundraiser for a far-right organization.

The Premier will curry favour with anyone on America's far right because she cares so much about their approval, but Albertans want a Premier who stands up for Alberta as a proud part of Canada. The Premier should cancel her trip, stop courting the American far right, stop interfering in the federal election, and start solving the many problems her government has already created here, like maybe calling a full public inquiry into the corrupt care scandal her government is embroiled in. Will she do that today? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you Mr. Speaker. I think we just saw exactly with the members opposite who they are aligned with. One of their members just joined Team Carney in order to be able to advance the Liberal agenda in Alberta. We have said for some time that their leader is the Liberals' choice for Alberta. We have said for some time that they would always default against Alberta instead of defaulting in favour of defending Alberta. We stand strong, defending Alberta. We will do it here, we will do it nationally, and we will do it internationally. We will do it on behalf of all Canadians to make sure that we maintain a tariff-free relationship with the United States. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for question 3.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, for a decade the members opposite have fearmongered about our party's links to one federal party or another

as befits their narrative, but it turns out they're the ones who are completely captive to a federal party, so much so that their leader would invite foreign interference into our federal elections. It is shameful.

Health Services Procurement Process

Ms Gray: On the corrupt care scandal the worst allegations involve kickbacks. My question to the Premier: has the Premier learned whether any of her staff accepted flights or gifts from Sam Mraiche or MHCare, and if so, what did she do?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite: you buy a membership in the NDP, you are automatically a member in the federal NDP. The federal NDP have kept the Liberals alive to impose damaging policy after damaging policy against this province, and they have not agreed . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. Premier is the one with the call.

Ms Smith: . . . to roll back a single one. We have a tanker ban off the west coast because of them. We have Bill C-69 because of them. We have an emissions cap because of them. We have net-zero vehicle regulations because of them. We have net-zero power grid regulations because of them. They cannot distance themselves from their record.

Ms Gray: Because of them we have one of the worst corruption scandals in Alberta's history.

It is Albertans' hard-earned money meant to provide health care that is tied up in bloated contracts for private surgical facilities, and Albertans are now on the hook for more than half a million dollars for a retired judge to review some, but not all, of the allegations without the powers of a public inquiry, so Albertans deserve to know if anyone in the Premier's staff received kickbacks from Sam Mraiche or MHCare. Did the Premier's principal secretary, Becca Polak, accept the gift of a flight from Sam Mraiche?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

2:00

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No.

But let me tell you what we have done in health care. We have done a number of investments that are going to make a major difference as we refocus health care, and the reason we are making these decisions is so that we can have investment in the chartered surgical centres, that are the only things that are increasing the number of surgeries. Mr. Speaker, I've said before that we've put billions of dollars into AHS, and we have not seen an increase in the number of surgeries. We have put a smaller amount into the investment in chartered surgical centres, and we've seen a 50 per cent increase in the number of procedures. We're going to keep on doing that.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, this is an important question, so I'm going to ask it again. The Premier's own ethics disclosure contained no gifts whatsoever; neither does the Deputy Premier's. We know this government changed the rules, but let's be clear. Other ministers have appropriately listed gifts in their disclosure. We know that the Premier's political staff do not have public disclosures, so I'll ask again for the record of this House: will the Premier tell Albertans today if her principal secretary accepted any flights from Sam Mraiche?

Ms Smith: I answered that question, Mr. Speaker. No.

Premier's Travel to the U.S.

Ms Pancholi: In the Premier's recent interview with Breitbart she boasted about her conversations with U.S. officials asking them to politically interfere in Canada's federal election so that her preferred candidate could win. Yesterday in this House she claimed to have met with multiple American elected officials. She did it again today, from governors to Senators to members of Trump's cabinet. The Premier has a tendency to trade away our country for political favour with Trump, so it's in the public interest for her to disclose to Albertans what she promised in those meetings. Albertans deserve to know where her loyalties lie, so will the Premier table in this House the dates and meeting notes of all the meetings she claimed to have had with U.S. officials?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think anything needs to be tabled because we've been very clear, as has the Premier, on the kinds of meetings that she has taken over the past several months in defence of Alberta's best interest, including meeting with Doug Burgum, interior secretary; Chris Wright, Secretary of Energy; Marco Rubio, Secretary of State. We will take no lessons from the members opposite about diplomacy and how to build relationships to defend Alberta. They tried it for four years, and they epically failed.

Ms Pancholi: Well, maybe the reason the Premier can't table the meeting notes with all those U.S. officials she apparently met with is because she didn't actually meet with them. That's not my opinion, Mr. Speaker; that's what the Premier said herself. In estimates last week the Premier told a committee of this House, "all of the meetings and conversations I had were of a social nature, where I indicated that I would love to have sit-down meetings with those individuals as soon as we were able." Now, we know that the Premier loves to spend all her time in the U.S., but has the Premier managed to have sit-down meetings with all of those U.S. officials since last week?

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite want to talk about opinions, let's talk about the opinions of Tom Mulcair, their former boss in Ottawa, who recently said in an article: do not vote for the NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd laugh, too, if it wasn't so sad that their own former leader and boss in Ottawa has such little faith in their party that he's telling Canadians across the country, coast to coast to coast: do not vote for the NDP. How is it possible that he has no faith in their party? You want to know why? Because they have no plan.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, that was a pretty sad deflection.

Look, I get it. It kind of ruins the vibe to take meeting notes at cocktail parties for Trump, and it's very hard to take notes when you're holding a champagne glass and trying to take a selfie. The truth is that the only people the Premier is speaking to are extreme far-right social media influencers who are hostile to Canada and to our political and economic independence. When she talks to them, she's not standing up for our country. She is rolling over and playing nice because she has more in common with them than with Canadians. Will the Premier admit that the only ones she has on speed-dial are the people that average Albertans would block?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, what are they talking about? The only thing sad is the sinking ship across the aisle. In the past year three members have jumped ship because they know there's no future in Alberta's NDP. I can tell you right now that that ship over there has no future. It's careening towards the iceberg.

On this side of the House we have a Premier who will continue to defend Alberta's best interests and meet with anybody she needs to to make sure that the U.S. knows Alberta has a relationship with them. It's important. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Health Care Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the former AHS CEO alleges that the UCP government wanted to eliminate over 1,900 health care jobs to meet their outrageous budget cut demands in the Ministry of Health. The UCP is causing chaos, closing emergency departments, chasing doctors outside of Alberta, and driving up wait times for cancer care. We need more health care workers, not fewer. Will the Health minister state which of the 1,900 health care workers the UCP is planning on firing?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health has risen.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the member opposite is misinformed and spewing misinformation. In fact, we are hiring record numbers of nurses and doctors, and I am very proud to say, as we heard earlier in the member's statement, that in fact we have a new primary care compensation model that already has 789 doctors signed on to start as of April 1. The member opposite, when she was the Minister of Health, couldn't get one clinic to sign on.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:06.

Ms Hoffman: Given that when I was the Health minister, I proudly opened the High Prairie hospital, expanding delivery services so that people in High Prairie could finally have babies at home, and given that under the UCP that's a thing of the past – babies can't be born in High Prairie or in Slave Lake – and given that when the Member for Lesser Slave Lake asked about health care in his riding, the minister said that there might eventually possibly be a new hospital in Beaverlodge – does the minister not know that Beaverlodge is 355 kilometres from Slave Lake? – how can she justify firing 1,900 health care workers when her government is failing rural Albertans so poorly?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite, when she was the Minister of Health, actually failed Albertans miserably. In fact, by contrast, she had put forward a new physician compensation model. She said that it was urgent, that it was necessary. That was in 2016. Yet you know how many signed on to that? One clinic. One clinic only signed on to the NDP's new physician compensation model. She said that by 2017 there would be an additional 10 running. As of 2025 we only have seven clinics and 60 doctors signed on to that.

Ms Hoffman: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the question was about health care services in Lesser Slave Lake and that the minister saying, "Drive to Beaverlodge, three and a half hours away from Slave Lake" is completely inappropriate – it's closer to drive to

Edmonton, Minister – and given that this question is serious, that there are clear documents and likely audio recordings of meetings with the minister that show that 1,900 AHS employees were on the chopping block, how can the minister continue to claim ignorance on this when it's clear that she has been driving this bus and that it's failing Albertans? Where are the 1,900 people going to come from, Minister?

Member LaGrange: Again, the member opposite is totally delusional, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: There is no such number. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite continues to fearmonger. We are hiring more doctors, more nurses, more health care aides. We've got more resident students here practising in Alberta. We are cutting down our surgery times. We're doing more surgeries. In 2018-2019 under the member opposite there were roughly 297,000 surgeries; we're now at 310,000. We're going to be at 316,000 coming soon. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Supports for Seniors

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, as of this year there are approximately 827,000 seniors living in Alberta. That number is expected to grow to over 1 million by 2033. It's also estimated that 93 per cent of seniors in Alberta currently live in private dwellings, and the vast majority want to remain in their homes and local communities for as long as possible. To the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services: how is Alberta's government helping seniors maintain their independence and age with dignity in the community they call home?

2:10

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, Budget 2025 is going to invest half a billion dollars in direct grants to seniors to make their lives more affordable here in our province. We're also investing \$105 million in FCSS this year, that goes directly towards being able to help seniors with supports, particularly in rural communities. Most importantly, we're going to continue to invest hundreds of millions of dollars this year, making more continuing care spaces and independent senior lodge spaces right here in this province, all part of our \$9 billion housing plan that's taking place between now and 2031. Sharp contrast to the NDP, who made zero net new units of housing during their time in government.

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you to that minister. Given that the NDP-Liberal carbon tax has caused gas prices to skyrocket and given that the NDP's bosses in Ottawa are trying to ban gas-powered vehicles by 2030 and given that most rural communities do not have public transit services and walking is not a viable option for seniors and for those facing mobility challenges in rural Alberta, to the same minister: what is Alberta's government doing to help provide rural communities with affordable and accessible transportation services? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is exactly right. Unfortunately, when the NDP were in government,

they told constituents like mine in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre to take a bus. There is no bus inside communities like that, which is why we are investing this year alone \$3.5 million with healthy aging Alberta in 19 different communities to be able to help seniors be able to meet their transportation needs to get to things like doctor's appointments, to be able to get food, to be able to do those types of issues. Again, we on this side of the aisle understand that there's more to Alberta than just the large cities, where the NDP is from, and we represent all Albertans in this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for such great news. Given that StatsCan has found that transportation challenges were a key barrier in participation for social activities for seniors and given that seniors and people with mobility challenges in rural Alberta rely on accessible transportation services to maintain their independence and their quality of life and given that I represent the beautiful rural constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka, to the same minister: what communities will this partnership with healthy aging Alberta support, and how were the successful communities chosen?

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, communities were chosen on need and their ability to be able to put in programs very, very quickly. We started with five communities. We expanded to 14. Now we're up to 19. We're going to continue to put programming in places like that, where we can invest to be able to make sure we keep taking care of seniors. As the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar just heckled again, just like his former leader told my constituents to take a bus, now telling them to take a horse to their doctor's appointments, we're not going to do that going forward. Instead, what we're going to do is we're going to make sure that we invest in good programs that care for our seniors and not abandon rural Albertans and, most importantly, not abandon the people that built our province, like the NDP did.

Recovery Community Development

Member Eremenko: Deputy ministers are nonpolitical staff. Their job is to lead the civil service in fulfilling the minister's mandate, so imagine my surprise when this government sent out a news release on Saturday not from the minister but from the Deputy Minister of Mental Health and Addiction in response to more corrupt care allegations. There was not a single mention of or by the minister in the release. It's just weird. Mr. Speaker, why is the minister hiding behind his DM regarding serious allegations that Sam Mraiche is linked to yet another procurement deal, once again involving the Premier's former chief of staff, this time related to construction contracts of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I'm not hiding behind anyone. I'm here in question period every day taking questions from the members opposite. I speak to the media regularly, as I was asked about this previously, and I'm happy to address it again. When I heard rumours around misuse of public funds, I took action. I asked my officials. Unfortunately, individuals outside the government have now tried to draw independent, nonpolitical civil servants into the fray. They should not have. We have done everything according to the book, and we've done all that we can to make sure, if there is

misuse of funds, we've looked into it to make sure that we've seen no substantive evidence thus far.

Member Eremenko: Given that the minister was elected by his constituents, not his deputy minister, and is who is ultimately accountable for these decisions, he has claimed that an internal investigation has been completed, so will the minister hand over the "internal document review, independent corporate searches, [and] multiple inquiries to First Nations and Métis partners," as the DM claims to have been completed? Will the minister make public the extent of his deputy minister's investigation and the associated findings?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I did what any Albertan would do when they heard: misuse of funds. I took action to make sure that we were looking in to see if there was any substantive evidence. As the members opposite have alluded, nothing came out of that. When the deputy minister and the officials looked into corporate registries and spoke to our partners, who I'm happy and proud to be partnering with, in Métis and First Nation communities, there's nothing to turn over because no substantive evidence had come from this. We take this seriously. The Premier has announced that there is an investigation happening from a respected former justice in Manitoba along with the Auditor General. I'm happy to wait for those reports. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Eremenko: Given that the DM is reported to have said that the minister is, quote, freaked out because the builder of four recovery communities is connected to, quote, Sam as well, and given that this is Sam Mraiche, the multimillionaire UCP insider at the heart of the Turkish Tylenol and MHCare scandal and given that the DM's impressions of these contracts and the integrity of Marshall Smith is highly suspect, did the minister know the potential involvement of Sam Mraiche and/or his associates or family members in the acquisition of building contracts for recovery communities in four First Nations?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I've seen no evidence of this. I've heard nothing but trafficked rumour from members opposite and those outside this House. If I see substantive evidence, I'm happy to take action. What this government is doing, building partnership with First Nations when it comes to recovery, is the kind of thing that members opposite could never dream of because they do not believe in recovery. They have one path forward when it comes to addiction care, and it's harm production rather than getting health care that heals those who are suffering from addiction. I'm proud of my partnership with Indigenous. I'm proud that we haven't imposed a paternalistic approach, that we've seen members opposite do. I will continue to build recovery for Albertans.

Coal Development Policies

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, the UCP applies double standards to development, depending on how much they like or do not like a project. The minister of utilities told Albertans in budget estimates that he applied the so-called agriculture-first and the so-called pristine viewscape policies to block wind turbines in Alberta from views to the majestic Rockies. When will the energy minister apply the same agriculture-first and pristine viewscape policies on his mountaintop removal coal mining in the majestic Rockies?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, that's funny, trying to give us lessons after they made an absolute gong show of coal in this province. The NDP

invited rich billionaires from around the world to come in and mine, not just in category 3 or category 4 lands but category 2 lands. Now, I can't imagine a worse decision by a government in Alberta's history than that. We're not going to let that happen. We're going to protect water, we're going to protect animals, and we're going to protect humans.

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, given that coal companies are currently suing the UCP government for their ill-advised coal policy, not the Alberta NDP, given that the plaintiffs have shared that, quote, none could explain what mountaintop removal meant, end quote, given that neither the energy minister nor the so-called environment minister took responsibility to define what a mountaintop removal policy is, Albertans deserve to know: what are the ministers actually hiding, and why can they not define mountaintop removal?

Mr. Jean: Well, Mr. Speaker, you can go to Virginia and see what it is. You can go on the website of the AER, and many of the definitions they're asking for are there.

But, really, what Albertans want to know is: where is Nenshi? No-show Nenshi is not showing up. You know what the difference is, Mr. Speaker, between Waldo and Nenshi? At least people can find Waldo. We can't find Nenshi. We don't know where he is, but maybe he's gone to the restructuring of the corporation, the mother ship in Ottawa. Maybe he's done what Rod Loyola has done. Maybe he's joined the Liberal Party of Canada. I don't know. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that since January 20 Calgary-Glenmore has received over 16,229 e-mails from Albertans, not from Waldo, voicing their objection to coal mining in the eastern slopes, given that Alberta has two energy ministers and both seem to be deflecting responsibility on what a mountaintop removal is, will the real energy minister stand up and tell us: how do they plan to protect the majestic Rockies and the multibillion-dollar agriculture sector in Lethbridge and southern Alberta once the mountaintops are removed and once selenium has leached in headwaters?

2:20

Mr. Jean: That is not going to happen under this government, Mr. Speaker. I understand why they think it might happen under the NDP, because it has for years in B.C. We're not going to let that happen.

Mr. Speaker, I want to get back to my point. Where is Nenshi? Is he with Notley? [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. Okay.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, while we can't find anybody on the opposition, where they're going, what they're doing, the restructuring they're doing with Ottawa, the deal they're making with con man Carney, and all the rest, what we've been doing, what our Premier has been doing is standing up for Albertans, standing up for Canadians, making sure that she does whatever she can to keep Albertans and Canadians employed.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Veterinary Medicine Funding

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, UCVM, is recognized across the

world for its pioneering approach to education and research. I'm proud of our government's support of UCVM, notably including \$67 million to double the number of seats, which will be critical for the future of Alberta's veterinary sector. Can the Minister of Advanced Education please share with the Assembly how this significant investment in UCVM will support the future of our veterinary sector and meet the needs of Albertans across the province?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the hon. member for that question. Mr. Speaker, we understand that veterinary services are a critical component of the economic health and vitality of Alberta's rural communities. That is why we are investing \$67 million in capital toward the University of Calgary veterinary medicine program to expand facilities, which will increase the number of students who can be admitted each year. Through the targeted enrolment expansion initiative we have also committed an additional \$13.6 million in operating support to the University of Calgary veterinary medicine program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that Alberta's ranchers and livestock producers contribute billions in revenue to the economy every year and given that poor flock or herd health can be very costly, threatening the viability of their operations, and given that UCVM is home to Alberta's only laboratory offering routine livestock diagnostics, to the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: how is our government supporting UCVM's diagnostic services unit through Budget 2025, and how will this investment contribute to greater productivity for Alberta's livestock producers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If Budget 2025 is passed, \$3.1 million will be invested into the University of Calgary's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, supporting the expansion of their diagnostic services unit. Now, this funding will ensure that Alberta's livestock producers have access to affordable in-province diagnostic services, which will protect animal and human health, ultimately supporting greater productivity for Alberta's livestock industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that the impact of avian flu on bird populations has recently become a global issue and given that the spread or emergence of such disease outbreak can threaten the security and affordability of food in our province and further given that Alberta hunters may also contend with the threat of chronic wasting disease, which has also caused concern among the livestock producers of the Camrose constituency, to the same minister: how will our government's investment in UCVM's lab services make Alberta's livestock producers more resilient against livestock disease and improve food security in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member. This investment will be crucial in building resilience against diseases like highly pathogenic avian influenza. By allocating \$3.1 million, we are enhancing Alberta's ability to rapidly detect and respond to emergent diseases. This proactive approach helps safeguard the health of our herds, ensures

affordability as well as long-term sustainability. This investment will strengthen Alberta's preparedness and response, ensuring that we remain a leader in animal health and wellness.

Music Industry Support

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton's downtown smaller independent clubs and bars put on shows featuring local musicians, all of which will surely be impacted by the Oilers Entertainment Group's new large concert venue. Last week during estimates I questioned the minister of arts and culture about the massive provincial investment that is earmarked for the OEG's future large concert venue next to the Rogers centre. Can the minister explain how provincial funding for a large concert venue will benefit local musicians, promoters, and downtown clubs?

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

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the member opposite how our funding into arts and culture in Edmonton and Calgary and every corner of this province helps musicians both big and small, whether it's funding to Arts Commons, the largest cultural infrastructure project in Canadian history, in Calgary; whether it's funding to the Winspear Centre in Edmonton; whether it's increased funding to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, which will reach record-level funding by the next budget year; or the conditional funding for Contemporary Calgary. There are multitudes of venues that support musicians across this province.

Member Ceci: Given that a number of live music venues in Edmonton were severely impacted by the pandemic, which they're still trying to recover from, and given that local promoters, bands, and venue operators have concerns about the impact the OEG's new 2,500-seat concert venue will have on them and given that music fans only have a finite amount of disposable income they're willing to spend on tickets for a night out to see bands, what is the minister doing to support smaller music venues like private clubs and bars, that don't receive massive public investment and are the bedrock of the local music scene in Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I'll say, it's not an and/or. There's room for both large concert venues and performances and small independent artists as well. What we're doing to support those for-profit venues and facilities is having the lowest taxes in Canada, and what we're doing for the nonprofit organizations is continuing to provide record-level funding through programs like our CFEP program, CIP program, OIP program, crowd-funding program, just to name a few.

Member Ceci: Given that the government has pledged to create an Alberta music strategy and appoint a music commissioner and given that my own Bill 211, the Arts and Creative Economy Advisory Council Act, would provide emerging artists and venue owners a voice to advocate for their needs as well as to counsel the minister regarding how to build the music ecosystem, can the minister explain how the Alberta music industry can grow and develop without the farm system of local bars and smaller stages, which provide musicians and local talent a place to get their start and contribute to the creation of Alberta's rich cultural heritage?

Ms Fir: I thank the member for his question. There are so many things that we're doing to get more information from the music

industry, from the round-table that I held with music industry professionals and musicians from across the province to the one-on-one meetings I have, to the various music venues that I visit, to the Alberta music commissioner that we'll soon be appointing within existing government. We won't be adding any additional head counts. We will continue to support the music industry in our province, and it will continue to flourish, as it always has.

Agribusiness Industry Development

Mrs. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we owe a lot to our farmers, ranchers, and food producers. Agriculture continues to be a pillar in our economy, contributing to our province's prosperity and our nation's food security. According to StatsCan in 2024 Alberta's gross revenue of farm businesses ranked first among all provinces. Nationally the gross revenue declined by 3.2 per cent compared to 2023, indicating that while other provinces faced a decline in gross revenue, Alberta's agriculture sector remained strong. To the minister: what factors contributed to our agriculture sector outperforming other provinces last year?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you why Alberta leads the country in agricultural production. It's because Alberta has the best farmers and ranchers in the world. Alberta saw strong performance driven by high crop yields and strong demand for products like beef and canola. Our province also leads the nation in the livestock market receipts area. Alberta's government is committed to strategic investment and strong market access for our ag sector as well. We set a record in 2024 by attracting over \$3 billion into our agriprocessing sector, proving that Alberta is the best place in the world to invest.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that our agriculture sector is the economic powerhouse of our province – in 2023 agrifood industries employed over 83,000 people – and given that Alberta's agriculture and food manufacturing sector generates approximately 3.4 million tonnes of dry organic waste annually and further given that Bill 44's amendments to the Agricultural Operation Practices Act were introduced last week, could the same minister please explain: how will this proposed legislation reduce waste and support a circular economy?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member. The proposed amendments to AOPA will reduce waste and provide new revenue opportunities for farmers and agriprocessors. The changes will allow for the storage, composting, and land application of specific organic materials, which can be used as a nutrient source for crop production and soil health. This will divert millions of tonnes of organic waste from landfills and create a sustainable biogas industry, all while fostering innovation and job creation right here in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Johnson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you again to the same minister. Given that the five most commonly used waste disposal methods include landfilling, land application, composting, rendering animal waste, and feeding waste to animals

and further given that converting agriwaste into energy or into high-value products can benefit farmers and diversify the energy sector, could the same minister explain to this House the plans our government has to develop more biodigesters to benefit our agriculture and food manufacturing sector?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to supporting the development of biodigesters to benefit Alberta agriculture and the environment. By updating AOPA, we are providing the legislative framework to foster the biogas industry. These biodigesters will convert organic waste into renewable energy such as natural gas and electricity. This innovation not only diversifies the energy sector but also provides farmers right here in Alberta an additional source of revenue.

Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood Constituency Concerns

Member Irwin: I've heard from so many of my constituents who are fully outraged by UCP cuts, chaos, and corruption. They're devastated by this government's cruel cut to the child care subsidy. It's clear this cut disproportionately hurts low-income Albertans. Some of my constituents don't know how they're going to make ends meet with the loss of this subsidy. While our NDP government cut child poverty in half, this UCP government has cut subsidies for tens of thousands of kids. Wow. How can the minister possibly justify cutting the child care subsidy?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to share that on April 1 licensed child care in Alberta for children zero to kindergarten age will be \$15 per day, or \$326 per month, across Alberta. That represents a savings of 80 per cent, or \$900 per month, \$11,000 per year tax free, again for all kids in licensed care across Alberta. I'd like to thank the providers, early childhood educators, and my department for making this a reality.

Member Irwin: Given that my constituents also need new schools in our mature neighbourhoods and given that I'll always support the construction of new schools but many of the schools recently announced for Edmonton are located in suburban, newer areas of our city but students at Delton school in my area are in an old, inaccessible building, waiting for a replacement while putting up with extreme heat, freezing cold, pests, rodents, conditions that none of us would want for our loved ones, will the Minister of Education commit today to expediting a replacement school for the great kids and staff of Delton school?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, we already have put the project in our capital plan, and we're already working on replacing the school. We have to first, of course, evaluate the full scope of the project and what work needs to be done. We're working very carefully and closely with the school division to make sure that the design work is complete, and once all of that preliminary work is complete, shovels will be in the ground, and we'll have a replacement. I'd be happy to visit the member's riding and talk with her constituents in more detail and let them know that our government is indeed building the schools that are needed in her community.

Member Irwin: Given that yesterday I joined community members in my constituency at a homeless memorial put on by Boyle Street Community Services and the Bissell Centre and at that memorial the names of 104 people were read out, 104 people who passed on our streets in the last few months, 104 people who loved and were

loved, they mattered, to the minister – and I don't want a spin; I don't want his deflection and his derision – what does he have to say to those who've lost loved ones, and how can he justify his cruel cuts to homelessness supports in his latest budget?

The Speaker: I hesitate, but I'd just like to provide a tiny bit of caution to the hon. member. While I appreciate that all of those things may be about your constituency and those are important issues, certainly the first issue didn't relate to the third issue.

If the hon. minister of seniors would like to answer, he's welcome to do so.

Mr. Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are zero cuts to homelessness supports in our province right now. In fact, we have a record amount in the budget. We're going to continue to. We're investing a quarter billion just directly in emergency supports for the homeless people in our province right now.

What I would say to people that have lost family members: we grieve with them. It's why we continue to invest in real supports that make sure that homeless people are not victimized anymore by the policies that we've seen in the past, by not creating safe emergency places for them to go, by not creating Indigenous shelters and women-only shelters and instead forcing them into dangerous, drug-fuelled, gang-infested tents. That's why we brought in our new policy, and we're very proud of it, Mr. Speaker.

Health Services Procurement Process (continued)

Member Brar: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have watched in horror as details unfold in the corrupt care scandal under this UCP government's watch: bloated contracts handed to friends, insiders, and donors while Albertans struggle to find a family doctor. Does the minister think it's acceptable that well-connected insiders profit while Albertans are left waiting for hours in hospitals, or is this what efficiency looks like under the UCP, lining the pockets of insiders at the expense of public health care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. None of that is true. In fact, we are doing record improvements within Alberta Health Services as well as refocusing all of health care. [interjections] While the members opposite continue to heckle, we're actually doing the work of fixing health care in this province. We have got more doctors in Alberta than we ever have. When I started in June 2023 we had roughly about 10,600 doctors. Now we have over 12,200 doctors, and that number continues to climb each and every month.

Member Brar: Given that this scandal is not just a case of mismanagement but outright corruption, given that my constituents deserve to know why lucrative contracts were handed out to wealthy insiders of the UCP, will the minister explain why this government handed out bloated contracts, or is this government so deep in cronyism that corruption is no longer an exception but their business model?

Member LaGrange: Again, nothing that the member opposite said is true, Mr. Speaker. We are in fact making sure that we are improving health care, particularly Alberta Health Services. By fall Alberta Health Services will be an acute care provider only, a service provider. They will be focused, laser focused, on improving, making sure that we have improved wait times, that we have better facilities, that we are in fact meeting the needs of Albertans,

something the members opposite couldn't do when they were in government.

Member Brar: Given that whistle-blowers have raised alarms about ongoing corruption, given that the only way to get to the bottom of this scandal is an independent public inquiry into the corrupt care scandal, will the minister call one today, or does accountability vanish faster than a UCP ethics promise once it reaches this Premier's office?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again, the member needs to pay close and careful attention to what is actually happening. An independent legislative office is investigating. The Auditor General is working to uncover whether the allegations had any substance whatsoever. The fact of the matter is that we filed a statement of defence that clarifies all of the allegations to be ridiculous. We will defend that to the end. We're very firm in our position and where we stand with respect to the allegations made: completely baseless. We will defend Albertans.

Data Centre Investment Attraction

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Speaker, last December my riding of Grande Prairie-Wapiti received exciting news. The world's largest AI data centre, known as wonder valley, will be built in the MD of Greenview, just south of Grande Prairie. This \$70 billion investment will be the largest single AI data project in the world, which will help create jobs, strengthen the economy, and drive diversification. To the Minister of Technology and Innovation: how is our government working with representatives from this initiative and others to ensure that data centre projects like this one will succeed in Alberta? [interjections]

2:40

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Minister of Technology and Innovation.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for the question. What I always tell people is that time is money, and we're working to give folks the gift of time. The fact is that we have set up a concierge service to work with the proponents of wonder valley and over a dozen others all across the province because we believe in working with industry to find solutions and to help accelerate the path to getting a project done. Our government is all about getting investment done in Alberta and building projects in Alberta. You know, contrast that to when the NDP were in power; they chased away tens of billions of dollars of investment and ...

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that our government remains committed to fostering a business-friendly environment with competitive tax rates and further given that Alberta is a prime destination for AI data centres thanks to our abundance of natural gas, cooler weather, and proactive business approach adopted by our government, to the same minister: could you elaborate on why so many companies are choosing Alberta for these types of investments?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we know that these folks are looking for is two things: one, they need access to electricity at scale; and two, they need speed to market. This is something that Alberta excels at on both fronts. We have an abundance of natural gas. We have a track record all across this province of being able to develop that natural gas and to develop that into electricity power

generation. We have a track record on red tape reduction. In fact, in the last several years we've reduced red tape by 33 per cent, saving Albertans and Alberta businesses almost \$3 billion. These and so many other reasons are why ...

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that a single ChatGPT query consumes 10 times more energy than the standard Google search and given that new data released last week suggests that Alberta has proven natural gas reserves of 130 trillion cubic feet compared to the previous provincial estimate of 24 trillion cubic feet, more than doubling Canada's overall total, could the same minister explain how the resource can support the development of high-capacity solutions for AI data centres? [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is right. We have, you could almost say, virtually limitless supplies of natural gas in the context of what these AI data centres require. On top of the gas, we also have the expertise, and we are working with natural gas producers to make sure they understand the magnitude of this opportunity so that they can do the planning and the engineering and the due diligence to prepare the infrastructure to ensure that this capacity is there to support these types of projects. These things don't happen by accident; they happen by design. We're doing the hard work and the due diligence on the front end to make sure that all Albertans will benefit from this investment. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I wish to inform the Assembly that we can – oh, here we are. Standing Order 7(8), the daily Routine may continue past 3 p.m.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Premier's Leadership

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, it seems the Premier is feeling the heat regarding her planned appearance tomorrow at a far-right Florida fundraiser alongside noted racist, homophobe, and Islamophobe Ben Shapiro. Just yesterday her chief of staff, Rob Anderson, rode out to defend her honour, declaring she was "going into the lion's den" in a noble attempt to valiantly stave off the threat of tariffs and defend our democracy. He called it an act of courage.

Mr. Speaker, standing on stage to shoot the sugar with Ben Shapiro isn't courageous; it's conceited. This isn't a trip to promote Alberta. It's to pump up the Premier's ego. This fanatical fundraiser for the far right isn't a lion's den; it's a Conservative love-in. It's a 'conspiracalooza', a full-on QAnon 'Republicon', the Opposite-of-Learning-Man, where conservative nerds of a feather come together at \$1,500 a plate to support rolling back women's rights, whitewashing slavery, and denying climate change.

No, the Premier's actions aren't noble, but I suppose they're novel. She's certainly the first provincial leader to ask a hostile foreign head of state to just pause their attacks on us to help elect a

leader more willing to play ball with their unhinged demands, the first to attempt and fail to stop a tariff war with a campaign of selfies at high-end cocktail parties, the first sitting Premier to audition for a job with Fox News, all on the public dime.

It's ludicrous. It's ridiculous. But you know what? It's not funny. It's embarrassing. It's pathetic. It's an insult to every Muslim Albertan on their holiest day of the year, to every Albertan struggling to pay their bills even as they're forced to pay for the Premier to cosplay as a Republican governor.

It just goes to show that the UCP isn't a party of the people. They're a party of the Premier, controlled by the Premier for the benefit of the Premier, and under this Premier what Albertans want and need comes dead last behind her ego, her ideology, and her Instagram feed.

Courage? That would be if a single UCP MLA would stand up and call this out. Well, Albertans are waiting and watching.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Getson: Just likes hearing it three times. That's all.

Mr. Boitchenko: I need three times.

Trade Winds to Success

Mr. Boitchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, amongst all the energy in this House, I would like to take a moment to recognize the incredible work being done by Trade Winds to Success. Trade Winds is an Indigenous-led organization that provides training and programs to help individuals get into trades. I'm extremely proud that more than 3,000 young Indigenous people have benefited from this program. Our United Conservative government is dedicated to supporting our hard-working Albertans. That is why we are providing \$1.5 million to support this great Indigenous-led initiative, helping to increase and empower Indigenous participation in trades.

Mr. Speaker, our province cannot thrive to its fullest potential without empowering the next generation. This government is committed to ensuring all Albertans, regardless of background, have the same opportunity to flourish and contribute to the success of our province.

This Friday I have the privilege of participating in the graduation ceremony of 12 incredibly talented young Indigenous women. I'm beyond proud of what this next generation of young Indigenous Albertans have accomplished. As Alberta continues to lead Canada in job creation and economic growth, programs such as these reflect our commitment to fostering a workforce that is resilient and prepared for the future. Together with our Indigenous communities we are building a strong Alberta where every Albertan can succeed.

With that, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Provincial Response to U.S. Tariffs

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you. Over the past several days the members opposite have suggested that the only people worth calling about the Trump tariffs are extremists, Islamophobes, and racists. They are correct that we do not have any racists, extremists, or haters on speed-dial. Our leader doesn't, and none of our caucus members do.

Instead, we've been busy fighting for Albertans. Our leader and our members continue to work with leaders in the energy sector, the agriculture sector, and the high-tech sector about the devastating impacts of the tariffs on good Alberta jobs and their businesses. We

have spoken with entrepreneurs and farmers across Alberta about what they're concerned with and what they really need from their Premier, and they keep telling us she's done none of these things.

Our leader was invited to the U.S.-Canada summit in Toronto last month, where he met with business leaders and political leaders from both countries to develop a Team Canada strategy for how to combat these tariffs. In two weeks he will be going to another summit with luminaries from both countries, including the ambassadors from Canada and the United States. The Premier has done none of these things.

So, yes, it's true. We're not spending our time cosplaying as terrible diplomats and getting interviews on extremist radio stations. We are working with the people who are getting the work done. Maybe the Premier can start to do that, too, instead of flying off to Florida to fund raise for Ben Shapiro and the extreme far right.

2:50 Support for Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: The Premier and her minister are taking away \$200 from low-income disabled Albertans who are on AISH because they can. I had hoped that this corrupt, incompetent government was smart enough to know that the cost of deep poverty far exceeds the amount they're robbing from disabled people. The UCP MO: take from the poor, tell them it's good for them, turn around, and enrich their friends.

Statistics Canada reports suggest that 28 per cent of people with severe disabilities who live alone live in poverty. Things are even darker for people with intellectual disabilities, with 73 per cent of adults who live alone living in poverty. The UCP has chosen to claw back the new \$200 Canada disability benefit from severely disabled Albertans on AISH. This Premier and her minister are telling disabled AISH recipients that \$1,901 per month is more than enough to live on. Now, here's some perspective, Mr. Speaker. This UCP government just jacked up their own MLA living allowance to more than what AISH pays because the cost of living is so high.

Now, some disability-related expenses include intensive, ongoing medical care and specialized treatments. They're not luxuries but treatments that make life livable. Gas, parking fees, Uber trips during public transit off-hours, portable ramps, long-distance travel for specialists are just a few examples. There's a need for equipment like scooters, manual and electric chairs, maintenance, modification, and assistive devices. Materials like incontinent supplies, air filters, masks, ostomy supplies, orthotics, compression garments, adaptive clothing are necessary expenses, not nice to have. Advocacy groups like Inclusion Canada, Disability Without Poverty, the Down's syndrome association, Barrier-Free Alberta continue to point to the inescapable cost of disability, and they are urging this government to reverse this awful decision.

On this side of the House we are crystal clear: let all disabled Albertans keep the extra \$200 that was meant for them.

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

Health Services Procurement Process

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The comedian Stewart Reynolds says, "Spring in Canada is nature's broken promise." The slow melt of the snow and ice releases layers of embedded trash like a weird archaeological dig: plastic bags, rotted coffee cups, leaf litter, and my personal favourite, the thawing little bombs left by irresponsible dog owners. While I'm cleaning my shoes, I often ask what these dog owners were thinking, speculating maybe something like: "It's minus 30. Nobody will notice. The

snow will cover it all up, and maybe I'll move in spring. I'll be gone. Everyone will be gone. Besides, it's no big deal."

I imagine the UCP cabinet ministers embroiled in the corrupt care allegations might find these excuses familiar. The melting corrupt care cover-up is revealing a morass of sweetheart deals, overpayments, payments for services not medically required, and buck-passing. The Premier's hand-picked health CEO: fired. The Health minister's hand-picked board, which included Lyle Oberg: fired. Imagine the father of private medicine in Alberta on the board that looked at the corrupt care allegations and said: whoa; we need to take this to the RCMP. He was on a board that thought that making people wait longer in excruciating pain for new knees and hips to motivate sweetheart deals to private surgeons was beyond the pale.

Now, March is not spring in Edmonton. March is winter. April is late winter. So those dog owners will probably be off the hook when the next snowstorm rolls through. But here's the thing, spring always comes. No matter how much snow falls, it always melts eventually. No matter how many IT professionals are fired, even if enough documents are shredded into piles that look like snow mountains, eventually it will all melt under the light of truth. Albertans are looking at the soles of their shoes and smelling something bad.

Call a public inquiry. Melt the snow. Let Albertans see what hides beneath.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 99 I can advise the Assembly that the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions for the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act and the Burman University Amendment Act, 2025, which were presented to the Assembly on March 19, 2025, and that the petitions comply with standing orders 90 to 94.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

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

Member Miyashiro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill Pr. 5, Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta Act, sponsored by myself.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill Pr. 6, Burman University Amendment Act, 2025, that I am sponsoring.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 48 iGaming Alberta Act

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 48, the iGaming Alberta Act.

This bill would take the first steps towards implementing a regulated market for private companies to legally operate online gaming sites in Alberta. By regulating the private market, we will ensure that Albertans who choose to gamble on those sites will be provided with important consumer protection safeguards as well as the social responsibility tools that come with regulation.

With that, I hereby move first reading of Bill 48, iGaming Alberta Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 48 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you. I rise today to table five copies of the Parkland Institute report released today called Operation Profit: Private Surgical Contracts Deliver Higher Costs and Longer Waits. It is also on their website, so I hope it's easily available for the government.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table two articles. One is an article showcasing the great work by Calgary and Edmonton police to break up a drug ring.

The other one is highlighting the efforts of the Canadian border patrol, who just made a massive bust on cocaine bound for Canada.

Member Batten: I rise today to table five copies of an article just published today on albertapolitics.ca that reports on the startling increases in outsourced surgical costs that, of course, corroborate the claims of irregularities made by the fired AHS CEO.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday, followed by Calgary-Elbow.

Member Arcand-Paul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite copies of a February public community update from Kainai, where they announced that they are opposed to new coal mines in the Crowsnest Pass and anywhere in the eastern slopes. I especially urge the real energy minister to take a read given the most recent decisions.

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

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got tablings. I got a letter from Allan Bozek, Brett Vasconcellos, and Mark Williams demanding an end to coal mining of the Rockies, a letter from Emily Grenon calling for an end to corrupt care, a letter from Ryan Thompson and Margaret Cole calling for a relaxation on the wine taxes, and a letter from Tiffany Stones asking the Premier: please don't go to the PragerU fundraiser.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you. I rise today to table five copies of the Friends of Medicare report released yesterday called Access Denied: How the Changing Accessibility of Health-care Services in Alberta Impacts Equity. It shows how vulnerable Albertans are impacted the most by inequity in our health system.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you. I rise to table one of the countless e-mails that all of us have received calling on this Premier to once

again cancel their trip to Florida tomorrow. Do the right thing. It's not too late, Minister. This is from Katie.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of the article by Alanna Smith in today's *Globe and Mail* that shows that the Alberta public health care system is losing staff and funding as the province increases spending on private facilities.

The Speaker: Edmonton-McClung has a tabling.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of an article by a CBC reporter, Michelle Bellefontaine, in which the minister of children's services fails miserably to justify his reduction of AISH payments and the clawback.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Amery, Minister of Justice, pursuant to the Statutes Repeal Act a report entitled Statutes Repeal Act: 2025 List.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. Before proceeding to the first point of order, which was called at 2:06, I'd like to remind Members of the Legislative Assembly that sending or receiving of messages goes against the conventions of the Assembly during the daily Routine. There have been many remarks made about members tweeting from the Chamber or their accounts tweeting from the Chamber. I'd take this opportunity to remind the Premier that it is certainly unparliamentary and against the conventions of the Assembly.

3:00

Ms Pitt: It's called X.

The Speaker: If the hon. Deputy Speaker wants to take the chair, she's welcome to do so. Until then I would expect that she would conduct herself in a manner that rises to the level of the office of the Deputy Speaker.

The Official Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order

Insulting Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your consent I will combine 2:06 and 2:08 because they are of a very similar nature and involve the same individuals. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), particularly (j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder" at 2:06 and 2:08 – without the benefit of the Blues I stand to be corrected – I believe we heard the hon. Health minister say to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora: the member opposite is misinformed and is spewing misinformation; the member opposite is totally delusional; the member opposite is fearmongering.

Mr. Speaker, 23(j) as well as *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, chapter 13, page 623, "Personal attacks, insults and obscenities are not in order." Certainly, spewing misinformation, being totally delusional, and fearmongering, I believe, are clear personal attacks, insults, and obscenities. I believe this is a point of order. I would ask the hon. minister to apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the members opposite said something similar, I would call a point of order. I would agree with the Opposition House Leader, and I'll leave it to the hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: I do sincerely apologize, and I do withdraw.

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

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon, hon. members. I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 42

Appropriation Act, 2025

The Chair: I am looking for members who wish to join in our debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. A pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to this rather lengthy and large piece of legislation which, of course, deals with the budget and the implementation of the spending that the government has proposed. Let us begin, but it's hard to say where to begin. There are so many ways to count this budget as ineffective and difficult to comprehend.

Let's start at my home base, Madam Chair, and talk about the Transportation and Economic Corridors ministry. I know that members will be well aware that there was an individual, formerly a government member who now sits as an independent Member for Lesser Slave Lake, who took exception, amongst other things, to the quality of the highways in his riding and was so upset with the lack of response to his pleas for expenditures in his riding on the roadways. Particularly, highway 88 was mentioned by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake and reiterated by the reeve, the mayor about the poor condition of that highway.

Rather frustratingly, the then member of the government indicated that he got nowhere with his pleas for expenditures on that roadway to bring it up to a standard that was acceptable and ended up voting against the budget. Of course, in parliamentary practice this will get you a one-way ticket across the floor, and that's what happened in this particular case. But the member is still supported strongly by his constituents regarding the lack of expenditures on the highways that were contemplated in the budget, and I'm assuming that's why, or one of the reasons why, the member did oppose the budget.

This is something that I think is shared by communities right across rural Alberta, Madam Chair. When I've received e-mails from dozens of communities about the condition of highways in rural Alberta in particular, they're sporting T-shirts saying: I can't drive 55; I can't drive on this other highway. Many highways in the province have gotten advocacy groups together to demand that the roadwork be done.

This is a problem with this current budget, as reflected in the notes I have, that the expenditures that are contemplated in Bill 42 are inadequate to meet the needs of the maintenance of roadways in this province. The Member for Lesser Slave Lake, rightfully, brings to light and raises awareness that there is a large divide in terms of expenditure between rural and urban Alberta. We can simply look

at the expenditures on rail transit in, say, Edmonton and Calgary. Massive multibillion-dollar projects are expended in Edmonton and Calgary, and rightfully so, to invest in light rail transit and urban transit projects. However, when a community like Slave Lake or those people who live around Athabasca or any number of rural Alberta communities simply ask that their highways be maintained, Madam Chair, they don't get listened to.

Historically, I might add – and I mentioned this in estimates as well, and it's germane to bring it to light here. If we look at the transportation ministry itself contemplating expenditures in Bill 42, the ministry historically has about 42 per cent of its roadways in either fair, poor, or very poor condition, and that seems to be an acceptable standard historically in Alberta for our highways. I don't find it acceptable. Rural Alberta doesn't find it acceptable, especially in light of the massive differential in expenditure on transportation projects in urban Alberta versus rural Alberta.

What I wanted to turn to is the transportation ministry's underspending issue in this most recent budget. It's \$63 million underspent on highways, despite the current state of our provincial highways, as I mentioned, being 42 per cent in fair, poor, or very poor condition. The UCP government is favouring city funding over rural highways and economic corridors while, you know, leaving provincial roads in a state that would be unacceptable in an urban area. I find this something that is rather confounding.

I don't understand why the government of the day doesn't rate highway maintenance as a priority in rural Alberta when, in fact, the ministry has economic corridors as one of its major undertakings as part of the ministry. It's a partner in building the province and its ability to move goods and people, yet there's nothing but underspending in the department, where indeed the money could have been invested in our provincial highways.

3:10

I don't know if the minister has gotten this as a priority or if he's found the same type of response as the Member for Lesser Slave Lake and former caucus member in the UCP government caucus, if the minister is getting the same response that the Member for Lesser Slave Lake was getting in his pleas to spend more money on rural Alberta highways. It seems to be a no-brainer that the thing you'd want to do at the very least if you're the Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors would be to make sure that your highways are in really great shape. Like, what better calling card could there be than to make sure that our roadways are safe and convenient to drive on? I've had reports, Madam Chair, of school bus drivers not feeling that the roadways were adequately safe to drive buses on. They're rattling their buses till the windows rattled. Kids shouldn't be having to drive on roads like that just to get to school.

Speaking about roads around Athabasca, in many cases the response has been to do an asphalt and resurfacing job, yet indeed the mayor of Slave Lake has said no. In her case, on highway 88, she specifically says: not acceptable. We need a much more in-depth investment. We need lane widening. We need passing lanes to improve the roadway to make it safer and bring it up to standard for the amount of traffic that's on it and for the economic development benefit of the constituency. If it's truly going to be an economic corridor, part of that economic corridor for that area, the highway needs to be brought up to standards that one would expect to see in 2025.

There's another element to this as well, Madam Chair, and that has to do with the spring washouts that we sometimes see on our Alberta roadways. It's something that will be probably occurring again this spring, and the government's response to them and the transportation minister's response to them – in Budget 2025, in response to questions the previous year in estimates, I did not see

any contingency fund that would allow a county to draw upon to urgently repair a washed-out road, for example.

The example I've used in the past has been the Rainbow Lake washout where a river overflowed its banks, washed out one lane, and this was in spring 2024, I believe. Of course, what happened in response was that there was a set of lights, highway traffic lights, at both ends of the washout. In the dead of night on a foggy road you'd come upon a light which was either red or green and that allowed you to decide whether or not to go ahead and drive on the one lane that remained of the washed-out road. Typically one would expect that a highway, a provincial highway, with one lane missing would get a rapid response and be repaired pretty quickly. This wasn't the case.

I campaigned hard to get this done more quickly but to no avail. Finally, six months later, Madam Chair, the roadwork was completed. The lane was restored, and it took a total of seven days. That's it. The people of Rainbow Lake had to wait six months to get a seven-day repair done to make one lane of roadway passable again to restore the safety of the highway.

I didn't see in this budget, Madam Chair, any response to the need, as I see it, for an emergency contingency fund that counties and reeves could draw upon by making an application to the transportation ministry and not have to wait for six months to have the minister somehow find the money to get an emergency road repair done. Nothing in this budget seems to make any progress to that end. It may seem like a small thing to ask for, but if you're driving on a roadway like that, it can be pretty desolate. My father worked up in Rainbow Lake for a while on a construction project. Believe me, he said that it was one of the most lonely stretches of the road he's ever driven on. You don't need to drive in unsafe conditions like that.

A contingency fund should have been contemplated in this budget, and I'm hoping that it's going to be on the minister's radar for the next budget cycle, unless they can find some money within the budget as it is now contemplated to apply to an emergency contingency fund for road repairs so that residents of places like Rainbow Lake don't have to wait for six months for, I think, a dangerous situation to be rectified. It was uncalled for.

There's another significant topic that really wasn't contemplated in this budget transportationwise, Madam Chair, and it had to do with more of the economic corridors part. When we speak about economic corridors, many people will think about transmission lines or pipelines or major four-lane highways or a rapid rail connection to move goods and people to export ports from their manufacturing sites and get products to markets and so forth. But one of the things that gets lost in the shuffle when you talk about economic corridors is the business of moving people via ground transportation throughout this province, across western Canada, and right across the country.

The way that we used to, prior to the 2018 exit of Greyhound Transportation from all of western Canada, in fact all of Canada – before that, in 2018, Greyhound operated a bus line that served many, almost all of the small communities in Alberta and provided a transportation service for them to get on a ticketed, regularly scheduled network from High Level to Thunder Bay if they so wanted. But nothing in this budget contemplates support for rural bus transportation.

We have kind of a hodgepodge of bus lines that have stepped up to serve certain routes. We'll have the Red Arrow serving some gravy runs. There is FlixBus now doing some runs as well, but they're more between bigger centres, which are economically viable to run large rolling stock on. Yet smaller communities, which have lost their bus in many cases, not too super tiny communities – I'm talking about communities like Wainwright, Lloydminster,

Camrose. Those communities are not little villages, yet in many instances they have no bus. This has to change, but this government, the minister don't seem interested in any way whatsoever in at least investing in a serious undertaking of a study to determine what business model will work.

There are a couple of smaller bus lines. For example, Cold Shot bus and parcel operates it used to be 11 runs, and they're down now to six. They are not going to be able to survive much longer if, indeed, there's not some support that's given to rural bus transportation in the province, and the minister just doesn't seem interested.

I highly value the smaller communities in rural Alberta. I came from one. I came from the little village of Thorhild. I used to hear the Greyhound bus toot its horn every time it came into the village, in front of the restaurant. You'd go and see who was coming, who was going, what parcels were arriving. It was a vital connection. It was an economic corridor in a small way, a capillary, but it fed into larger centres, and it allowed small centres like the village of Thorhild to survive.

What you do by not having a bus transportation network that's reliable, that is ticketable, that is regularly scheduled is that you potentially hasten the death of small communities. Rather than becoming a village, they end up being unincorporated, and people leave. If you can't as a senior in your 70s or 80s get to a medical appointment from your small town to the city without relying upon a family member or friend, then, indeed, you may choose to move to the city, the larger centre. So the provision of some type of viable transportation network that will help those communities survive is something that is vital. It's a vital economic corridor to those people in those communities.

3:20

I would hope that the government across the way listens to their minister when they do talk about rural bus transportation and find the reasoning and the logic to actually support it in their budget. If you look across the world, there are many jurisdictions which have bus service that goes to smaller centres because they know it's absolutely essential to keep those communities going.

You know, if the minister is fully committed to having different rail networks serve the province, from larger centres serving into, like, Grande Prairie coming into Edmonton, if indeed that's to be a long-term reality, the last mile of that transportation network, Madam Chair, is going to be a bus. You're going to go from High Level maybe to Grande Prairie and then a train, if indeed that ever comes to pass. But for the moment the quickest solution, the low-hanging fruit is to provide support for a regularly scheduled rural bus transportation network not only throughout the province but to work together with the provinces.

We're talking in a period of time when we're looking at national unity being a concern, standing up together as Canadians. What better way to connect ourselves than to resurrect what we had before, a viable form of rural bus transportation so that people can actually travel across their own country affordably and conveniently in a regularly scheduled, reliable network?

Nothing in this budget contemplated under Bill 42 is anywhere near giving any credence or value to the thought of rural bus transportation. People in this House, members of this House and, Madam Chair, you as well, have heard me talk about this before, and believe me; I'm not going to rest until we indeed have the recognition for rural Alberta that is necessary. You may have ridden buses yourself, Madam Chair, and I'm sure every one of us in this House has at some point travelled from point A to point B in Alberta on a bus, but of course it's not possible for the most part in many communities.

We have recently had a situation where Lloydminster lost air transportation, and the community is looking to find an airliner that will replace that and to get regularly scheduled air service. That's another issue that indeed this budget doesn't contemplate well, and that, Madam Chair, is something that perhaps a bus could fill in, at least for now, and serve.

I would have hoped that we would have seen more in the lines of support for transportation in rural Alberta, as the Member for Lesser Slave Lake so eloquently called for and bemoaned the fact that he wasn't getting support while he was a member of the UCP caucus and ended up voting against the budget and crossing the floor in protest because he was so committed to making sure rural Alberta . . .

The Chair: Are there any other members that wish to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-North East.

Member Brar: Thank you, Madam Chair. Alberta is facing unprecedented challenges, from economic uncertainty to a cost-of-living crisis, and Albertans expect ethical, competent leadership with a real plan to guide us through these rocky waters. Instead, this Bill 42 offers no plan at all. It is as if the government scribbled their budget on the back of a napkin at the last minute. We have long suspected they make changes up as they go, but this bill is the clear proof of that.

This budget isn't the road map of recovery. It is a manifesto of mismanagement. At a time when Albertans need hope and solutions, this budget delivers neither. Under this plan Albertans could lose their jobs, they might not find a family doctor, their kids' classrooms may be even more overcrowded, they won't even feel any safer in their community, and their cost of living will stay out of control. All that, and for good measure this government is piling on a generational deficit that our children will be stuck paying for.

Madam Chair, Albertans have been very clear about what they expect from their government and what they want this government to prioritize. Over and over they have told us about the five key areas, their five key priorities that can build the pillar for a better Alberta. The first one is good jobs and diversified economy. The second one is affordability and cost-of-living relief. The third one is strong public health care. The fourth one is quality public education. The fifth one is safe communities and public safety. This budget does not address any one of these. This budget fails on every single one of these priorities. This budget is also a master class in poor planning and worse execution.

Let's examine all these five priorities that Albertans have told us one by one. I'll begin with jobs and economy. This bill and this budget do not offer any plan for prosperity, and their track record on jobs and economy is worse. Jobs and economy should be priority one in any budget, but this government has no real plan beyond crossing their fingers and hoping that oil prices will always stay high. In fact, their own budget numbers quietly admit a grim outlook. Job creation is expected to go down next year, with unemployment rising to 7.4 per cent as compared to 7 per cent this year. Alberta is actually forecasting job losses under slower growth while other provinces are expecting to recover.

Madam Chair, I would also like to highlight a little bit of history of this government from 2019. As soon as they got elected in 2019, the first thing that they did was give \$4.5 billion to wealthy corporations, and they promised on behalf of those corporations that this will create more jobs in Alberta. As a result, Alberta lost 55,000 jobs after their corporate handout. They also promised that this will bring more investment in Alberta. As a result of their corporate handout, investment flew from Alberta down to the States or to the east coast. This is a clear example that the trickle-down

economies of this UCP government have failed Alberta, have failed Albertans time and again.

But you can make a mistake once; if you continue to do that, that means it is your tendency to continue to make mistakes and without learning from them. There is no attitude of learning from the mistakes in this government. That's exactly what they have done in this budget. Alberta's growth is projected to stop at 1.8 per cent next year, and the UCP has no answers for this.

Instead of a real jobs plan for investments and diversification, what do we get? The UCP is hinging their entire budget on a hypothetical trade war scenario. They literally built this budget assuming that massive U.S. tariffs averaging 15 per cent on all Canadian goods will hammer our economy. This 15 per cent is way lower than what their friend Donald Trump has been saying. They are banking on tariffs lower than those threatened by U.S. President Donald Trump. They are creating uncertainty in the market, and they're calling this a plan for Alberta's future. Basically, what they are saying or what they are hoping is that they can pray that Donald Trump's threats don't come true and call it a fiscal strategy. This is not how the Alberta government should function, Madam Chair. Albertans expect a government that has a real plan, that delivers that clear plan to them, a plan that is built and meant to deliver what Albertans need.

3:30

Albertans are going through a cost-of-living crisis. Insurance has gone up. Utility bills have gone up. The cost of tuition has gone up. Insurance of their vehicles is expected to go up for another two years, and then this government is saying that in the third year they will bring in a new plan to help Albertans. The unfortunate part is that it will even be more hurtful than the current system that we have here in Alberta. Even if we assume that those tariffs don't happen, the UCP still leaves us with a \$3 billion deficit. If things do go wrong, the deficit goes up to \$5 billion. This is how the self-proclaimed fiscally responsible party manages our economy.

One observer also shared his thoughts on it, and that observer said that they have never seen a government this bad with money. The truth is that this government's approach to the economy is stuck in the past. They seem to think simply cutting taxes for corporations will magically create jobs. They have tried it, they have failed at it, and they have not learned from it. The UCP's so-called job-creation tax cut, slashing the corporate tax from 12 per cent to 8 per cent, has been effective for years now. Where are the jobs? Now they are saying that they will give a \$2 a day tax cut to Albertans.

Is this the government that Albertans elected? That was not the promise that they made to Albertans, and they failed to deliver on their promise for years. It was supposed to be in the beginning of 2024, but they delayed that. Now they have come up with a plan which gives Albertans \$2 a day at the same time as hiking their tuition costs, hiking their cost of living, hiking everything that Albertans buy in the market every single day.

Even the Alberta Federation of Labour warned back in 2019 that a corporate giveaway was not something that government should move forward with, yet they continued with that, and Albertans lost their jobs. In 2025 they have no plan, no real plan, to create more jobs in Alberta, to bring down the cost of living, to lower emergency wait times, to lower ambulance wait times, to provide access for Albertans to a family physician. These are not the priorities of this government or this budget.

Madam Chair, this budget also doubles down on the failed approach that has been continued by this UCP government for years. There's not a single new idea to diversify our economy or to help workers transition into growth industries. What about renewable energy? The government imposed a ban on renewable

energy projects last year, and that created uncertainty in the market. The investment flew away from Alberta, and municipalities lost billions of dollars with that ban. In fact, Alberta's municipalities lost \$28 billion in 2023, and even the province got just \$300 million in extra revenue from renewable resources. But the UCP's message to the world was: Alberta is closed for business unless you are a cryptocurrency cowboy. That's not an economic plan; that's an economic suicide in slow motion.

How about attracting new industries or training workers? This budget is completely silent on this issue. This budget offers no coherent strategy to address the huge workforce shortage in health care. Vacancies for nurses and doctors are higher than ever. Health job postings are up 16 per cent, higher than in the trades, yet there's no significant investment to recruit or retain those professionals. Imagine if we put as much effort into recruiting doctors and nurses as the Premier does into recruiting conspiracy theorists to her talk show appearances. We might actually fix the health care crisis in Alberta.

Speaking of training, our postsecondary institutions, that are the engines that train the next generation of job creators, aren't being staffed. Budget 2025 offers universities and colleges peanuts, nowhere near enough to reverse the deep cuts of the past. The government capped tuition at 2 per cent, but what about funding enrolment growth? Nothing for our postsecondary institutions in this budget. In fact, this budget cuts capital funding for postsecondary by 14 per cent over the next two years even as campuses literally crumble. The University of Alberta's deferred maintenance backlog will hit \$1 billion by 2028 at this rate. How can we compete in a global knowledge economy if our labs are obsolete and our best professors are leaving? We can't build a future-proof economy by cutting education and innovation, but that's exactly what this government is doing.

At the end of the day, a real jobs plan for Alberta would invest in diversification, in renewable energy, in technology, in value-added manufacturing, and in the education and skills of our people. It would recognize that public investment in health care and social services yields huge economic benefits. Studies have repeatedly shown and proven that. The data shows that. The science proves that. The unfortunate part is we have a government that doesn't believe in data, that doesn't believe in statistics, that doesn't believe in science. They believe in conspiracy theorists. Madam Chair, instead, the UCP clings to the trickle-down fantasies and tries to come up with these failed policies that don't work. They need to come up with a plan that Albertans need at this time of affordability crisis.

But what this government is doing is that they sent our Premier to Mar-a-Lago to ask Donald Trump for a selfie. That's not the economic plan. That should never have been an economic plan. We should have stood with Alberta's first ministers. We should have worked in a Team Canada approach instead of a Team Trump approach. But we have a government in Alberta that does not understand any of this, Madam Chair, a budget that projects years of deficits, rising unemployment, and not a single bright idea to create sustainable diverse prosperity Albertans deserve is unacceptable.

With that, Madam Chair, I would like to go to the second point, which is cost of living. I have repeatedly mentioned that the cost-of-living crisis has worsened in Alberta, but this government has not done anything to fix that. There are so many constituents that have been repeatedly telling me how difficult their life is getting under this government. People are feeling unsafe. I shared a member's statement yesterday about a horrific attack on a young woman in Calgary's city hall station. Albertans deserve to return

home safe when they leave work, when they go to school. This is the job of the government of the day.

The unfortunate part is that we have a government that is focused on wrong priorities, we have a government that has no idea how to deal with these Trump tariffs, and we have a Premier that chooses to side with Team Trump instead of Team Canada. On this side of the House we will continue to side with Team Canada, we will continue to be the voice of Albertans, and we will continue to ensure that Albertans get a government that they deserve. And come 2027 we will have a way better budget, we will have a way better government, and we will have an Alberta budget that works for everybody, because better is possible.

Madam Chair, thank you very much.

3:40

Mr. McIver: I'll be brief, Madam Chair. What we just heard was nonsense. It wasn't true. It wasn't even attempted to be true. Somebody is reading something random off a piece of paper that they didn't write, and it's completely devoid of facts or . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise pursuant to section 23(h), (i), and (j). As soon as the minister opened his remarks, he said that it was not true, and then he said that it was not even intended to be true. That's imputing a false motive to a member of this Legislature. That's completely offside, and I'm pretty sure the minister knows better than this.

Mr. Schow: No, Madam Chair, this is not a point of order. This is clearly a matter of debate. When the member opposite said that as soon as the hon. minister began his remarks, he began by saying it's not true: that is the near definition of debate, to debate what is and what is not true, what is and what is not right or wrong. [interjections] I don't know what is so funny to the members opposite. If one of them has something to say, they're more than welcome to come up and challenge my remarks. But that, again, would be debate. So no; this is a ridiculous point of order, and I'll leave it in your hands.

The Chair: Hon. members, we were doing so well in terms of decorum and debate in this House, and I'm certain we'll get back there. Thank you for the remarks from both sides of this Chamber.

I'm not sure I heard what the opposition deputy House leader thought he heard from the hon. minister. However, if that were the case and that was the intention of the minister, then I'm certain he would withdraw his comments. I didn't hear it that way. I'm really sorry, but this time it's not a point of order, and I'll ask the hon. minister to continue with his remarks with great caution.

Debate Continued

Mr. McIver: Sure. Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that. What I was pointing out is that what I heard was nonsense, and it was never a personal slant against the hon. member. But what we heard, is what I said, was not true. It wasn't, in my view, intended to be true, and we just heard insult after insult reeled off for about 20 minutes.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Chair: Another point of order.

The hon. opposition deputy House leader.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again 23(h), (i), and (j). I think I do understand when you say that something you heard is not true. We do say that often when the Premier says something or the Minister of Health says something, but when you say that it was not intended to be true, you're imputing a false motive to a member. That's extremely disrespectful, and the minister was cautioned, but still he ignored that caution and went on his nonsense rant that was just starting.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: No.

The Chair: Okay. Hon. members, this is the reset time. We're going to talk about the bill. We're not going to talk about other members and their comments and their intentions. Let's, like, stick on the bill, and we won't be having these issues.

The hon. minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Chair. I stand by what I said twice. The point that people need to know is that what was said here was not accurate. It went on for a long, long time. Somebody wrote down a list of a long series of insults. Somebody in here read that out. That's what we have here. No substance. Nonsense. Somebody needs to point it out, and as the longest serving member of this place, I kind of felt it might be my place to point out something that's completely ridiculous.

The Chair: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo rising to speak.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just working my way through the fiscal plan and Bill 42 and have some comments I'd like to address on both those things. You know, the overarching frame that is Bill 42 comes from the fiscal plan. We know that we've heard the Finance minister stand up and talk, both here in the House and elsewhere, about the 2 point reduction in personal income tax up to \$60,000, and we know that the Finance minister believes that will be a boon for Albertans in terms of the lower personal taxes they'll pay as a result.

My colleague before me – not that colleague; the one over here.

Mr. McIver: I'm your colleague, too.

Member Ceci: Former colleague. Yeah, I remember.

This one talked about – and we've worked the numbers, Madam Chair – a \$2 a day reduction for Albertans who pay taxes. It came from the Finance minister himself in terms of corroborating those numbers, and he went on and on about how important that would be for Albertans. I can tell you that a small dark roast with one cream costs \$1.67 at Tim Hortons, which is now a Brazilian company, unfortunately. But anyway, the reduction in taxes won't make a big deal of difference for Albertans.

We know that costs are rising all over the place. We have, I think, the second-highest inflation in the country after probably Newfoundland, and that is eating into people's disposable incomes. That is a big problem for Albertans. We know that we have word from people who work to support those who have auto accidents,

from the law profession, and they say that the UCP is raising our rates and ripping away our rights. Those \$2 savings per day that the Finance minister lauds will go pretty quickly, Madam Chair, in auto insurance costs, in record inflation, in housing costs.

And that's another thing. Another minister gets up regularly and talks about how many homes are being built in this province. True; there are a lot of them, but I can tell you that the people in my constituency primarily are apartment dwellers. A very great number of big apartments, condos are being developed. Lots of multiresidential is in Calgary-Buffalo. In fact, I just saw that there are 80,000 constituents in Calgary-Buffalo, which I think is over the average, way over the average of people here in the Legislature representing. Those people tell me that their costs for their rentals have skyrocketed in the last several years, and it's no coincidence that it's under the UCP.

People's rents are going up in Calgary-Buffalo, people's costs are going up every day, and we have a Finance minister who says he's going to save us two bucks a day. It doesn't add up. It doesn't make a whit of difference in those people's lives. That's the frame that is the fiscal plan that is Bill 42.

3:50

The other thing that's in the fiscal plan as a result of Bill 42 coming before us is 39 fee increases across the various ministries that are reported here. That's pretty devastating for Albertans, and, again, nothing to stand up and crow about, but our Finance minister likes to talk about the other side.

I just wanted to continue working my way through the fiscal plan and the bill that supports it. I see that some of the commentary from the mayor of Slave Lake, Francesca Ward, is in support of the comments made by the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake. That individual has said that the rural areas of this province are being ignored by this budget. I don't live in rural areas, but I take that person at their word because of their long-term life in rural areas and their representation of the people there.

The mayor, as I was saying, has commented: I fail to see the logic between having a provincial budget that is spending hundreds of millions of dollars to tear down an arena when we can't get a highway maintained. My colleague was talking eloquently about the lack of maintenance on highways throughout this province and the significant impact on people's lives that that has. I think we should be listening to people like that a lot more than we currently do and this budget currently addresses.

I want to go on to the next point in my review of the fiscal plan and that's with regard to Advanced Education. I know this to be true because of a personal connection I have with someone who works at U of A, that their operating grant has remained flat for the third year in a row. When we do that, when we starve our postsecondary institutions, we really put ourselves in a difficult place as an economy, as a population, as a province, because then we're able to compete less with other provinces who spend more on education, and the more they spend, they are able to attract better researchers, help more grad students, continue to provide the support to the researchers to get more and more excellent work done across all sorts of topics, from veterinary sciences, to AI, to medical, to the arts, and other things that universities do so well.

I can tell you that total cuts at U of A on operational grants since 2019 are about a quarter billion dollars, and that's not factoring in population growth and inflation, so really our premiere postsecondary institution at U of A is struggling as a result of this government. Under the previous government they struggled as well, so it's not all on this government's shoulders, this government's fault. There was a previous one that maybe some of you weren't here for but I can tell you that there were some pretty draconian cuts

to postsecondary, and there seemed to be a glee about sticking it to the universities, which I certainly don't see the sense in myself.

I want to go on to another topic that's in the fiscal plan and I had an opportunity to speak with the minister of arts and culture during estimates about. I'd like to talk about a few things in that area before I move on to the next one. You know, at a time when Albertans are struggling to make ends meet – it's not just me – I don't think there's been enough attention to the importance of arts and culture, what that brings to our population, what that brings to the people who live here, what that means in terms of creating a distinct voice in this country that's made up of the Francophonie but also people who are involved in all aspects of the arts.

We know that, for instance, the AFA grant: the minister has talked many times about how that's going up at the end of this government's term to be the highest ever. But we know right now that if you were to look at the last Alberta NDP AFA grant, that was about just over \$30 million. Where we're at now is \$34 million, but the growth in population plus inflation and value for money does not put this \$34 million higher than what the NDP AFA grant was in real dollars. Madam Chair, I can tell you that it just doesn't add up in terms of the importance that we need to place on arts and culture and what this budget is delivering to that area.

The other thing I wanted to say is that I asked the minister: why is the Glenbow's \$2.228 million, that is regularly a budget line in estimates, going into the AFA grant? It will make a smaller overall amount of money available to the new grant cycle that gets put in place. You know, it just means that there's less diversity, fewer organizations that are able to access those monies. The Glenbow is taking up \$2.228 million of that \$4.5 million that is increased, and that's not right. That's not helping out the diversity or the number of organizations that are looking for grant dollars from that organization, but that's the way the minister has set things up. It's a problem for the new cycle of funding that's coming up.

The other thing, and this is something I've regularly kind of banged on in terms of support. I think further down you'll see in the sports and tourism part of the review of the budget that I've done there's another \$8 million there for the every kid can play program, which is great for every kid who wants to play and their registrations are partially covered to make low-income children able to play sports and recreation programs.

But I asked the minister: why isn't there the same sort of funding that you're championing in the arts and culture area? Her kind of typical response is: I'm funding organizations, the capital in organizations. They can do it. But I said that's an unequal playing field. You're just hoping that arts organizations pick up the mantle and allow kids who are low income who want to take, say, theatre lessons, want to take music lessons – I guess their ability to do all of that is at the organizations' whim as opposed to, like, across the way, where the government will fund sports organizations to cover the registrations. They won't do the same thing for children who want to get involved in arts and cultural programming, which is unequal treatment for kids, which I think is wrong, but that's not in this budget.

Just moving on to the Children and Family Services part of the budget and part of Bill 42. I think it's horrible that in 2023 Alberta saw the highest recorded deaths of youth in care with 2024 only being slightly under at 83 notifications and the majority being Indigenous.

4:00

One would say: well, if that's the problem, if the problem is our young people in care are dying, why aren't we investing more to ensure that they can live a long and healthy life? The budget doesn't answer that, unfortunately. The budget doesn't talk about that. It

talks about cutting funding for the prevention against family and sexual abuse. There is another bill here – I think it's Bill 38, the red tape reduction bill – that seems to take away official reporting of all of that, legislative official reporting of the number of deaths, which I think is a total abdication of responsibility of this government, but it doesn't surprise me.

I just want to move on to another area, and it's the area of Health, Madam Chair. In this area, unfortunately, there is a proposed 3 per cent cut to Alberta Health's overall budget, the '25-26 budget. You know, it's an axiom, it's a thing people say: if you don't have health, you don't have anything. Unfortunately, there is so much chaos in the system of health right that we should be trying to figure this out as a government, working together across the floor so that we don't create even more chaos and people don't know where they're going to get their support for their health problems.

My colleague from I think it could be Edmonton-Glenora talked a little bit about the 1,900 cuts to the nurses that we found out about that are going to be happening. That's on top of cuts of 425 AHS staff, who were informed of their cuts on February 27, 2025. The budget needs to be investing in Health for sure, and it isn't doing that. That's where I'd like to also say that there are problems in what I'm seeing before me.

I just want to go on to Jobs, Economy and Trade briefly in Bill 42. I think, as I mentioned earlier off the top, that the second-highest inflation in the country is happening right here in our province. Red Deer is experiencing the highest unemployment in the entire country. These are things that need focusing on, and I don't see where the budget is doing that for Red Deer or reducing our inflation. I mentioned that there are 39 new fees, which does nothing to redress the affordability challenges that we're all experiencing, particularly people who are low income in Alberta. There are significant numbers of Albertans who are struggling to get by, and this budget does not assist them.

Moving on to Public Safety and Emergency Services, Madam Chair, I don't think it's changed all that much. The Public Safety and Emergency Services ministry continues to spend money on trying to bring an Alberta sheriff's force across this province when the majority of Albertans, when asked if they want that from their government, are still of the view that they want to continue on with the RCMP. That waste of money that's in this budget with regard to an APP, an independent police force, is something Albertans don't want and something that we could be saving funds on and investing those in things like the horrible record we have on children in care who are Indigenous and needing support from their government. Their government is their parent in that regard, their guardian, their responsibility.

I just want to move on to other parts of this fiscal plan and this budget that are a problem. Of course . . .

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 42, the Appropriation Act, 2025, which is basically the government budget that was supposed to be for the fiscal year starting April 1. We are in a pivotal moment in Alberta's history. Our province is facing enormous challenges from rising costs to economic uncertainty, to pressure on our public services. At a time when Albertans are looking for leadership, a time when Albertans are looking for stability and a real solution, Budget 2025 fails to deliver exactly that. Instead of meeting the moment, the government has brought forward a budget that ignores the realities that Albertans are facing today. It's a budget that lacks vision, it's a budget that fails to address urgent priorities, and it's a budget that leaves many Albertans behind.

Albertans have been clear about what matters to them, Madam Chair. Their top priorities include jobs and economic stability, affordability and cost of living, public health care and well-funded public education, and community safety, but Budget 2025 fails to meaningfully address any of those. This is not a budget built around the needs of Alberta families. It's a political document, and it's not shaped by compassion or common sense.

Let's start with the cost of living and affordability. Albertans are paying more and getting less. Albertans are being squeezed harder than ever before, and Budget 2025 offers no meaningful relief. In 2024 Albertans paid the highest utility costs in the country. The UCP's response to this was the rate of last resort program, a program that does nothing to lower prices. The government is actually spending now \$9 million to warn people not to use the same program that the government created. Instead of addressing the root causes of high electricity costs, they are running a PR campaign.

Auto insurance remains the most expensive in the country. The UCP continues to protect insurers while Albertans pay hundreds more per year than residents in other provinces of the country, and this is just going to go up in the next two years when their new reformed auto insurance is introduced.

Rent in Alberta is rising faster than anywhere else in the country. Madam Chair, Budget 2025 offers no new support for renters and instead cuts funding for homelessness initiatives.

4:10

What do Albertans get in return? You may think that if cuts have been made on all of those things, there will be some return here. The budget includes an 8 per cent tax bracket, which was not there, and this saves a maximum \$2 per day in a way of addressing the rising cost. While not only there – but the \$2 per day is not, if you divide the \$750 that the government has included in the budget as a benefit to relieve affordability, for all Albertans. Let me use an example of the average income, a single mom that lives in Edmonton-Decore. Madam Chair, it is \$36,000 annually. If you calculate that, the savings that she will be making are less than \$250 through this government initiative. And if you use that, you're talking about less than 70 cents per day. How will that help on the rising cost of living?

The budget also doesn't stop there, not to provide relief, but it actually introduces 39 new tax and fee increases, including a shocking 14 per cent hike in the education property tax that that single mother had to pay.

On the jobs you would think that during this crisis jobs and economy will be factored here as a plan, but no plan for the future, Madam Chair. Alberta's economy is facing serious risks, and this budget has no clear plan to project jobs, grow the economy, or support workers. Unemployment remains high at 6.7 per cent. Red Deer now has the highest unemployment rate in the country, yet there is no targeted job strategy in Budget 2025. The budget is silent on labour market retraining. It does nothing to help those who have lost their jobs transition to new industries. Knowing that there is a potential tariff looming, you would expect the fiscal plan to include such initiatives.

This budget has slashed funding to postsecondary education, and this budget has not reversed the cuts that have already been made on postsecondary education. There's no new support for students, no plan to attract talent, and no vision for innovation and research in Budget 2025. It seems like the government continues to ignore the diversification of the economy, focusing on the short time period, losing sight on the long time period of the vision.

Well, how does that impact our vulnerable populations? This budget makes a crisis even worse. Budget 2025 includes no significant investment in affordable housing. During the estimates

the minister has spoken a lot about market housing, but there are no affordable housing initiatives that will address the increasing needs that we see on a day-to-day basis in our constituency offices. At a time when more Albertans are struggling to keep a roof over their heads, the government is pulling back. Homelessness in Edmonton has tripled under this government, and this budget doesn't address that.

The UCP government likes to highlight a one-year uptick of housing starts, but that barely scratches the surface of what's needed.

There is no funding for new major affordable housing initiatives despite the growing need in every corner of this province. In Edmonton-Decore my constituency will only lose existing units that are coming to the end of their lifetime, and there is no replenishment plan in this Budget 2025. Hundreds of thousands of Albertans are struggling with housing costs, and Budget 2025 does not address the root cause of those problems. What makes it worse is that it leaves vulnerable Albertans behind.

Budget 2025 continues this government's pattern of undermining social supports for Alberta's most vulnerable. AISH and FSCD are not being increased to keep up with inflation and population growth. If you think about it, that's really a cut. Thousands of disabled Albertans continue to receive benefits that leave them below the poverty line. With tariffs looming, with cost of living increasing, this government has made no effort to change that. The budget documents themselves admit that the increases to these programs are driven solely by increasing caseloads, meaning that the amount of support per person is not improving while the cost of living is going up. More people need help, but this budget delivers none. This is not responsible governance. This is abandonment, and it is austere dressed up as a balance.

Let's talk about public education. Alberta's classrooms are at the breaking point, and Budget 2025 does nothing to help with that. Alberta students are the lowest funded in the country and have been for six years straight. The budget continues to keep that trend. The government is boasting about maintaining funding, but when you factor in population growth and inflation, which the government agrees that population growth – stats show that Alberta has been leading on inflation from the rest of the country. When you factor in all of those, this is actually a \$25 million cut in real terms. Teacher hiring has not kept pace. In 2024 only one teacher was hired for close to 50 students, double the recommended high school class size. New school construction is not funded this year despite crowding and growing enrolment in almost every district of our province. School boards are being forced to dip into reserves just to keep the lights on, and when those reserves run out, there's no plan. This government has created chaos in classrooms, this budget is filled with cuts, and our students and parents are left behind. They do deserve better.

On the health care and public safety front there have been announcements and promises but no progress. At least Budget 2025 doesn't show that. It offers no bold plan to strengthen public health care. ERs are overwhelmed, ambulance wait times remain high, and we are seeing more rural hospital closures. Mental health supports remain unfunded, and community health services are stretched thin. Meanwhile on public safety the government is once again focusing on centralizing power, not building community-based support or addressing the root causes of crime.

4:20

This budget confirms what Albertans already know, that the government's priorities are not the priorities of the people of Alberta. While families struggle to pay their bills, the UCP hikes fees and cuts services. While workers face layoffs and an uncertain

future, the UCP ignores retraining, innovation, or economic diversification. Students cram in overcrowded classrooms. Teachers struggle, educational assistants struggle in terms of managing the complexities of those classrooms. This budget does not show solutions to these challenges. Our most vulnerable Albertans fall farther behind, and this budget doesn't open the door for those who are struggling.

Madam Chair, Budget 2025 is not a plan for Alberta's future; it's a plan to survive the next news cycle. Albertans deserve better than that. We need a government that listens. We need a budget that provides relief. We need a budget that provides support for struggling Albertans on the cost of living. We need a budget that addresses affordability, and we need a budget that shows opportunity and hope.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 42, Appropriation Act, 2025. I'm just going to build on some of the comments that my colleague from Edmonton-Decore brought up about this particular budget. First, I just want to do a more high-level view. You know, this budget was actually disappointing on a number of fronts, a lot of missed opportunities. Like Alberta Municipalities, I was also quite disappointed in this government's failure to address the infrastructure deficit. I think they were pretty clear leading up to the budget. I'm sure they have been very clear for years, actually, about not addressing this deficit. It's just going to make things worse. Government failed to do that.

Also, what was really disappointing, and Alberta Municipalities was also very clear about this, was around FCSS funding. That is the funding that goes to municipalities as a partnership between the province and the municipality, the 80-20 split. It actually funds the preventative social services and municipalities and Métis settlements. As you can imagine, you know, with population growth and all of the stresses and pressures that we see in communities, the need for preventative social services has only increased, yet this government saw fit to do, really, nothing about it. In fact, they underspent about \$5 million last year and then completely ignored the population growth that, actually, they had a hand in, calling people to move here and giving people bonuses to move here. But they're failing to fund for that population growth, especially in terms of preventative social services.

They like to stand up and talk about, you know, being tough on crime and all of these things. I mean, certainly, there is room for that, but we know that preventing these problems is actually the more affordable way to address problems and actually results in better outcomes for people. I'm not entirely sure why this government ignores that.

We know municipalities are paying far more than the 20 per cent of their share, and they can't afford it. Just like, you know, this government likes to squawk about the pathetic transfers from the federal government, I would suggest that their transfers to the municipalities are pretty pathetic.

I just wanted to focus on a couple of areas in the Seniors, Community and Social Services budget. I first would like to say that, you know, the minister is quite right. It is the second-highest spending ministry in government. It's over \$10 billion, I believe. One of the things that has been somewhat disappointing – although, you know, government will say, "Well, it's just about organization; we're just making it easier," what they've done is actually reduce opportunities for oversight. By shoving all of these massive programs into one ministry under one person, who likes to yell a lot, they're just not allowing Albertans to have the oversight that

they deserve. Whether it's in budget estimates, whether it's in this place, it just doesn't make good sense. But I suppose that's what they're aiming for.

I want to talk a little bit about family supports for children with disabilities and persons with developmental disabilities. The acronyms are FSCD and PDD. Now, Madam Chair, I'm sure you are getting mail, just like I am. I'm sure every single member in this place is because I see it. I get copied on a lot. Families from every corner of this province, every area of this province – rural, mid-sized cities, villages, big cities, all over the place – are letting us know that their child, sometimes it's a youth, has been approved for family supports for children with disabilities and they're still waiting. They're waiting for a caseworker, which is code for: yeah; there's no money; you're just going to wait. Some people have been waiting for four years. Some three. Some two. Some just gave up. Some of their kids turned 18. Some of the kids are no longer toddlers, and that early intervention time for speech and language or occupational therapy: that's gone. We missed it because this government failed to properly support people.

The other piece is persons with developmental disabilities. Now, those are the disability supports for people that are over 18. Same problem there. This government actually just completely stopped their responsibility to report the number of people waiting for legislated supports because they just don't feel like they need to report on the really horrible job that they're doing. In 2021 we knew those numbers were staggering. I can only imagine what they are now, and I can only imagine why this government refuses to disclose those numbers.

We know, all of us know in this place – I know your offices are getting the mail – that these children with disabilities, complex disabilities, are just not getting what they need. It gets even worse when they're adults. We know of people that have died while waiting on the wait-list. PDD right now under this government's direction – this is this government's direction in this budget, deciding that only adults with disabilities that they label as urgent and critical, so an imminent harm to themselves and others, are going to get support. The rest: you are going to linger on that wait-list till God knows when.

Now, who they call not really urgent is someone like someone I know that has Down syndrome. He actually came from a small town, moved to the big city with his folks. Lived with his folks his entire life. Has Down syndrome, got a job. Actually worked for about 30 years and retired. Still lives with his folks. Dad died. Mom is the only surviving parent. Mom is starting to deteriorate because of dementia and some other health issues. This person needs PDD support to be able to (a) either go into a group home or (b) hire his own support staff because mom can no longer assist in making the meals, helping with banking, helping choose clothing, helping to ensure the personal care is done. None of that's happening because mom can't do it. But this person is labelled as not urgent, not in crisis. That's what this budget has done.

This budget did see a little, teeny bump in disability supports – when you factor in population and inflation, there is a little bump – but there is zero information in this budget about what that money will be used for. Now, we saw an announcement before the last election where the last minister of social services stood up and said: check us out; \$25 million going into that wait-list. We got no reporting. Where did that money go? What was the number? How has it reduced? Where is it now? Nothing. It's just this black hole of money. It's like: trust us; we're the government; we'll make things better. But it's a black hole of money. We keep dumping money in there, but we don't know what the outcomes are. Why? What is this government hiding? What are they ashamed of? I don't know.

I'd like to focus just for the last few minutes here to talk a little bit about some of the other major plans in this particular ministry in this budget that were actually a little bit shocking to me. I look at the government's own report about the state of the economy or things that are coming, challenges that are coming. We know the Trump tariffs, the Trump administration in general, just the unpredictability or the danger of what this administration is proposing not just for their neighbours but world-wide: we know we're about to go through some stuff. Government's own documents talk about: the GDP will likely contract; we will likely not see unemployment rates go down; we will likely need to use some of this discretionary funding we put aside because income supports might need to go up because people are going to lose their jobs.

4:30

What does this brilliant government do? Hey, let's start a new program so we can move people off AISH and they can get jobs and it'll be wonderful. I'm guessing that they're going to reduce the core benefit, too, because they're not doing this to spend more money, Madam Chair. They're creating this to move people to employment, which is actually great, which is the goal for many people, but you have to do the work first. You have to open up those pathways to employment, and I will tell you that this government has not done that. Sure, they fund a few programs here and there. They like to stand at a presser: look at us, check us out, we're going to fund this program.

The reality is that they don't even have accessibility legislation. They don't even know if these workplaces are accessible because they cannot even get that work done. I was hopeful when I would see this budget. One of the first things I looked for, was quickly searched: accessibility legislation. I was super hopeful that this budget would mention that because I believe that that kind of legislation has the potential to positively impact the economy of Alberta and certainly has the potential to open jobs up, open pathways to work for people with disabilities.

It has the ability to do a whole lot of other things. For example, Madam Chair, yesterday in Public Accounts, you know, we were looking at, obviously, last year's report but this year's budget and looking in terms of tourism. I know that JET is looking at Japanese tourists, German tourists, and there was another country – I'm sorry; I've forgotten now – that they're really focusing on because the value of those tourists is actually quite a bit higher than the Canadian tourists. Obviously, they're going to work with those carriers, going to work with that country to get as many people here as possible. You know who travels a lot? Seniors. You know who has a lot of accessibility needs? Seniors. But we don't have accessibility legislation here at home. The rest of the country does, but we don't, so we can't guarantee travellers even visiting here that they'll be able to access some of the basic spots or basic things the government funds. That's unfortunate.

This budget did none of that even though this budget's own disability advocate, that is funded at over a million dollars a year, did the work, actually did the work in 2022. This government funded the disability advocate to consult about accessibility legislation, and that work was done. I went to a few of those. Since then we have heard crickets, but still they want us to trust them because: you know, we're going to move people off AISH, and life is going to be great; they're going to get jobs. Never mind that we're about to lose more jobs, life is about to get a little bit more stressful and difficult. But just trust us; it'll all be good. Well, Madam Chair, there are a lot of reasons why I am very disappointed in this budget, and that would be one of them.

A couple of other things that I'm going to say about this. One of the last things I'll say about this is that this government has said:

well, there's nothing to worry about because we're going to add I think it's about \$90 million to career and employment supports. Well, here's what they didn't tell you, Madam Chair, that they already funded that before, as, like, 80-some million dollars, and they do it all the time. But it's not just for people with disabilities; it's for anybody that is on income supports that's looking at retraining or, you know, maybe getting a different job of some kind. It's a lot of people that use these supports.

You know what? They don't have a lot of metrics in their report, their annual report, but they have one related to career and employment. You know what their stretch goal is for this funding that they've doubled now, because this is going to solve all their problems about unemployment for people that are disabled? Their goal of these programs that they doubled is 65 per cent. On a good day they think that almost \$200 million – they're going to get a 65 per cent success rate for employment following this funded programming. That's a problem. I think that's a horrible metric, and their experience over the last few years is horrible. They don't share data, but we have anecdotal information.

With that, I am going to end my chat about this and just say that this budget was a missed opportunity, but it was also a really good glance for all Albertans to see: really, this is an incompetent government that doesn't know Alberta priorities.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate in Committee of the Whole on Bill 42?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 42 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 43

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2025

The Chair: Are any members wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 43, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2025. As I begin, I'd like to give a shout-out to *Hansard* as it has been really helpful to review the conversation that we had here on Monday evening, when we were asking some questions about the bill. I'd also like to thank the minister for his introduction to the bill providing us all with some background on the bill. I think it's fair for Albertans to be curious about a bill that in part requests approval for funds that have already been spent, funds that were in some cases an overspend from the original budgeted amount.

Also, for clarity the amounts in Bill 43 are described in more detail in the Supplementary Supply Estimates document provided as part of the government's budget documents. In that document on page 7 it's described \$69,212,000 in capital investments that are carry-over from unused '23-24 capital investment appropriations. Now, Madam Chair, in the grand scheme of things a little over \$69 million may seem immaterial with the billions that are spent each year by this province on very necessary infrastructure projects. I mean, \$69 million is a little less than a 'Tylenol' or approximately one-tenth of a Mraiche, but with the 2025-26 budget estimates, an even larger infrastructure spend, we should be concerned about the

government's inability to deliver on the projects that were included in the '23-24 budget.

If the government is still delivering on projects in '24-25, this indicates that perhaps projects that were budgeted in '24-25 are likely spilling forward into '25-26. Madam Chair, it would be worth knowing sooner than one year from now whether or not the Minister of Infrastructure, whether the department is struggling or if any of those projects are being held up and whether or not any of those projects will not be completed in '24-25. I think it's kind of known that I talk a lot about schools here. I don't know if the schools that are listed in the Education portion of those infrastructure projects are carrying forward, but I do know that Nolan Hill had a Catholic school budgeted for construction in '23-24.

As I have said, I have often made it my business in this House to talk about schools and the need for schools in Calgary-Foothills. Calgary-Foothills is one of the fastest growing constituencies in Alberta. I think we've all just recently received the funding that we're getting for our MSI. Mine indicated that Calgary-Foothills is now nudging up against 70,000 people, that Calgary-Foothills is full of young families, families with school-age children. Regrettably, this constituency with 70,000 people currently has four Calgary Catholic schools and three Calgary board of education schools. Every day there are about 8,000 children that get on buses and are being driven to schools across the city, and all of those families have been waiting. Neighbouring MLAs and their residents have also been waiting. They too remind me on a daily basis how the children from Calgary-Foothills are crowding out the schools that their children go to.

4:40

Back to that school in Nolan Hill. That school that was budgeted for construction in 2023 is still an empty field surrounded by a snow fence. Last summer on behalf of the community I e-mailed the Minister of Infrastructure asking about the progress of that Nolan Hill school, and we received a response informing us that the school was bundled with other schools under a single P3 project contract. In estimates just this last week I learned that that P3 contract had been signed off by Treasury Board and Finance in January, almost two years after being budgeted for full construction. So, Madam Chair, I think it is fair to question the government's ability to deliver on infrastructure projects that appear in the budget.

Madam Chair, with this bill we are being informed that approximately \$69 million was not spent in '23-24 and has been brought forward into '24-25. My sincere hope is that the government is doing its utmost in striving to drive this number to zero. It is my sincere hope that we will be here in this Chamber next year debating supplementary supply and that we will see that no funds for infrastructure projects were moved forward from '24-25 into '25-26 and that all of those budgeted infrastructure projects, those budgeted infrastructure projects that are so critical for Albertans across this province, were completed. That might give our residents some faith that the generational investment in schools announced by this government might be completed.

This government must deliver on that plan. We cannot continue to tell Albertans and the residents of Calgary-Foothills that they need to wait another year or two or three before they see a shovel in the ground. As I said, Madam Chair, there are 8,000 children travelling across the city to get to school just from Calgary-Foothills. In that generational investment in schools the Calgary board of education has 21 schools in their capital plan. Four of those schools are in Calgary-Foothills. Four schools that are so desperately needed. Four schools that the Calgary board of education has said they need to be open and operating today. Those four schools are budgeted in '25-26 for design. It is my sincere hope

that this government will take their promise seriously to advance those projects more quickly than we have seen this government's ability to do so in the past. This government must strive to deliver on all of the infrastructure projects that they have promised for Albertans.

Now I'll move on to some other elements of Bill 43. We know that some of the funds presented in this bill are in recognition of funds that are spent but then recovered from federal grants. That seems pretty straightforward. I should expect, however, that at the beginning of '24-25, when we designed that budget, we didn't know that we were going to get those federal grants. Had we known that we were getting those federal grants, then they would have been budgeted and not included in supplementary supply. If we knew about those programs, then the matching of prespending amounts would have already been budgeted. We would be good, and we wouldn't be talking about it here today.

Madam Chair, there is one other element of Bill 43 in supplementary supply that I'd like to address and maybe ask some questions, and that is the government's ability to accurately forecast the funds that are needed to deliver services to Albertans. In reviewing *Hansard* and the conversation that we had here on Monday evening, I can see that, you know, we reminded that we were asking questions about the \$137 million transferred from Health to Mental Health and Addiction.

The conversation said that those funds were largely directed to Recovery Alberta, which was stood up in about September 2024, and that those funds were for pharmacy and laboratory services, laundry and food services, and corporate services. Madam Chair, these sound like items that are essential and predictable in delivering mental health and addictions, predictable in that when Recovery Alberta was stood up, the department should have been able to accurately forecast the funds needed to deliver those services. Yet, as we heard in our discussion on Monday, the department was off by almost 10 per cent.

We heard that those funds were always meant to be used and to be transferred from Health to Mental Health and Addiction, but Madam Chair, had that been the case, those funds would have been budgeted, and we would not see them today as additional supply requests being required in supplementary supply. So along with the questions raised about this government's ability to deliver on infrastructure projects, people also call into question the government's ability to budget appropriately and effectively manage the funds that they have raised from hard-working Albertans.

I will also ask, Madam Chair, to take this opportunity for the hard-working individuals that protect us and our communities from the devastation of wildfires. We've been through some of the worst years we have ever seen in this province and in this country. Last year we lost one-third of the beautiful town of Jasper, and I think all of our hearts go out to the residents of Jasper and everybody who worked so hard to stop that fire. I'd like to be clear that my comment or question that I'm going to ask about wildfire funds included in supplementary supply is not about the spending of those funds to stop and fight those wildfires; rather, a question on clarity and a comment on clarity.

We heard and we understand that part of the funds were accommodated through contingency, and part of the funds are a request through supplementary supply. I think allocations from contingency are easily understood by all Albertans, that when the contingency fund is set at the beginning of the budget year, it's also talked about what those contingency funds might be for. It is clearly stated that unforeseen wildfires are included in that amount. But not all of the funds that are applied came from contingency, and we're seeing them now as additional through supplementary supply

requests, so I think it would be beneficial for some clarity on why it's not all transferred from contingency and why some of it is coming from another source.

As also raised by my colleague in this Chamber, Madam Chair, I'd like to talk a little bit about the outcomes that we achieved from the funds that were spent. Supplementary supply also includes additional funds for the transport and marketing of crude oil. In Alberta producers have the ability to pay royalties in cash or through a bitumen in kind program. We've heard recently from the Premier that bitumen in kind could be leveraged to increase production. However, we don't know on a per barrel basis if the bitumen in kind program leaves the government financially better off. As we see from supplementary supply, the government needs to allocate resources to deliver on the program, but we don't see if the revenue received leaves Albertans better off than just the standard royalty program. I think it would be beneficial when voting on the allocation of additional funds for the program if we had that information in front of us.

Madam Chair, I'm completely aware that the funds have already been spent, that the vote on this bill is performative, yet I believe we owe Albertans a response to the concerns that they are raising about the stewardship of their tax dollars. Thank you.

4:50

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

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 43. You know, I can appreciate and I do often reflect on the fact that budgeting with so many billions of dollars across so many programs is difficult. I don't think that this is an easy job that the government does. It is fair that we may underestimate expenses from time to time, and that's why we have supplementary supply, but I'll also just assert that Albertans expect us to do the hard work.

They expect the expertise in the public service to strive for accuracy where we can. With a supplementary supply budget totalling just over \$492 million, I feel that this government has demonstrated that they can't be trusted to accurately plan spending and can't accurately account for excess funding. I feel like the UCP government is wasting money in some areas, underspending in others, and then overspending. A little of that can be explained, but a lot of it demonstrates incompetence.

I'm going to focus my comments today on the supplementary supply for the Ministry of Forestry and Parks. It is the bulk of supplementary supply. It is associated with \$251,378,000 supplementary supply for Forestry and Parks. Now, the supplementary supply estimates say that this is to be combined with \$455,422,000 from contingency for wildfire suppression and response. Like my colleague from Calgary-Foothills, I appreciate that we can't predict the future and we can't know where the wildfires are going to be this summer and how extensive or intensive they're going to be. So it is natural that some of this wildfire response money would come out of contingency funding, and we discussed this as part of contingency funds in the budget.

But what I really want to focus on is the unanticipated \$251 million that are not coming from contingency but coming from supplementary supply. What do we know about wildfire? I mean, I could really talk about that for way longer than 20 minutes, but just some high-level things. Well, we know that the extent of wildfires is high and growing. We can expect that every summer we will lose hundreds of thousands of hectares to wildfire in Alberta. We know that wildfire will threaten communities in the wildland-urban interface, and we also know that it's much more expensive and traumatic to rebuild a community than to protect a community in

the first place. We also know that models show – I thought you were going to call a point of order on me. I was like: what are you doing? Sorry.

We also know that wildfire predictor models show that fuel load is the best predictor of fire risk, and when we know that, we can predict the areas of the province that have the most likelihood of having or experiencing intense wildfires. All of that information combined, Madam Chair, helps us predict and understand in advance where we might see the worst wildfires, which communities are most likely to be affected, and where we might want to allocate some preplanning money to help those communities.

I guess part of my question is: how much of this money in supplementary supply, this \$251 million, went into fire suppression instead of response? The supplementary estimates say that this \$251 million is to provide for wildfire suppression and response for addressing the costs related to 2024 wildfires. I think the wildfire response piece is difficult to pin down early on, but I also think the suppression piece and the preparedness piece are not as difficult, and I think we can do better in that regard. How much of these funds were reactive, and could some of these funds been proactively planned for to support communities to address fire risk? For me, that is at the heart of this question around these supply estimates.

As the MLA for Banff-Kananaskis this last weekend I hosted a wildfire preparedness workshop for the communities in my riding. It was attended by over 110 people. We had five guest speakers of varying perspectives and expertise on wildfire. We talked about wildfire preparedness from the landscape level, with prescribed burns and land-use management, right down to the property level and FireSmart in your own backyard and what you can do to keep your home safe.

The number one comment that I heard from participants at this workshop was, “Are you going to do this in another community? Are you going to do this over there? Why are you the only one hosting workshops like this? How come the government isn’t also hosting wildfire preparedness workshops?” to which I said: well, I’m your MLA, and I’m happy to do this; I’m happy to provide this information.

But, for me, it was very clear, Madam Chair, that there is a gap in information transfer and knowledge, that communities living in the wildland-urban interface don’t necessarily know how to prepare for wildfire. They don’t know what they can do at the property level, they don’t know what their community can do, and they don’t know what the role of the province is in funding landscape management to reduce wildfire risk in communities.

I wonder if that is something that this government might be interested in doing because I do feel that wildfire preparedness is information that Albertans are hungry for. They’re scared about the risk of wildfire. They would love more information, recognizing that FireSmart is a website that people can go to where a lot of this information is housed but also recognizing that not everybody is going to take the time to do that. I wonder if workshops like this are something that the government might be able to spend money on so that we don’t have this demand of supplementary supply for fire suppression because we have educated Albertans and brought them along with us when we talk about reductions in wildfire risk. Why is the government not spending more money to share information with people who clearly want more of it?

This year the government announced the construction of fireguards around the town of Canmore, which is a welcome investment in reducing wildfire risk for the community of Canmore. But what of the other communities that are also at risk? Bragg Creek and Redwood Meadows in my riding are very afraid of wildfire, and there’s no provincial money going into creating firebreaks

around those communities. Why not? That should be part of wildfire suppression activities and should be accounted for in estimates.

What about plans for egress and evacuation plans? Most municipalities of, like, any size or capacity will have emergency plans in place for wildfire, but smaller municipalities and villages may not have the capacity to create these emergency planning and evacuation documents. Is the government able to provide some capacity to these municipalities so that they know what to do in case of emergency and they’ve communicated that to their residents?

The egress plans I also think are critically important, and it is an area where this government is kind of falling down. Bragg Creek as a community has one egress. If that is blocked by fire, we will be sending helicopters in to rescue people just like we did in the flood of 2013. Working with municipalities to provide egress, to provide residents with that safety and security and confidence in their government, is essential, and these are all things that can be planned in advance so that we are not scrambling at the last minute when the fire is burning and ravaging across the landscape at, like, kilometres every half an hour. We could be more prepared.

Some of the things I learned during the wildfire workshop this weekend was that when it came into the town of Jasper, it was not the wildfire itself that burned into town; it was embers travelling on the wind up to one to two kilometres away from the fire. The fire wasn’t even in town, but embers blowing into town and landing on roofs and in yards started the fire in the town of Jasper. So I think communicating and educating Albertans to the need to firesmart their own individual properties is real. People need to not have a lot of debris in their backyard. They shouldn’t have trees growing right next to the house. Even things like fences can direct a fire from the back of your property right to the house.

5:00

There are things that Albertans can do to keep their houses safe, and some of these things cost money. A lot of the houses in Bragg Creek and Redwood Meadows are very treed, and even if landowners would like to remove trees to firesmart their property, they can’t always afford to do that. Homeowner subsidies and programs for homeowners to firesmart their properties would be incredibly useful and, again, could be a granting program that would be planned for in budgets so that we don’t have to have this unexpected cost coming from supplementary supply.

Fire suppression is an essential part of budget planning in our lives right now, and in wildfire management on line 2.1 of budget estimates on page 99 we’ve actually underspent wildfire management, and then we come back to supplementary supply and ask for more money. It’s strange to me that we underspend, and then we’re like: “Oh, no. Oops. We could have spent more, but now we actually want way more.” If we just plan ahead for this stuff – like, we know wildfires are coming. We should be more prepared for that expense. Do we have any data on how much money and planning saves us in the long run in wildfire response?

I also have some questions about how that \$250 million was spent. Over what timeline? In what areas? I think that would really help us to understand the need of why it’s in supplementary supply and not actual preplanning for wildfire response.

In the 2023-24 budget wildfire suppression and response was not budgeted, but the government spent \$45.9 million that year. It seems to me like this line of wildfire suppression and response is a continual spending item that we’re talking about in supplementary supply each year. If it’s a consistent expense, why is it consistently not budgeted in the main estimates? Why? We know we’re going to spend this money. Why don’t we plan for it and account for it in estimates first?

I also just want to spend a couple of minutes addressing Environment and Protected Areas and the just over \$3 million requested for remediation work on contaminated sites, the restoration of contaminated soil and groundwater. I have a few questions, like: how long was the contamination at these sites known? How long did Albertans have to wait for their reclamation to happen? How were the private entities who created this contamination held accountable?

I understand that some of this expense was associated with some fuel stations that are no longer in use. Fuel stations have closed around the province a lot. We know exactly how much they cost to reclaim, so why did we need supplementary supply to augment those reclamation efforts? Did we underestimate the level of contamination? Was there inflation? What is the reasoning for this underestimation of reclamation in this area that we have extensive experience in doing this work? What steps were taken to not have these costs next year? When it comes to reclaiming fuel stations, we should have a list at the beginning of the year of which ones will be reclaimed, where, and what that reclamation looks like. We should be able to predict that cost. Why did we not predict that last year?

The government needs to be planning ahead, but I also see in the Environment and Protected Areas budget an underspend in the ministry for fish and wildlife of about \$2 million and an underspend in integrated planning of \$4 million. Does that \$2 million and \$4 million then get allocated towards reclamation? Why was that money underspent in the first place, especially for integrated planning, when land-use planning is such an important activity in Alberta to address cumulative effects and monitoring and all of those other things? I guess I have a question about: how is the budget overall for Environment and Protected Areas actually a reliable prediction of where money will be spent? We're underspending in some areas and overspending in others.

And what about the cost of reclamation for longer term activities like coal mining or oil sands tailings? If we have issues predicting the cost to reclaim a gas station, which we have extensive experience doing, how can Albertans trust that the government will accurately assess the cost of reclaiming oil sands tailings or coal mining? How are companies held accountable for those costs as well?

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 43 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs to seek a motion to rise and report.

Mr. McIver: Madam Chair, I think I would like to make a motion to rise and report at this time.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. van Dijken: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 42, Bill 43.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 40

Professional Governance Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my honour to rise and move second reading of Bill 40, the Professional Governance Act.

Professional regulatory organizations, or PROs, play essential functions in Canada, regulating their respective professions and ensuring a high standard of practice in protection of the public interest. What does that really mean? It can sometimes be difficult to see the roles and benefits of regulated professionals in everyday life. Having professionals regulated in the protection of the public interest is about trust, being able to trust that the professional is accountable, that their work is competent, and that the ultimate service provided to everyday Albertans is reliable.

Though we may not realize it, we all benefit from services provided by regulated professionals on a regular basis. When we drive on the road to and from work, we have regulated professionals to thank. When we turn on the tap and know we will get clean drinking water, we have regulated professionals to thank. When we turn on the lights in our homes, we have regulated professionals to thank. And it is thanks to regulated professionals that when it rains, our wetlands can absorb the water and not flood our homes. When we see new homes being built for our growing province, it is regulated professionals that ensure there is sufficient wood for the frames, infrastructure for our families, and parks and playgrounds for our kids. When we drive to Alberta's breathtaking mountains or to the many rivers and lakes Alberta is home to, we are carried by bridges across valleys and rivers while wildlife can safely cross over and under the roads. There are fish in our waterways, birds have places to nest, and wildlife is abundant in our forests.

Teams of biologists, surveyors, engineers, architects, planners, technologists, and foresters are just some of the many professionals that do this essential work behind the scenes so that our communities and our province can function smoothly. It is no surprise, Madam Speaker, that the regulation of these professionals is incredibly important since it protects all of our interests. That is why in Alberta, much like in other provinces, our government oversees professional governance organizations which ensure standards of competence and ethics and regulate these professions overall.

5:10

Madam Speaker, that is why the Professional Governance Act is such consequential legislation. Bill 40 will set an example for what good governance and modern policy can look like. If passed, Bill

40 will promote high standards of competence, conduct, and ethics, ensuring professional regulatory organizations have flexibility and improved regulatory tools, leading to positive outcomes for both professional regulatory organizations and everyday Albertans.

Madam Speaker, Alberta Advanced Education is currently responsible for 22 professional regulatory organizations. I went through just a few of those professions earlier, which are governed by nine different pieces of legislation and 28 supporting regulations. This has led to inconsistencies across these organizations and the way they support their members and serve Albertans. This includes misaligned functions and authorities, questions of what is covered in legislation versus regulation versus bylaws, and various reporting requirements. Many of these disparate pieces of legislation are also outdated, especially in terms of provisions for the use of modern communication and technology.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

If passed, the Professional Governance Act would consolidate and streamline Advanced Education's professional governance legislation from these nine separate acts into one comprehensive and consistent piece of legislation. Bill 40 would consolidate the Agrology Profession Act, the Architects Act, the Chartered Professional Accountants Act, the Consulting Engineers of Alberta Act, the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act, the Land Surveyors Act, the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act, the Regulated Forestry Management Profession Act, and the Veterinary Profession Act.

The Professional Governance Act would fix inconsistencies and information gaps in current professional regulatory legislation by providing clarity on the purpose of professional regulatory organizations and their authorities, their powers, and their functions; providing consistency on the distribution of provisions between various levels of legislation, including acts, regulations, and bylaws; providing clear requirements for reporting and transparency; providing clear requirements for accountability, offences and penalties, and information privacy and disclosure; ensuring members have access to an Ombudsman in the event of disputes.

Outdated provisions would also be repealed and replaced to recognize technological advancements and bring Advanced Education's professional regulatory bodies into the 21st century. The legislation would be updated to reflect common modern practices like electronic signatures, electronic records, delivery of electronic notices, and virtual meetings, basic realities today which did not even exist when much of the current legislation was written.

Mr. Speaker, the changes put forward in this legislation are examples of good governance. The Professional Governance Act supports positive outcomes for Albertans and for professional regulatory organizations and their members. This legislation promotes high standards of competence, conduct, and ethics, as I've mentioned before, and would reduce unnecessary government oversight. This bill would increase the professional regulatory organizations' ability to be flexible, to be responsive and accessible to their members. In addition, this legislation would provide improved regulatory tools, allowing the organizations to function more efficiently and more effectively, resulting in better service to their members and to Albertans. The Professional Governance Act would also enhance fairness, transparency, and accountability by implementing a modernized framework for complaints, discipline, and appeals.

This legislation would provide a consistent framework across organizations while also allowing for flexibility in addressing the needs of each individual organization. Through specific regulations

each professional regulatory organization can ensure their unique requirements are addressed. We will continue working directly with our professional regulatory organizations to develop regulations that meet their unique needs and circumstances, and we will ensure a smooth transition for them through regular communication, templates for bylaws, codes of conduct and ethics, and practice standards and guidelines. We would also provide support and extended timelines to ensure professional regulatory organizations can effectively make this transition.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident in the direction this legislation is taking us. After thorough consultation with professional regulatory organizations, the legislation we are proposing would modernize governance of these organizations to the benefit of all. It would provide consistency for the organizations, their members, and the Albertans they serve. Bill 40 is an important step to continuing to protect the public interest and providing the best possible services to Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move second reading and urge all my colleagues on both sides of this Assembly to support Bill 40, the Professional Governance Act. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to speak to Bill 40? The Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak opening comments in second reading to Bill 40, the Professional Governance Act. I do note that I was participating in the previous incarnation of this bill, Bill 23, which was introduced back in 2022, and it's come back here now in 2025. Hopefully, some of the issues that we did see from the original Bill 23 have been resolved. There were lots of issues around consultation, especially because this is such a wide-ranging act. It's dealing with 22 different professional regulatory organizations, PROs, plus others that were already in existence. So, you know, it needed to be canvassed properly by all of these organizations. These are professional organizations, as the minister mentioned, that deal with an incredibly wide range of regulations and different professions in our society that help to make Alberta function. To do that right I think is important, and for us to debate this properly is important, too, thoroughly and investigatively so that we make sure we do get it right this time around.

I've noticed that Bill 40 has, from 2022 with Bill 23, gained quite a lot of weight, you know, as things do gain sometimes over the passage of time. This current version of the bill is 213 pages, Mr. Speaker, so it's like a short novel, really, and I think we need to take our time to debate this properly. Certainly, the earlier incarnation, Bill 23, had been described as convoluted, heavy handed, overreaching, and so forth, and a number of different professional organizations did have some serious concerns. The bill did die on the Order Paper back in October of 2022. It is reincarnated in a slightly heavier form here today, and I'm happy to be debating it.

In my mind, the key to the success of Bill 40 will depend on allowing the professional regulatory organizations to develop regulations and to develop standards that are in line with their core mandates and values as professional organizations, from architects to urban planners to shorthand writers to, you know, I think home economics is in there as well. There's a list of so many: veterinarians, landscape architects, agrologists, land surveyors. Who knows best in each of these 22 organizations but themselves how to maintain the integrity of professionalism in each of those associations and to make sure that the standards are being met not just on an ongoing basis but standards on a national or international basis to make sure that we are following the law and have a gold standard for our province that's recognized around the world?

I think this is a great opportunity for us to streamline some of these professional organizations across different jurisdictions as well. There's a lot of talk about that now with tariffs and for us to look east to west, north to south within our sovereign Canadian region to allow for greater mobility for labour. This is another way by which we can do so, I think, by looking at professional standards and making sure we look across borders, provincial and territorial borders and international ones, too, to make sure that each of these groups have standards that are in keeping with the rest of the world.

5:20

Another thing we've got to make sure we're looking for with this process, I believe, is allowing for the autonomy and the identity of each of these organizations and the professional autonomy and identity that they have grown from. Some of these, you know, organizations are more than 100 years old, right? Some of them are very large, like APEGA. It has its own corporate structure and many, many dozens of workers, and some of the other ones are volunteer organizations that just do that off the side of their desks. We have to respect each of the traditions that all of these professions are coming from and make sure that we're not burdening them with unnecessary expense and bureaucracy as well.

When I look through, you know, I haven't spoken to all of the 22 different organizations yet, but some of them have been voicing concerns already in regard to, first and foremost, the cost of implementation and the transition to this new regime, right? As I said, some of these organizations are entirely voluntary and have limited resources. So we have to make sure we're supporting them, not just to implement Bill 40 but to reach to their membership and to reach into the postsecondary institutions that support some of these organizations, too.

I mean, it's no coincidence that this act is brought forward by Advanced Education. I think that is appropriate but only if we are making sure we are supporting the interaction between a professional regulatory organization and the different faculties and professional education that each of our colleges and polytechnics and universities do to support each of those professions as well.

It's good to say it, you know, but we have to back up these things with finances and resources and, again, that professional integrity to recognize what's done in a school and is taught at a standard at a school and then maintained by the standards of a professional organization and to recognize and respect those organizations every step of the way.

Cost is one, for sure – right? – as it always is. A second one that I've heard already from some of these smaller organizations especially is the clarity on how professional expertise might be honoured and reflected in regulation. Of course, this is such a vast piece of legislation, as I say, 213 pages, and there will be even more in the regulations.

You know, we have to make sure that writing the regulations with each of the professional bodies is absolutely paramount, not just to be respectful but to also make sure we catch all the details that should be contained. Yeah. I mean, the scale is huge. There are more than 75,000 professionals that would be affected by Bill 40. We have to make sure that we get it right.

You know, in second reading the procedure in the House here is for us to consider both sides of the possibility, which is to vote or not vote for something, and to make sure we know what we're voting for. So I have a number of questions that I would like to bring forward to the minister and her staff. If we could just maybe work through that, it'll help us in our caucus to decide what to do with this bill.

The first question I have is in regard to the ombudsperson – right? – that we do currently have in regulation. Currently there's an Ombudsman that deals with four regulatory bodies. Maybe I can already answer this question myself, but would we extend the

power and the use of an Ombudsman to all of the 22 bodies that would be encompassed by this new Bill 40? Is that going to be part of what the new regulation is? Did I read all 213 pages? Well, you know, almost, but I didn't see that one in there yet, so I will ask that question. Will the powers of the Ombudsman be extended to all regulatory professional organizations that are covered by Bill 40?

My second question is in regard to: are the regulated professions such as lawyers, teachers, doctors, and nurses going to be, at some further point in time, considered to be moved into Bill 40? I know that they are excluded from Bill 40 at the present time, but you know there are some serious concerns, I think, about some of these other professional organizations like lawyers, for example, and doctors and making sure that they have the autonomy to regulate their professions without fear of an external body reaching in to change decisions that might be made.

I'm thinking of the Law Society in particular. We know that the Law Society does govern the professional conduct of lawyers here in the province. We had some, I think, considerable controversy around the government intimating that they would try to influence the decisions of the Law Society around certain cases such as the former minister Madu's case, with him contacting the police chief and so forth. It brought to light just how important it is to have independence and autonomy around the regulation of professional associations.

I guess I should rephrase the question to say that the lessons we learn around government overreach we have to make sure we build into Bill 40 for all of these organizations, to make sure that they have the autonomy to be able to conduct disciplinary proceedings and so forth without fear of government reaching in and overreaching in to their professional body.

At this point in time I don't see lawyers, teachers, doctors, nurses, LPNs, and so forth in Bill 40. Are they going to be? Is there a framework to move more professions into Bill 40, professions such as these, at some future time? I'm sure there are lots of people who would like to know that.

The third one I had was: the issues around Bill 23 back in 2022, were they considered and rectified in Bill 40? I remember the debate around overreach and cumbersome law and so forth in Bill 23. Was that considered when building this new bill that we have before us today? Of course, the best thing we can do in life generally is to learn from our mistakes, so I'm hoping that maybe Bill 23 did influence its shortcomings, did influence the construction of this bill here that we have before us today.

The fourth question I have is in regard to amalgamating or relinquishing licences of any professional regulatory organizations. If I can just draw your attention to – you don't have to look right now – page 158 of the bill talking about offences and penalties surrounding not complying with Bill 40. I noticed that the schedule for offences is quite a lot of money, right? For a first offence, a fine of not more than \$5,000; second offence, \$10,000; third, \$20,000, I mean, \$50,000 for some entities, \$100,000 for third offences of certain entities. You know, I just want to make sure that we're not building a structure that would overwhelm a smaller voluntary organization with some of these penalties that I do see here. We want not to reduce the professional organization landscape in our province but, rather, to strengthen it and to modernize, as the minister said, which is awesome. But, you know, if we have these heavy-handed penalties built in that could overwhelm some of these smaller organizations, then I don't think that's a good idea, basically.

5:30

Another question I have is in regard to society and – maybe I'll skip that one because I'm running out of time here.

Another one is the role of colleges and universities – that’s a good one – and polytechnics in regard to supporting Bill 40. Now, obviously, many of these professional organizations derive their membership from, you know, an engineering degree or an architecture degree or something like that. So are we refreshing the interaction between our polytechnics, universities, and colleges with Bill 40 to make sure that that interaction is strengthened and that people have resources to be able to do that? I mean, sometimes we lose the connection between our schools. Now more than ever, with stagnant funding of our colleges, universities, and polytechnics in the province for so many years now, may be a good chance, through the professional regulatory organization, to refresh and strengthen those connections. Just a sense of reassurance, too. You know, so many of these different faculties have been cut so badly. They don’t just lose money; they lose confidence and self-respect, right? So if we can try to turn the corner on that by saying, “Hey, you are a big part of how we regulate our professional organizations in this province,” then maybe that’s a good first step to reconciliation.

Another one that I was thinking about is fees around professional organizations. I know that a lot of these professional fees that are charged by various organizations have gone up quite significantly over the last number of years. It becomes a burden for professionals to have to pay these fees every year and sometimes to update and write exams and so forth, too. I’m just curious to know if there is proper regulation around increases to professional fees and to upgrading of skills and so forth so that this is not an extraordinary demand put on, you know, a population of whatever organization it happens to be and making it unaffordable to be the professional you’re trained to be kind of thing. I think that some regulation would be appropriate at this point in time. I talked about it in my opening comments, but I’ll bring it back again. I think that it’s important for us to look at Bill 40 in regard to labour mobility and to allow that people from different provinces and so forth can move to and practise in Alberta with less cumbersome application for their, you know, standards or their professional credentials to be recognized and so forth. I think that’s a good move to do at this point in time, especially.

Another one that I wanted to look at here, over on page 169 of the bill – let’s just turn to that now. I’m sure you all are turning there as we speak. Page 169 is in regard to bylaws and the making of bylaws. Again this goes back to, you know, the integrity of a professional organization to look after and to have initiatives and move along as they see fit as an organization. So I wanted to ask: how far and how much does a minister have to reach into bylaws to change them or to compel a professional organization to change their bylaws? I mean, I know that there’s a great hue and cry around equity and diversity and inclusion – right? – these days with the American government, especially, hunting down EDI provisions in schools and businesses and so forth. I have seen it here in the province of Alberta, too. We’ve seen both the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta changing their equity, diversity, and inclusion standards and emphasis and some board members appointed by this UCP government somehow suggesting that we should water down or eliminate equity, diversity, and inclusion in our schools.

I just wanted to ask a question around the minister’s ability to reach into the bylaws or the focus of different organizations covered under Bill 40, you know, to ensure the integrity of the independence of them to be able to maintain initiatives like equity and diversity and inclusion if that’s a choice that a professional or an organization is making. I think that’s worth while thinking about.

As well, in regard to – I just have on page 93 of the bill, if we can all turn to page 93, please – discipline and tribunals.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Is there anyone else wishing to speak? I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to speak to and support Bill 40, Professional Governance Act. Just like many of our other bills the government has passed, this bill is about making simple changes which will significantly impact Albertans. I would like to congratulate the Minister of Advanced Education, her officials, and the relevant provisional associations who have provided their input in making this bill possible.

[The Speaker in the chair]

This legislation will help ensure that our professionals operate efficiently to provide top-quality services for Albertans, further highlighting our government’s commitment to making Alberta the best place to live, work, and raise a family. If passed, this legislation would consolidate and streamline each of the nine separate pieces of professional governance legislation into one, making it easier for Albertans to access and understand the governing and regulatory rules associated with different professional associations.

By streamlining these regulatory provisions, this bill would provide clarity and consistency by holding all professional regulatory organizations to the same high standard of practice, especially when dealing with members of the public. This legislation is about common sense, accountability, and red tape reduction, a significant priority for our government. Albertans expect professionals like engineers, veterinarians, accountants, and architects to be held to high standards of practice, and that is exactly what this bill ensures.

It’s worth noting that this follows – you know, not a lot of jurisdictions have done this type of thing, although British Columbia did do something like this in 2018, and Australia in 2013. Both balance uniformity with flexibility for professions’ specific rules within the regulations, so, you know, the flexibility will be in the regulations.

If passed, this legislation will reduce unnecessary duplication, confusion, and inefficiencies, allowing our professional regulatory organizations, or PROs, to focus on what truly matters, protecting the public interest in maintenance of high standards. By bringing nine separate acts together under one clear framework, this bill will ensure consistency across all regulated professionals governed by Advanced Education. This approach makes it easier for these organizations to operate effectively while still maintaining strong oversight.

Mr. Speaker, when we delegate self-regulatory responsibilities to these professional regulatory organizations, it embodies trust in our professionals, which carries a high sense of responsibility on their part. We trust our professionals to uphold high standards, but we also recognize that they need the tools and flexibility to manage their members effectively. This bill gives the professional bodies the autonomy to pilot their affairs to ensure they can adapt to any changes and challenges unique to their profession without unnecessary government interference. By giving professional organizations more control over their bylaws, governance structures, and internal policies, we are delegating more authority to them, allowing them to focus on what they do best, ensuring their members meet high professional standards and provide top-quality services to Albertans.

Under the current professional regulatory system, these organizations are expected to navigate excessive layers of bureaucracy, wasting time and resources. No one benefits from confusing, inconsistent, or inefficient oversight mechanisms. This bill introduces

a modernized framework which makes professional regulation more fair, clear, and transparent through the standardized approach, making it easier to resolve complaints quickly and fairly.

If passed, this legislation will give the PROs access to an alternative complaint resolution mechanism capable of eliminating the need for lengthy investigations and hearings with the Ombudsman, providing an additional layer of oversight when required to do so. This legislation strikes a balance between protecting the interests of both the professional bodies themselves and the public interest.

5:40

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that this bill comes following an extensive consultation process, which involved engagement with the professional regulatory organizations to ensure this bill reflects their needs and concerns. Since 2023 this government has consulted professionals, accountants, engineers, veterinarians, other professionals to craft an effective, practical, and fair bill. Our efforts have resulted in Bill 40, a modern, streamlined approach to professional regulation that enjoys strong support from the industry.

We are not here to micromanage professionals. We are here to empower them while ensuring they continue to serve Albertans with integrity and excellence and let them focus on delivering high-quality services rather than navigating outdated and complicated regulations. By consolidating these nine acts into a clear framework, we are strengthening self-governance and giving PROs more control over their own rules and ensuring fairness and consistency in professional discipline and complaint processes.

This is exactly the type of common-sense governance that Albertans expect from their government. It's about accountability, efficiency, and fairness, ensuring that regulated professionals can operate with clarity and confidence while maintaining high standards of practice. I therefore call on all members in this Assembly, including members opposite, to support and vote for this piece of legislation, the Professional Governance Act, which will benefit professionals, businesses, and Albertans alike.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Ip: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to address Bill 40, the Professional Governance Act. I think it's, frankly, a very opportune time to talk about this. To begin, as members of this House have already referenced, this piece of legislation would bring nine pieces of legislation and 28 supporting regulations that govern 22 professional regulatory organizations, or PROs, under one unified framework. I think that is important.

Given that we are in the second reading, I think it's the appropriate time, frankly, for us to debate and talk about how we can actually improve upon the bill. So I'll take my time, Mr. Speaker, or the time allotted to me, to parse through the bill, and I have a number of different questions to raise with the government. Before I do so, I think it's actually particularly appropriate given the political environment that we're in to really set the stage because I think this bill potentially could be an opportunity for us to address interprovincial trade barriers. While there are some housekeeping pieces and pieces to ensure that there's a unified framework with PROs, I also think, given the political climate and the external threats that we're facing south of the border, that we should actually also use this as an opportunity to talk about some of the barriers existing within our own country.

I'd like to begin that discussion by referring to an article, if I could, Mr. Speaker, put together by the Public Policy Forum. I'll

read it into the record because I think it's particularly appropriate, in which the Public Policy Forum talks about the specific issue.

Interprovincial trade barriers have . . . been a frustration and drag on the economy. Donald Trump's trade war could change that. Interprovincial trade barriers are a long-standing problem . . . They have been a focus of frustration and a drag on productivity – costing the country as much as 4 per cent of real GDP per capita. In the turmoil sparked by Donald Trump's trade war, these barriers are suddenly being looked at with some urgency.

The article goes on to ask:

Could lifting these unnecessary barriers ease at least some of the pain inflicted by tariffs?

The Public Policy Forum specifically talked about in this article, which I will table, Mr. Speaker, at a later date, different forms of barriers, and one of them is different trade and professional licensing standards from province to province. For example, dental hygienists must recertify if they move from Alberta to Newfoundland and Labrador. There are also buy-local procurement restrictions, varying product standards and business fees, and even, famously, a ban on direct-to-consumer shipments of alcohol from other provinces. This is just Atlantic Canada alone. If you live in P.E.I. and want to order a case of Chardonnay from another part of the country, well, too bad.

There are significant interprovincial barriers, and they existed initially to protect jobs, but the reality – and I think this has been something that various governments have not been able to solve – is that they exist to protect jobs, but they are also a significant drag on economic growth and productivity and hinder the free movement of labour.

It's really from that lens, Mr. Speaker, that I'd like to approach this piece of legislation. I'll maybe start by providing a little bit of history and going from there. This government did introduce Bill 23, the Professional Governance Act, in May 2022, which later died on the Order Paper as the Premier was sworn into office. Bill 23 proposed to consolidate the nine acts that govern the different PROs and 22 nonhealth PROs to provide a consistent framework that will carry out governance, registration, and address professional conduct as part of streamlining and reducing some additional barriers.

However, as we know, Mr. Speaker, there was not adequate consultation at that time. I am glad to see Bill 40 come forward because I think some of the overhaul around professional governance organizations is overdue. While Bill 40 aims to bring significant changes for a number of Alberta's professional regulatory organizations, including accountancy, engineering, geoscience, veterinary medicine, architecture, among others, I know that there continues to be some concerns from stakeholders. I will continue to consult with stakeholders and continue to review all 213 pages of this legislation to understand its full impact. I think, given that we're in second reading, this is a great opportunity to do that and to see how both sides of the House can all work together to strengthen this piece of legislation.

If this legislation is passed, this would mean, however, that certain professionals would face stricter reporting and compliance requirements. I know that some stakeholders have expressed concern around the administrative burden this will mean for them. To the government: I wonder whether you have considered ensuring that there is a balance, that there is, of course, appropriate oversight, accountability but that there would not be the unfortunate administrative burden that would hamper productivity or in some cases labour mobility across provinces.

I also want to shift gears a little bit and talk about why professional regulatory organizations are so important to Albertans. I'm sure members of this House already know PROs do a lot of the

work in regulating different industries and in keeping their particular members and professions accountable to a high standard.

5:50

A number of different PROs are included in this bill, including the Alberta Assessors' Association, Alberta Land Surveyors' Association, Society of Local Government Managers of Alberta, the Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals, all very important organizations, not just for the professionals that it regulates but for the functioning of our economy and Alberta and, frankly, the functioning of society. These organizations are responsible for delivering services that protect the environment as well as the economic interests of Albertans. Each organization holds the responsibility for the governance, registration, conduct, and discipline of their registrants. Currently each organization governs and operates independently of one another and really does its very best to serve Albertans to its higher standard. I certainly in this debate want to give my shout-out to these fantastic professional regulatory organizations that do their work every single day to serve Albertans.

I do want to, however, talk about some of the concerns raised by stakeholders that seem to exist in Bill 40. While I appreciate that after the defeat of the previous iteration of the bill this government has come back with a strengthened bill, I don't think we're quite there yet in terms of ensuring a comprehensive bill that addresses all of the concerns. One of the concerns that I have been made aware of is that there is a lack of consistency within the framework for professional regulatory organizations in the sense that this bill emphasized collaborating with PROs to develop regulations and schedules to maintain consistency, but some of the feedback that I'm aware of is that it's not consistent throughout the entire bill.

So while this bill allows PROs to retain their core mandates and responsibilities, I'm not sure whether this bill has done enough to address some of the administrative burdens and replace outdated provisions with modern practices. One particular example of inconsistency is the issue of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman only sort of addresses four regulatory bodies. Will the government continue to sort of work on this particular aspect of the bill so that the Ombudsman has oversight on all regulatory bodies?

Another inconsistency for PROs that I see is the lack of settlement or mediation available for these organizations. This bill does give PROs the tools of mediation and settlement – actually, what's not clear, rather, Mr. Speaker, is: will this bill give PROs the tools of mediation and settlement so that any sort of challenges of disagreement or conflict can be addressed internally within these regulatory bodies rather than going through the court system? This bill, according to my reading anyways, is unclear whether tools of mediation and settlement are addressed there adequately.

I also want to talk about the fact of Alberta's booming population growth. We know that we are leading the country in many ways in terms of interprovincial migration as well as migration from other countries. There are lots of newcomers, which is great for Alberta. However, we also know that Alberta newcomers, particularly Alberta newcomers who have a professional background who are educated in another jurisdiction, face some of the highest barriers

to be able to have their credentials recognized and to be able to work in their field of training. Unfortunately, Alberta is actually lagging behind the rest of Canada when it comes to the acceptance of foreign and interprovincial credentials.

In doing just a really quick scan, I want to refer to a number of different things that other jurisdictions have done. For example, in British Columbia they have established the Office of the Superintendent of Professional Governance, which has been amended in 2022 to incorporate Indigenous traditional knowledge and update the disciplinary process. Manitoba introduced the Regulated Health Professions Act in 2009, which consolidated 20 acts of governance under a single framework. Both of these pieces of legislation, in my understanding, have also addressed some of the interprovincial barriers in terms of credential recognition and have been able to expedite the recognition of credentials from foreign-educated professionals.

I would submit to members of this House as well as encourage the government that as we look at potentially improving upon this bill and looking at the next iteration, are we doing enough through this specific piece of legislation to reduce interprovincial barriers, particularly around the . . .

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a beautiful day, a wonderful warm day outside to be able to speak about this incredible bill, Bill 40, the Professional Governance Act. But while I'm speaking, just to wrap up the day, I just want to give the minister just a few accolades here. She took the big challenge. She took multiple acts. It was incredibly complex given all of these regulations as well. I believe there are 28 different regulations. She was able to bring that into a single act for 22 different professional governance bodies. This is a big freaking deal. This wasn't just a simple bill to put together. This is a complex bill, a big deal. An incredible minister, who has really just stepped up to the challenge.

Not only that; as we were going through some of the challenges, working through with some of these different agencies, the minister was well at our disposal, letting her team engage as well as trying to solve the problems and step up to the plate and be able to take those concerns, answer them, and be able to work with her team. I just saw this just as a huge win as we step forward. Thank you for your humbleness, and thank you for just taking that complexity and making it into a really simple although very big and long bill.

I see this bill as in a couple of ways just being really fantastic for families. We'd be able to see how people can get to work, be able to give this clarity on that. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta advantage is about family. It's about bringing opportunities to people and giving people the opportunity to work. I speak about this all the time. That's what this bill is at its core, the opportunity for people to go and work, and I'm thankful for it.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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