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The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, March 24, 2025

Day 90

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, March 24, 2025

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening, hon. members. Please be seated.

Committee of Supply

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

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

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

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

Finally, as provided for in Government Motion 60, approved by the Assembly on March 20, 2025, the time allotted for consideration is three hours.

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2024-25 General Revenue Fund

The Chair: I will now recognize the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move the estimates.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move the 2024-2025 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund. In total the supplementary supply estimates will allow additional spending by 11 government departments and transfers of spending authority between six departments. If passed, the estimates will authorize approximate increases of \$470.3 million in expense funding, \$3.9 million in capital funding for the government, \$18.3 million in other financial transactions, and \$148.2 million in transfers between six departments.

The estimates include additional funding for the following government departments: Arts, Culture and Status of Women; Energy and Minerals; Environment and Protected Areas; Forestry and Parks; Health; Immigration and Multiculturalism; Indigenous Relations; Jobs, Economy and Trade; Municipal Affairs; Public Safety and Emergency Services; and Technology and Innovation.

The funding in these estimates will support a variety of programs and services, with the largest portion relating to wildfire disaster response. As many can appreciate, the 2024 wildfires, especially those in Jasper, required significant funding to support the firefighting efforts and keep community members safe. The great majority of the rest of the requested funding relates to spending off-set by dedicated revenue, mainly from the federal government. Supplementary supply requests off-set by revenue include \$218 million in expense, with \$251 million of the other \$252 million in expense for wildfire response, and \$4 million in capital investment for early learning and child care IT systems.

The fire season in 2024 was not as extensive as the 2023 record-breaking wildfire season in Alberta. However, thousands of Albertans were still evacuated from their municipalities, and hundreds of homes and commercial buildings were destroyed. The worst damage occurred in the town of Jasper, where about one-third of the town's buildings were lost to a massive firestorm. In response to these devastating wildfires throughout Alberta the provincial government matched donations to the Canadian Red Cross and provided short-term financial assistance, accommodation support, and tax relief to affected residents and businesses across the province. Forestry and Parks requires \$251.4 million more along with \$455.4 million from contingency, which will provide a total of \$706.8 million in expense for wildfire support.

The next largest expense request is from Jobs, Economy and Trade, which requires \$91.6 million in expense funding. Together with \$15.6 million from other programs this will provide \$107.2 million for the ministry's child care program. The department is also requesting \$3.9 million in capital investment funding for the early learning child care IT system to transform it to a more user-friendly and efficient web service.

Moving to the next ministry, Public Safety and Emergency Services requests the supplementary amount of \$45.5 million. Of that, \$2.1 million will go towards fighting organized and serious crime under the federally funded gun and gang violence action fund. An additional \$43.3 million is requested for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency for the Jasper wildfire. This is fully off-set by federal funding through the federal disaster financial assistance arrangements.

Energy and Minerals is requesting \$41.7 million for cost of selling oil due to higher crude oil volumes and higher transportation and marketing costs. This increased expense is off-set by increased crude oil royalty revenue.

Health. Our government is building a refocused health care system to provide Albertans with access to high-quality, reliable services close to home. The refocusing provides targeted specialized care in four areas: acute care, primary care, mental health care, and continuing care. Health requests the supplementary amount of \$26.2 million to provide for expanding access to family health services. This includes \$25.6 million for the initiative to expand integrated supports for vulnerable and underserved Albertans. Another \$600,000 is required to enhance access through a virtual care program initiative fully off-set by federal revenue from the working together on shared health priorities bilateral agreement.

Other funding is requested to provide for various services and initiatives. Technology and Innovation requires \$15 million to meet a financial commitment made to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation in 2020-2021 for recapitalization. Indigenous Relations requests \$3.3 million together with \$4.1 million made available from lower than budgeted expense in other programs to provide \$7.4 million for infrastructure projects. These projects support Indigenous communities and initiatives funded from the investing in Canada infrastructure program. Environment and Protected Areas is

requesting \$3.3 million for obligations to remediate contaminated soil and groundwater at various sites.

Two notable transfers are needed from Health to Mental Health and Addiction and transfers from Arts, Culture and Status of Women to various other ministries. Mental Health and Addiction is requesting a transfer of \$137.5 million for indirect costs related to addiction and mental health treatments and services such as pharmacy and laboratory services, laundry and food services, and corporate services. Arts, Culture and Status of Women requests the transfer of \$10.7 million to four partner ministries for the prevention of family and sexual violence program. This program is funded by the federal government under the national action plan to end gender-based violence. The ministries requiring the transfers are Children and Family Services, Indigenous Relations, Justice, and Advanced Education.

The amounts in these supplementary estimates are needed to address the key priorities of Albertans. With this support we're keeping communities and Albertans safe. We continue to refocus the health care system, and we are ensuring that the work of our government centres around meeting the needs of Albertans. My colleagues and I will now be pleased to answer questions from committee members.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right. We will go to the first round of questions from members of the Official Opposition for the first 60-minute block.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. You can speak up to 10 minutes at any time. Please go ahead.

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Oh, sorry. Hon. member, I'm going to pause your time just for one minute.

Just before we start, I'd like to recognize the Ministry of Finance department staff. We have Kate White, the Deputy Minister of Finance, and James Forrest, the senior executive director of budget development and planning.

I will now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much. I'd like to ask just a very few questions. First, on page 34 it indicates that of the \$26.2 million, \$600,000 was to enhance access to a virtual care program and \$25.6 million was for expanding supports for vulnerable and underserved Albertans.

7:40

With regard to Health, the working together on shared health priorities bilateral three-year agreement between Alberta and the federal government provided \$285 million for the '24-25 year. This funding is to expand team-based care, enhance virtual care, reduce wait times for CT scans and MRIs, accelerate secure digital health services, expand youth mental health services through school-based and community programs, establish new treatment spaces, and increase access to culturally appropriate Indigenous primary care and mental health and substance use services. It is also to build health workforce capacity and infrastructure. Has the minister used this federal funding to finance the creation of the four new agencies that replace Alberta Health Services? Were any contracts issued using this federal funding? Did any of these contracts go through a competitive bid or RFP process, or was it sole-sourced?

My next question is: how much of this \$285 million from the federal government was used to fund Indigenous health initiatives such as expanding access to primary care in Indigenous communities? How

much was invested in initiatives to build Indigenous health workforce capacity during '24-25?

Next, can the Minister of Health please provide some more information about the types of additional integrated supports for vulnerable and underserved Albertans that were funded under line item 5.2 on page 35? Then, is the federal funding for the shared health priorities also the source of the \$137.5 million expense transfer from AHS Acute Care to Mental Health and Addiction?

I would like to cede the rest of my time to my colleague from Calgary-Currie.

The Chair: Hon. member, did you want a response from the ministers on your questions first?

Dr. Metz: If you could, yes. That would be wonderful.

The Chair: Okay. Why don't we do that and then go from there?

The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Sure. Thank you so much. The \$26.2 million to expand family health services fully funded by the federal revenue was \$25.6 million dedicated to integrated supports for vulnerable and underserved populations and \$600,000 for a virtual initiative. The \$25.6 million and the \$600,000 were actually reprofiled from the previous year.

When you look at the shared priorities bilateral agreement, it was \$240 million over three years starting in '23-24 going all the way to '25-26. So when we look at those years, I can go into a great amount of detail and happy to spend all that time doing that if that's what the member would like. I can go into detail in terms of the details of the primary care specific federal funding. The community health centres was \$30 million. Over the next two years funding will be allocated for four community health centres to support underserved Albertans. That includes The Alex in Calgary, \$11.6 million; CUPS Calgary Society, \$6.6 million; Radius Community Health and Healing in Edmonton, \$7 million; Jasper Place Wellness Centre in Edmonton, \$4.8 million.

The rural health recruitment grant was \$6 million. It will support community organizations and clinics in hiring additional nonphysician team members to increase capacity and improve access within their clinics. The municipality supports clinics grant is \$6 million and will assist rural municipalities or regions to enhance team-based care, allowing them to take over ownership or support the operations of existing primary clinics within their communities.

There is the continuous glucose monitoring, \$29 million, expands coverage for continuous glucose monitors to eligible adults. Coverage has been available for children under 18 since February of 2022. This expanded coverage fulfills a key recommendation from the diabetes working group.

We also have Primary Care Alberta team-based care. That's \$13.8 million. Funding is being provided to Primary Care Alberta over two years to identify new and expanded existing solutions to provide comprehensive team-based primary care services to Albertans through innovative initiatives. There's a primary care mobile health clinic. That's \$960,000. Funding is being provided to Primary Care Alberta over three years for a mobile health clinic. We also have pediatric rehabilitation primary health services, another \$33 million. Funding is being targeted to increase access to community-based care. Budget 2025 continues to invest in primary health care initiatives that improve access to team-based care across the province.

On the \$137.5 million, that is a direct transfer from general revenues of the Ministry of Health or Alberta Health Services to Mental Health and Addiction or Recovery Alberta.

The Chair: Sorry. I just want to interject a little bit to clarify. Hon. member, the minister already, in her comments, said that she was willing to go back and forth on the questioning. I didn't make that clear to you. My sincerest of apologies. I will give you a 20-minute block warning until your 60 minutes is up and keep an eye on the time. You can ask at any time how much time you have left, and we'll go from there.

Dr. Metz: Okay. Just very quickly, then: so none of the federal funding was used to finance the start-up of the four pillars?

Member LaGrange: No.

Dr. Metz: Okay.

Were there any contracts issued using the funding for all of these programs? Was there a competitive bid or an RFP process, or were they sole-sourced contracts?

Member LaGrange: Well, all of the funding agreements that are put in place: there are very strict parameters around the shared priorities bilateral agreement. Any agreement we have with the federal government has very strict parameters around it. As well, we would always follow procurement processes, and my understanding is everything has been followed.

Dr. Metz: Is there a number that can be given for what was given, how much was spent on expanding access to primary care in Indigenous communities? That might be a few of those programs. I'm not sure. Were there initiatives to build the workforce in Indigenous communities?

Member LaGrange: Through the bilateral agreement there was only \$6 million allocated through that federal funding, but because we know that more needs to be done, we actually allocated \$45 million over the course of three years, I believe. Actually, we've added even more into that program funding because we really believe there's more that needs to be done, so we're working very collaboratively with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities as well as the Métis nations to make sure that we're meeting the needs of Albertans.

Dr. Metz: Thank you.

I would like to cede the rest of my time to my colleague from Calgary-Currie.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, which minister would you like to ask questions to, and would you like to go back and forth?

Member Eremenko: I have questions to the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, and if he's willing to share time, that would be great.

The Chair: Perfect. Is that amenable?

Mr. Williams: Sure.

The Chair: All right. Please proceed.

Member Eremenko: Thank you so much. Okay. My colleague from Calgary-Varsity already referenced the \$137 million that has been transferred from Health to Mental Health and Addiction. Right off the top, through the chair, Minister, can you specify how much

of that \$137.5 million was allocated to Recovery Alberta versus to the department generally?

Mr. Williams: My understanding is that these funds are largely to do with laboratory and pharmacy services on one side that would have been combined with Recovery Alberta, corporate services with Recovery Alberta, and laundry and food services as well, largely Recovery Alberta. So largely, Recovery Alberta. I'm happy to try and get detailed numbers if the member is willing to wait.

Member Eremenko: In that case, I'm curious about why the actual overspend, per Budget 2025 on page 165, was \$182.572 million in terms of forecast versus budget for '24-25. Where did the minister choose to cover that shortfall? If the amount being transferred from Health to Mental Health and Addiction, Madam Chair, was \$137 million but the gap between the forecast and the budget was \$182 million, where did he make up that difference?

Mr. Williams: My understanding is that's simply a difference between forecast and budget, which is normal budgetary process. I'm happy to have the Department of Finance speak more to that.

7:50

Member Eremenko: From what I can tell, continuing with care and capital grants underspend between budget and forecast was \$45.2 million, so my concern is that what ultimately has happened in Mental Health and Addiction, Madam Chair, is that they have cut community programs, community services through the 300 or so million dollars remaining outside of Recovery Alberta to prop up Recovery Alberta itself, this new mental health and addiction pillar of the new health care system. Is that the case, Minister? Have you cut community programs to lessen the gap in Recovery Alberta?

Mr. Williams: Not only is that not the case; it's also a budget, not a supplementary estimates, question. I'm happy to answer those on the topic today, but that is not the case as proposed and not on the documents we're investigating today.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Member Eremenko: Okay. Thank you. Let's go back, then, to the \$137.5 million that was transferred from Health. We talked about laundry and food services, pharmacy and laboratory services, and corporate services. Through the chair, has the minister since acquiring Recovery Alberta and since actually launching September 1 – but let's actually look at the whole fiscal year for '24-25. Has there been a net gain in new beds in Recovery Alberta for mental health and addiction spaces?

Mr. Williams: Yes. Of course, there are increases in net new beds, broadly speaking.

Member Eremenko: In Recovery Alberta specifically?

Mr. Williams: Recovery Alberta is always expanding its services. I don't know if there's anything more to add than: yes, there are, of course, new beds added all the time to our services.

Member Eremenko: I guess if we can't look at a specific number in terms of by how much Recovery Alberta has grown since the budget for 2024-25, then why did you need an additional \$137 million? Laundry services strikes me as a pretty fixed and predicted cost. I think I probably would like to see the specific numbers tabled when it comes to how the \$137 million has been spread out across laundry and food services, pharmacy and laboratory services, and then we see a small \$120,000 request for corporate services.

If we can't see a specific increase in beds in Recovery Alberta, then how did you underestimate by \$138 million the cost to actually run Recovery Alberta?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Chair. For clarity this is a transfer from Health to continue operating in the transfer agreement as Recovery Alberta broke out. These are not net new dollars. These are dollars that were being used to run what were Recovery Alberta facilities and programming, corporate services. When it came to pharmacy services, laboratory services, laundry and food services, that existed under the AHS banner previously. With the breakout of Recovery Alberta this transfer was needed to continue funding the operations.

We've made do with the money that has been transferred so we can continue operating our system at peak capacity with the terrific work that our front-line service providers within Recovery Alberta do. Of course, as we see fluctuations for bed usage and increase in capacity, we make do with the money that we have. This money was really allotted previously to AHS through Health. That's why it's a transfer from Health to my ministry for the funding of Recovery Alberta.

Member Eremenko: But addiction and mental health services, when they were under Alberta Health Services, were \$1.1 billion. We're now being told that the budget, the forecast for that same period of time was \$1.3 billion. If it was simply a shift of programs and services previously under Alberta Health Services within Mental Health and Addiction programming, moving that over into Recovery Alberta, why did it suddenly go up by a hundred and – I can't reference the budget documents, but why did it require at minimum \$137 million more for Recovery Alberta to offer the same services that were being offered for \$1.1 billion under Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Williams: This transfer includes money coming, of course, for providing those services. I've also been transferred services as well to provide through this breakout of Recovery Alberta. This is money in addition to what was previously budgeted but transferred out of Health so that we can operate those heightened new responsibilities we have with Recovery Alberta now being established.

Member Eremenko: How much time have I got, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have four minutes left in this 20-minute block.

Member Eremenko: Was additional money required because Recovery Alberta has taken on health care services for correctional facilities? Was that always part of the plan, and is that partly why you require the additional funds from Health?

Mr. Williams: It was always part of the plan to transfer the services within our correction facilities for physical and mental health over. That money has been transferred. Of course, the planning for that had always been considered.

Member Eremenko: Through the chair, why did the minister underestimate the cost, then, when mental health and addiction services were brought under his control during the AHS reorg, launched officially September 1, though I know work was certainly happening before that? Launch of Recovery Alberta was delayed multiple times, and still they missed the budget by 9 per cent. How did it occur? I'm still not hearing it clearly at all. When the government announced the health care reorg, starting with

addiction and mental health services, they said that it was programs and services worth \$1.1 billion. They missed that by 9 per cent. What wasn't accounted for in that initial planning that now requires them to ask for significantly more money to cover the costs?

Mr. Williams: There was no missing or being accounted for. There always was a plan to transfer these dollars. This is a normal process within government when it comes to budgeting, when it transfers between departments, especially when you're doing a massive change and reorganization to refocusing the health care system. This is a tool that we always planned on using, and happily it's going smoothly with the breakout of Recovery Alberta.

We've had terrific buy-in from the front-line staff at Recovery Alberta. We've seen 10,000-plus employees who are working now doing mental health and addiction work as a priority for them. This incredible transition that we've seen, not just today in the transfer of the \$137 million but also the work that's happened since September, is credit to the department within the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction, but also the department staff and those working in Recovery Alberta and those working in AHS. It has been a smooth transition, happily. We continue to provide those services.

Of course, we had a long-term plan to make sure this worked out. Look at the supplementary estimates today, with the transfer that we're seeing of \$137 million. It was always a part of the plan, Madam Chair.

Member Eremenko: Perhaps it has been a smooth transfer of programs and services but at the tune of \$180 million more, Madam Chair. I understand that this is a process that when we exceed our budget, we need to come to this room and discuss approving and voting for an increase in the supplemental.

I think this will be my last question, Madam Chair. I still have not heard any kind of response that if the transition was as smooth and seamless as the minister claims it to be, something like laundry services would cost an additional \$137 million at least and \$180 million at most. I understand that this is the process. It is also my job to ask why \$1.1 billion worth of services is now costing \$1.3 billion under Recovery Alberta.

That's all I have to say.

Mr. Williams: Okay. Again, this is not an increase; this is a transfer of dollars. It's not a net increase. Of course, it's funding services that we always are providing within government. Whether it has the RA or the AHS label on it does not change the delivery of those services, Madam Chair. They must continue.

The Chair: Hon. members, we've completed the first 20-minute block of the 60 minutes from the Official Opposition.

I am seeking any other members from the Official Opposition to join in the debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Who would you like to speak with? Would you like to go back and forth?

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: The Minister of Forestry and Parks.

The Chair: The Minister of Forestry and Parks. Would you like to go back and forth?

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Excellent.

The Chair: Okay. Please go ahead, hon. member.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I'm thrilled that someone took my humble questions during estimates to heart, and some decisions were made. So now I would like some clarification. The supplementary estimate for wildfire presuppression and response is over a quarter of a billion dollars. Can you explain how you intend on discerning the amount?

8:00

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Forestry and Parks.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. When it comes to the budget allocations, the \$707 million in disaster spending on wildfire presuppression and response is funded through contingency and supplementary estimates. Those decisions are made by Treasury Board and do not impact the way Forestry and Parks responds to wildfire emergencies.

The fiscal framework defined in the Sustainable Fiscal Planning and Reporting Act limits in-year expense increases not off-set by dedicated revenue or for emergencies and disasters to the budgeted and voted contingency. Treasury Board determines the allocation of the contingency after consideration of all in-year expenses, increases, and decreases, including their categorization such as those off-set by dedicated revenue or those that are nonvoted, which are noncash or statutory. After consideration of all the in-year expense changes across all ministries, \$456 million of this is funded from the voted contingency while the remaining \$251 million requires a supplementary supply estimate. Again, this is just money that's all part of the \$706 million in emergency spending that was done this past year for wildfire fighting.

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

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll just ask a few more clarifying questions, Minister. Line 2.3, page 31. According to the budget documents this line goes into preparation for wildfires and responses to wildfires. Does this include prevention of wildfires at all, especially on the preparation side, or is this line purely reactive to wildfires?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. That would be mostly reactive, but there are times when we're creating fireguards and things like that that would be for protection of key facilities, communities, and homes and things like that. But most of it is in actual firefighting expenses for battling the blazes while they're happening in an emergency situation.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Minister. Line 2.3, page 31. How much of the \$251.4 million went into the preparation versus response? Was this funding reactive to the threat of a bad wildfire season or just reactive to the actual wildfire once they were already burning? Does this line item exist because the government was unprepared to deal with the 2024 wildfire season?

Mr. Loewen: No. That's not correct at all. What we have is that the initial budget was \$160 million, which was the highest budget allocated for wildfire fighting in Alberta history. That made sure that we were prepared going into the fire season. The \$706 million is costs that are accumulated as we fight the fires throughout the season. They go for things like the contract aircraft, the contract helicopters, and the contract heavy equipment. It includes staffing. It includes supplies and services. It includes grants given for reforestation and emergency fireguards. It's a combination of a lot of things that happen during the wildfire season itself. Again, the \$160 million was the initial budgeted amount for wildfire, and as

we move into the actual firefighting season is where we start spending into contingency.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you. Line 2.3, page 31. Does the government measure how much money is saved in wildfire response by funding wildfire preparation? For example, does a dollar spent on wildfire presuppression save \$2 in wildfire response? Is there any difference in the efficiency on spending on either of these, and how is this calculated?

Mr. Loewen: Well, what we do know is that when we go into a fire season, we don't know what kind of season we're going to have. We don't know where the fires are going to start; otherwise, they wouldn't go anywhere. We react to wildfires as they start, but going into the season, that's where – you know, currently right now we're working on fireguards around communities. We're looking at fuel hazard reductions around communities. That work is ongoing, and we know that that work is proven to be effective. But, again, as we go into a fire season, we don't know where the fire is going to start, so we don't have a calculation of dollar for dollar how that would affect, but we do know that our number one priority is protecting communities, protecting homes, protecting livelihoods of Albertans. We focus our energy on that year-round, and when it comes to fighting fire, then we expend what we have to do to protect those communities and protect those assets.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line 2.3, page 31. What was the timeline for the spending of the \$251 million?

Mr. Loewen: Those expenditures happened throughout the year. Again, as we go into the firefighting season, we have the initial \$160 million that was budgeted in the '24-25 budget – sorry, \$155 million in the '24-25 budget; '25-26 budget is \$160 million. As we go into the season, as the fire season starts, that's when we start accruing those costs. We have those contracts with the helicopter companies, with the heavy equipment companies, with our Indigenous firecrew crews. We have those contracts signed, and going into the season, as those contracts are used and those people go to work, that's when we start accruing the costs into that \$700 million. That would start on April 1, as soon as we have fires that are starting and we're fighting them, and it would continue throughout the whole year. We've been fighting fires all through the winter and then coming into this fire season also.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you. On page 30 the explanation of expense explains that there's \$251.4 million in supplementary supply, was combined with \$455.4 million from the contingency fund to provide a total of \$706.8 million for wildfire presuppression and response. What was spent in the supplementary supply portion compared to the contingency fund? Did specific items come out of the specific funds? How were these decisions made?

Mr. Horner: Maybe just a little clarification for everyone. What we're discussing today is everything that is outside of the voted contingency of \$2 billion. Everything you'll see here today is either disaster spending, which fits our fiscal rules, or it has dedicated revenue. The vast majority of that is through the federal

government, but there are instances, like in energy's cost of selling oil, that there are other ways to have dedicated revenue.

The portion that was spent within the contingency was voted as part of Budget 2024, and it would be discussed in Public Accounts. The minister wouldn't know how to separate those things. It was all wildfire response. This is how it's broke out in the accounting supplementary estimates and what's in the contingency, just for everyone's clarification.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you for the clarification, minister of treasury.

On page 30. Did the minister try to extract more than \$455 million out of the contingency fund, and did the fund run out before wildfire presuppression and response was funded to the level needed?

Mr. Horner: Yes. That's correct. If we could have fit it all in the contingency, we wouldn't be here discussing it.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you. Page 30. Wildfire presuppression and response was not budgeted in the '23-24 fiscal year, but the government spent \$45.9 million. It clearly wasn't budgeted this past year either. Why was this not budgeted last year or the year before, and why is it not budgeted for the '25-26 fiscal year? It seems clear that this has become an annual expense. Is the government going to leave this to the contingency fund again?

Mr. Loewen: Again, I think that's more of a budget question rather than a supplementary supply question. These are standard expenses that we go through each year. In the '24-25 budget we had \$155 million allocated for wildfire going into the season. That allows us to make sure we have our people hired, make sure we have the equipment ready and the contracts ready moving into the season. That takes care of our full-time staff that work year-round on wildfire. As we get into the wildfire season, again, that's where we go into the contingency fund, and that contingency fund – you know, we have supplies and services contracts. We've got our aircraft, both helicopters and water bombers. So that's when we get into the situation we're in now, where we have supplementary supply, where part of our contingency, what would normally be in contingency, has been moved over to supplementary supply. As the Finance minister said, if we could have fit it all in the contingency, that's where it would be. We couldn't, so now we put it into supplementary supply.

8:10

Again, to suggest that we've cut anything – you know, it's not possible to have the highest budget in Alberta history and then be accused of cutting \$45 million worth of spending, so I guess I'm a little uncertain of the line of questioning there. The highest wildfire budget in Alberta history is the '25-26 budget of \$160 million. The second highest was last year at \$155 million. It's actually kind of interesting to look back. The third-highest budget for wildfire in Alberta history wasn't when the NDP was in power; it's actually the budget of 2015 that the PCs brought in before the NDP formed government. Again, we're spending more than we've ever spent before in our budgeted amounts for fighting wildfire. When we look at our contingency spends the last two years, those are some of the highest we've ever seen, too. There are no cuts here. This is business as usual, and it's actually higher than business as usual.

We have night-vision helicopters: things we've never had before. We're fighting fire at night. We have contracts with hundreds of contractors around the province to fight wildfire with heavy

equipment. Again, we keep going above and beyond in wildfire to protect Albertans, and we'll continue to do so.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Madam Chair. Of the \$707 million is there a portion allocated to replace the cabins that burned down in ACFN?

Mr. Loewen: No. That budget will come out of other areas. I know there have been discussions in other departments, but I don't believe there's anything here in this supplementary supply that would cover any kind of cabins or anything like that. Again, there are other funds for those situations. As far as I know, nothing in this budget here.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Great. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister, for your answers.

I'll cede the rest of my time.

The Chair: Just over seven minutes left in this 20-minute block. The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a few questions for the minister of public safety regarding the amounts in the supplementary supply.

The Chair: Would you like to go back and forth?

Mr. Shepherd: If the minister is amenable.

The Chair: The minister is amenable. Please proceed.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you through you to the minister.

My first question is regarding line 2.8 on page 263 regarding the organized and serious crime. I do note that it shows there is a reduction this year in 2025 to 2026 from the . . .

The Chair: Sorry. I hesitate to interrupt. Page 263?

Mr. Shepherd: Page 63. Regarding line 2.8, page 63.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. Regarding, again, organized serious crime, which does seem to show a reduction in spending this year from the 2024-25 forecast. Just through you to the minister: what is the rationale behind this funding decrease? Was the previous funding level a one-time exceptional allocation? Can he clarify the long-term strategy for addressing organized and serious crime, and how might this funding reduction impact the government's approach to gun and gang violence prevention?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much. This is money that we actually receive from the federal government. It is fully off-set by federal funding. The \$2.1 million is a carry-over from 2023-24 funds from the federal guns and gang violence action fund, which will now be spent in '24-25. This actually supports initiatives in Edmonton and Calgary and Camrose addressing the guns and gang violence.

Over the next several years Alberta is receiving approximately \$53 million in federal guns and gang violence funding. We're using that funding to support about 31 initiatives promoting prevention

and enforcement as well as collaboration with engagement, municipalities, local law enforcement partners, and, of course, ALERT, Alberta law enforcement response team.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the minister breaking down that, of course, this is federal funding and a bit of a larger overview about how the dollars are going to be directed in Edmonton, Calgary, and Camrose. But just to clarify again, this does seem to be a decrease overall from the previous year's spend. Was it simply that, in the previous year, the minister had an extra allocation or there was an extra initiative? Could the minister just clarify why there are less dollars being allocated this year than the previous year?

Mr. Ellis: We had a lot of money for last year to spend on guns and gang violence, and this is just money that's been reprofiled into this year. You know, we're looking at all the organizations that I listed here, especially, as the member knows, in Edmonton and Calgary and Camrose. We're making sure that it's being spent appropriately to battle organized crime, and I appreciate the support.

The Chair: The hon. the member.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Well, if we're not going to get a clear answer to that, then perhaps the minister could simply provide a bit more clarity then. Certainly it is going to Edmonton, Calgary, and Camrose for initiatives. Could the minister provide a bit more detail as to the specific initiatives or programs that this federal funding will be supporting?

Mr. Ellis: I mean, we're talking about supplementary supply, and I've given the member the answers to the approximately \$2.1 million. That is money that's fully off-set by the federal government. Certainly, if the member would like to discuss something related to the budget, then certainly that's something we can do, you know, in this Chamber when it's time, or we could add this discussion to estimates as well.

Mr. Shepherd: Again, Madam Chair, I do believe it's related to the budget to ask what the budget is being spent on. That is simply the question that is in front of us. This amount that is here, this \$2,121,000 allocation for the gun and gang violence action fund: are there specific initiatives or programs that funding will be supporting?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. You know, as I indicated, this is \$2.1 million. It is a carry-over from the 2024 funds from the federal guns and gang violence action fund. It will now be spent in '24-25 to support initiatives in Calgary, Edmonton, and Camrose, as I previously stated. Over the next several years Alberta is receiving approximately \$53 million in the federal guns and gang violence action fund, and we're using it to fund and support 31 initiatives promoting prevention and enforcement as well as collaboration with engagement, municipalities, local law enforcement, and as a specific, of course, Alberta law enforcement response team to tackle guns and gang violence.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I suppose that is as specific as we will get.

Then, regarding line 4.4 on page 63, regarding the \$43,358,000 that is set aside for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency related to the Jasper wildfire, can the minister elaborate on the specific costs that are covered by the federal disaster financial assistance arrangements? What are the primary expenses that are being off-set by this federal funding?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I mean, as everyone in the Chamber knows, forest fires can be extremely unpredictable. Certainly we budgeted a certain amount of money, a total budget, I think, of \$149 million for disaster recovery funding, but let me explain. As the member has indicated here, eligible expenses for this \$43.4 million could include, of course, wages for volunteer firefighters, overtime costs for salaried firefighters, municipal staff, structural protection costs, repairing infrastructure and damage as a result of the wildfire suppression operations, as well as reception centre costs like accommodations, food, and, of course, transportation. Again, this is another item here, that emergency management agency, of course, for the Jasper wildfire, and it looks like it is additionally off-set by federal funding through the disaster financial assistance arrangements.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I believe those are all the questions that I had for the minister. We have a fairly small transfer here within public safety, so I do believe I have some colleagues who have some further questions that I imagine will begin in the next 20-minute block.

The Chair: Twenty-nine seconds. That's okay.

We'll add it onto your time. Hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia, which minister would you like to ask questions to?

Member Batten: The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade, please.

The Chair: And would you like to go back and forth?

Member Batten: I would love to go back and forth.

The Chair: Minister, are you amenable?

Mr. Jones: I am.

The Chair: All right.

Hon. Member, please proceed.

Member Batten: Excellent. Okay. Madam Chair, I want to start on page 47, budget line 5.1, the supplementary request for \$91.6 million with an additional \$15.5 million made available from lower than budgeted expenses and other programs to provide a total of \$107.2 million for affordable and high-quality child care. Well, child care certainly would like to see some investment from this government. What strikes me as concerning, Madam Chair, is the piece that shares the \$15.5 million "made available from lower than budgeted expense." Can the minister explain where these resources have come from? And if it were in child care, which part of child care did we put?

8:20

Mr. Jones: That reallocation was from programs under the labour market transfer agreement, so training for work, and some under the Canada-Alberta jobs grant.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Member Batten: Perfect. With the goal of accessible, affordable, inclusive, high-quality child care, when we're looking at this \$107.2 million, recognizing the minister's answer, how much of that is invested looking at early childhood educators? Madam Chair, of course, the research is clear. The quality of the early childhood educators dictates the quality of the program, so of course by investing in our early childhood educators, we are investing in Albertan children. It's really that simple. I'm wondering if the minister can provide any clarity on that, if there's anything of that \$107.2 million that is being used directly for the early childhood educators.

Mr. Jones: The \$91 million is going to support affordable child care primarily through affordability grants, and this is typically funded by carry-over from unspent funds from the federal agreement. The answer to your question is that while we are sustaining the whole system, this particular supplementary estimates is for affordability grants primarily.

Member Batten: Okay. Well, I'd love to hear more about those affordability grants.

Of course, we know – same budget line, 5.1, page 47 – that the removal of the low-income subsidy for child care while claiming to make it more fair has been very bad for Albertans, Madam Chair, specifically for any household with an income less than \$180,000 with children in child care. Now, there are over 70,000 children who rely on that subsidy in order to gain access to what this ministry continues to claim is accessible. To the minister: what specific initiatives are being put in place to address the 70,000 children and their families who can no longer access child care?

Mr. Jones: None of that was related to supplementary estimates, but I'm happy to share that over the last three years we've reduced child care costs for all Albertans by 80 per cent, so on average \$900 a month, \$11,000 per year. There used to be a subsidy program that was for some Albertans for between \$106 and \$266 a month. Again, on April 1 all Albertans accessing licensed child care between zero and kindergarten age will be saving an average of \$900 per month, or \$11,000 per year. In fact, a family with an infant in care in Alberta could save \$21,000 per year. We are not in a position to stack additional subsidies on top of this 80 per cent reduction in the cost of child care. If we could, we would. As the member opposite knows, this agreement has a \$5 billion funding gap projected over the next five years.

My department and I are engaging in good faith with the federal government. We did so with the previous federal minister responsible for child care, Jenna Suds, we did so with Steven MacKinnon for the week that he was in place, and we'll do the same thing with whoever is the next minister responsible for child care. We want this to work, but it has to work for Alberta's mixed-market system, it has to have sufficient funding, and it has to have, you know, characteristics that will make the agreement successful in Alberta.

For example, the current agreement discriminates against 65 per cent of our providers; in other words, it is unfair to private providers and family day homes. Madam Chair, in Alberta these providers all follow the same rules, they receive the same funding, they hire the

same staff, they care for the same children, so what is the purpose of this arbitrary distinction from the federal government? Why do they not want primarily women entrepreneurs caring for children in their homes? Why is there a cap on that? There is actually a cap on the number of family day homes I can create. When there's a child care desert in northern or rural Alberta, the federal government says: "Whoa. It's got to be a big box not-for-profit. Can't possibly be a private child care provider or a family day home." I don't understand that. I also don't understand an agreement that every province and territory says is underfunded. Now, many have signed it anyway.

I am not prepared to build a system that is unsustainable because it's going to ultimately damage parents, educators who are choosing the career path. It's going to damage small-business owners who are taking out loans. We need an agreement that is sustainable for the long term. The federal government has not offered that.

I requested a meeting to discuss this term of the agreement in December. The federal government didn't say anything for a month and a half, and then we get a rushed extension offer. The only difference was a 3 per cent increase in funding in years 2 through 5 of the extension. I called the federal minister. Can we discuss the things we've learned over three years of implementation? Can we discuss the \$5 billion funding gap? Can we discuss the continued discrimination against the majority of our child care providers? Can we discuss how we can't target the benefit to low-income Albertans, how half of the system users in Alberta make over \$180,000 per year? The federal minister said: "No. The offer on the table is the only offer on the table." I said, "Well, then we're not in a position to sign it, which is regrettable." I also think it's tremendously unfair to the parents and workers and child care providers in the system who need long-term certainty, long-term predictability. But I would love to provide . . .

Member Batten: Madam Chair, I do appreciate the minister answering my question; however, I do have more to ask.

Mr. Jones: Hold on. I'll talk about the supplementary estimates if that's what's asked, but you want to talk about anything else? We'll go. We've got lots of time.

The Chair: In all fairness, any one member can take up to 10 minutes in their speaking block. It sounds like things are changing here.

Hon. member, you may continue with questions.

Member Batten: Thank you. Referring to 5.1 on page 47, child care affordability and access, which, arguably, Madam Chair, encompasses most of what the minister just shared with us, I do want to share something that the minister and I agree on. "I think we have to be realistic with finite government resources, federal and provincial, which means that we can't have millionaires accessing the same level of subsidy as single mothers, in my opinion." Now, I completely agree with that. Looking at the supplementals, looking at the additional funds that are being provided to child care for affordability and accessibility, I still have not heard an answer from the minister as to what the government is going to do for the 70,000 children who cannot access child care now. That is directly related to the supplementals.

The Chair: I hesitate to disagree with you, hon. member, but the question has been asked, a response was given, and we're specifically just on these estimates. I appreciate the angle that you're taking, and I have certainly had my own fair share in the days of opposition, but I encourage you to be very specific on this particular matter.

Member Batten: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. As it seems that the relation back to supplementals, even discussing child care affordability and access, which directly impacts whether or not Albertans have accessibility and affordability to child care – I cede my time to someone else.

Thanks.

The Chair: The hon. the minister to respond.

Mr. Jones: Okay. Maybe I need to go further back. Over the last three years we've expanded child care spaces by 35 per cent. There are 35,000 more child care spaces than there were three years ago. We have 60 per cent more children accessing the system than three years ago. Child care is cheaper than it's ever been across Alberta, and, again, we're hitting \$15 flat on April 1. Madam Chair, by all metrics Alberta has done what we've been asked under this agreement.

Now, we've approached the federal government to say: let's build on this success so far; let's do it under a sustainable agreement that will work for Alberta's unique mixed-market system. So far the federal government has said no. Madam Chair, I think this is a situation where the opposition, the NDP, have to choose whether they're going to support the Liberals or Albertans. I'm not pushing any particular ideology or party dynamic here. I'm pushing a system that works for parents, families, and Albertans, and on the other side is an ideologically rigid federal government with an underfunded agreement.

8:30

I would think that this is one area where the members opposite, who themselves put in a \$25-a-day pilot, which, by the way, excluded private providers, which, by the way, did not target the benefit and had the same problems which I've raised today about millionaires having fully subsidized child care and single mothers waiting on wait lists – now that we know that that doesn't work, I think that the members of the opposition could join us in advocating for an agreement, a sustainable agreement that will work for Alberta families, for the providers, for the early childhood educators. I don't see any downside to the members opposite joining me in advocating for that. It's what's best for Alberta.

The member opposite did not ask about the supplementary estimates, but just to be clear, the \$91.6 million is going to be used to support affordability grants to, again, make the system affordable for all families, and this is primarily funded through carry-forward revenue from the federal government, so there'll be no impact to the budget surplus.

An Hon. Member: Do you have more to say?

Mr. Jones: I have lots more to say about the child care system.

First, we know the benefits of child care. Child care enables people to pursue an education. It enables them to participate in our growing and dynamic economy. These are important things right now. For example, we have shortages in the skilled trades, and we know that one of the ways of addressing those shortages is by enabling more women to take up careers in the skilled trades. My colleagues have all done great work, especially the Minister of Advanced Education, on trying to build the skilled workforce and attract more women. Same thing in construction.

Madam Chair, we've been exploring things like child care pilots where we could have a modular child care provider which could be placed near a work site. Imagine that: child care located near an industrial work site, tailored to the hours of the industrial project so that people could go work but also have child care tailored to their hours. I think that's a great idea.

We're exploring more child care in the school settings with my colleague the hon. Minister of Education. Parents have often told me that they would love child care co-located with K to 12 education. As a parent of four I can understand. I spend half my life driving around. [interjection] That's right.

And what else? Madam Chair, Alberta is committed to supporting our child care system, but let me be clear. The child care system does require a willing federal partner, and we hope that the members opposite will join us in advocating for the federal government to meet us in good faith at the table and to provide just that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Just under seven minutes remaining. Hon. Member for Edmonton-South, which minister would you like to talk to?

Member Hoyle: Sorry. They're talking. I didn't even hear what you said. You said how many minutes remaining?

The Chair: Six minutes, 40 seconds remaining. Which minister would you like to talk to?

Member Hoyle: I'd like to talk to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade, please.

The Chair: There are 6 and a half minutes. Please go ahead.

Member Hoyle: Yeah. Through the chair, Minister, do you want to do shared time or blocked?

Mr. Jones: Shared.

Member Hoyle: Okay. Great.

Madam Chair, all of my questions will be referencing page 47 of the supplementary supply estimates, expense vote line 5.1 and capital investment line 5.1. You know, we know that child care is essential for workforce participation, which means higher employee retention, stronger talent pipeline, and greater economic stability, all of which benefit businesses and communities across the province. A stronger child care system means a stronger economy. Through the chair, can the minister confirm – actually, I'll just go back one second here. I'll also refer to page 46 of the supplementary supply notes, that this \$107.2 million is expected to be fully off-set by dedicated revenue. Through the chair, can the minister confirm that the ministry expects to make back this \$107.2 million through child care fees? What else is contributing to the revenue to fully off-set this expense?

Mr. Jones: To be clear, the \$107 million is not from parent fees. It's revenue from the federal government, and it's going to be spent primarily, as I mentioned in my previous answer, on affordability grants. The affordability grants are one of the mechanisms or one of the funding streams that the government provides in collaboration with the federal government to child care providers to reduce the out-of-pocket parent fee. So when I reference an 80 per cent reduction in the monthly cost for the average parent, which, again, Madam Chair, is about \$900 on average per month, or \$11,000 per year, the affordability grant that's provided to the provider is one of the ways that we bring down that out-of-pocket fee for parents.

The \$3 million referenced in the question, the \$3.9 million, is being used to modernize our IT systems. We have a legacy child care system, child care IT back end that we are updating. We're going to have a modern parent portal, a modern ECE portal. We're going to have a portal where parents can register their children.

Member Hoyle: Through the chair, I'd like to just get the minister to clarify one piece of that question that I just asked, please. Minister, you know, coming back to that \$107.2 million, you said that it's not to child care fees. Okay. But I would love for you to expand on what else is contributing to the revenue to fully off-set this expense.

Mr. Jones: There are two things here. There's \$91.6 million in supplementary estimates, and then there's \$15.6 million that we're reprofiling from other programs, which, I mentioned in my first answer, was from underspend in the labour market transfer agreement programs, training for work in the Canada-Alberta jobs grant. Again, all federal money, so this is not going to impact the budget surplus.

Again, these funds are all being utilized to provide affordable child care primarily through the mechanism of funding affordability grants, and the federal revenue is from carry-over funds, from unspent funds in the previous year under the Canada-Alberta Canada-wide early learning and child care agreement, if that's clear.

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Minister. Through the chair, as you know, the government stated its goal to maintain access to affordable, high-quality child care. We definitely need to see more facilities opening up across the province to meet increasing demands as more people move here. I've met with several child care operators and local business owners who have noted that the processing times for the space creation grant used to be seven to 10 days, and now they're seeing delays of over three months. Through the chair: can the minister clarify what the current processing time of the grant is and whether or not the backlog has been cleared? Was a portion of the supplementary supply allocated to the space creation grant, and, if not, what steps are being taken to ensure that business owners have the funds necessary to open their doors and support families and children?

Mr. Jones: Thank you again. That question is unrelated to the supplementary estimates, but I'm pleased to respond. We have made tremendous progress on reducing wait times for licensing applications. First, I should back up. We've added 35,000 spaces over the last three years. Half of those are not-for-profit, about half are private. We're adding about a thousand spaces a month. Can you believe that? One thousand affordable child care spaces per month. How are we doing that? Well, since child care moved into Jobs, Economy and Trade, we have got licences down to 10 days of processing time, surpassing the service standard of 30 days for family day home agencies and 40 days for facility-based providers. The applications in Q3 2024: all licenses took an average of 10 days to be processed. This is the answer to the members. I'm very proud of that. The child care delivery . . . [interjections] To be clear, I do not process anything. It is the Department of Jobs, Economy and Trade and the child care division that is doing fantastic work. But I can confirm 35,000 new spaces, a thousand spaces a month.

We're looking forward to the implementation of the new funding framework on April 1, which is going to increase transparency and predictability.

8:40

The Chair: Hon. members, that concludes the first 60-minute block for the Official Opposition.

We'll now move to the first 20-minute block for members of the government. I see the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. Which minister would you like to direct your questions to?

Mr. Getson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I think I'd like to start off with the Children and Family Services minister, if I may. Back and forth, Minister?

The Chair: Minister, would you like to go back and forth? All right, he's amenable. Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Getson: I appreciate that, Madam Chair and Minister. I'd like to look at page 18 of the supplementary estimates, if we may. Regarding Children and Family Services, I understand the expense transfer requested is \$7,250,000 from ACSW for the prevention of family and sexual violence program funded by the federal government under the national action plan to end gender-based violence. Well, that's certainly a good goal.

Looking at page 19 of the supplementary supply estimates, I see that \$7.25 million is split between two line items, being 4.2, regarding the prevention of family and sexual violence, and 4.3, regarding women's shelters. Minister, could you advise what the \$4.15 million for the prevention of family and sexual abuse is going to address?

The Chair: The hon. minister of children's services.

Mr. Turton: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to that member for the great question. You know, for the last five years or so I've heard that member speak, and I know that he cares about families and kids and women in need, so I very much appreciate his question. The \$7.25 million that the member talked about was part of Alberta's response to the national action plan to end gender-based violence, and that is led by the incredible Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

That \$4.15 million for the prevention of family and sexual abuse does include \$150,000 for public opinion research, \$2 million for prevention programming, and \$2 million for Indigenous-led family violence prevention programming, Madam Chair, because we do realize that we need to do a lot more in order to help out Indigenous families and Indigenous women fleeing domestic violence. That's why I was very happy to see this money get transferred to those programs.

The Chair: The hon. minister – sorry. The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. Don't promote me. No one else will around here, so we're all good for a while. I got called the Speaker once. I got called a lot of things here over the estimates. I think that everyone is getting a little punchy.

Minister, I also note that \$3.1 million for women's shelters. What will the transfer of this voted amount go towards as it relates to women's shelters themselves?

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

Mr. Turton: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair, and again, thank you to the member for that question. To the member, the \$3.1 million for women's shelters: \$100,000 of that goes for women's shelter renewal, and \$3 million goes towards women's shelter programming and support.

Just to touch base a little bit on the \$100,000 for women's shelter renewal, right now we are beginning an initiative called whisper for women's shelter renewal throughout the entire province to look and to make sure that those wraparound supports that women who are fleeing domestic violence need access to are available in their respective areas.

Madam Chair, we realize that women's shelters go from one corner of this province to the other, and making sure that the whisper program or whisper renewal, those wraparound supports are available for women and children fleeing domestic violence is a huge priority for my ministry. Very thankful to see these funds get transferred over from the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status

of Women. We know it's going to make a huge difference for so many women and children throughout the entire province.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to speak to the Health minister, if I can, on this next question. I guess, would you like to go back and forth, Minister?

Member LaGrange: Sure.

Mr. Getson: On page 34 of supplementary estimates, I'd like to look at an expense request for the Ministry of Health. I read that the supplementary amount of \$26.2 million is requested for providing expanding access to family health services priority. Families' health care and expanding access are all things this government has prioritized over the last few years, and I hope it will continue in this party's priorities going forward. Would the minister provide more context on what exactly the family health services priority is and how this supplementary amount will be used to expand to family health services in '24-25?

The Chair: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you for that question. Really, it's about utilizing the dollars that we have to further expand services, so we're allocating those dollars to expand existing integrated health, community, and social service models that deliver comprehensive services and outreach to people facing barriers such as poverty, trauma, and inadequate housing. We know that that's an ongoing issue that we have, and we are already allocating many dollars in that area. These are just additional dollars going into that much-needed area of health.

Additionally, \$600,000 would support ongoing planning for virtual programs aimed at improving access to care, connecting patients with a primary care provider, and enhancing support for patient medical homes. Again, we're looking to make sure that every Albertan has a primary care home. By utilizing virtual care, we can actually expand our reach, so that is something that we're delving into. We're finding great success with that, and we're going to continue to have that ongoing.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Minister. More broadly, would the minister be able to outline the key priorities of the expanding access to family health services priority under primary health care on page 36 of the supplementary estimates, please?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you again. Happy to expand on our access to family health care services, one of the four shared health priorities outlined in the working together federal bilateral agreement. This priority focuses on addressing key challenges, including equitable access to family doctors, rural and remote access, Indigenous health, and integrated models of care, investment support initiatives such as team-based primary health care, flexible service-delivery models that leverage alternative compensation mechanisms, and a range of primary health care providers as well as an integrated approach to prevention and management of chronic conditions and diseases.

Again, we want to make primary care one of our main focuses, one of our main pillars within our health care system because we know if we can keep people well, then they're not going to be going into our acute-care system. Every dollar we spend in primary care, we're going to get a great return on investment. That is why we're

increasing access to primary care and we're really focusing on that pillar.

Mr. Getson: If I could, Madam Chair, the next one would be for the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction. I'd like to take the opportunity to talk about mental health care and addictions. Before I get into it, I'd like to express my thanks for the hard work on this file and all the groups that have been working towards these. It's never easy, but you're doing some good stuff there. Health care is the largest budget expense for our province, and the work that Mental Health and Addiction is doing is truly life changing for so many. We've seen the Gunn centre open up again in my area, and it's having a profound effect.

I see the Health expense transfer was \$137.5 million to Mental Health and Addiction for indirect costs related to addiction and mental health treatment and services such as pharmacy and laboratory services, laundry and food services, and corporate services. What did this funding go to support in '24-25, Minister?

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through the chair to the member, this is going to fund, as the member mentioned, pharmacy and laboratory services, corporate services, laundry and food services within Recovery Alberta. This would affect facilities and programming at the centennial centre in Ponoka, which is a 300-bed facility that deals with some of the most complex cases we have across our province. Huge credit to the work that the staff, the front-line services of Recovery Alberta does there. I've had the opportunity to tour and see that it is life-saving and life-enabling work that happens in Ponoka. I know the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka is proud of the work that they do there, as she should be.

Of course, it also funds the Alberta Hospital Edmonton. This is also an important facility: you know, some of those other incredibly complex cases. Corporate services, lab services, pharmacy, laundry and food services definitely apply to both these facilities in every aspect of the funding when it comes to that \$137 million. I've spoken to the Member for Edmonton-Manning, who has been a very big advocate for that facility as it's in her constituency. At the same time I know that all across northern Alberta it ends up being a place where those who are suffering from diagnosed serious and psychiatric mental illness are able to get access to care that otherwise wouldn't be there.

It's this kind of work that we do here with a transfer that allows that to continue. It includes the southern Alberta forensic psychiatry centre, which does a huge amount of work – I've toured it – forensic psychiatric work as well when it comes to those not criminally responsible, when it comes to working with those in southern Alberta who are in a very, very traumatic and difficult situation.

Sometimes when we talk about all three of these facilities and the services they get – pharmacy, lab, corporate services, laundry and food services – through this transfer, we can see that even those who come in in the Mental Health Act on form 1, when they're committed to involuntary treatment, it's facilities with dedicated professionals that care for this.

I was just speaking to the Psychiatric Association here in Alberta and the work that they do, and so many of the members are emphatic on making sure that we in the province and the government continue to support the Mental Health Act. When it comes to that aspect of form 1 they want to see the mental health review panel working and working to the end of betterment of those who are in these facilities. For all that work to continue, it requires these transfers. It's not always sexy, the dollars and cents that are

required for corporate services, but let me tell you that without that, we don't always have that ability.

8:50

Mr. Getson: Thank you for that, Minister. What is the process by which indirect expenses from Mental Health and Addiction are provided by Health?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Chair. The process is simple. It's this estimates process with supplementary estimate supply that we're doing now. That's how the transfer happens in my understanding of the question. It is absolutely essential for us to provide these services when it comes to Albertans who are suffering in the Alberta recovery model. We have a huge opportunity here to provide care for those who suffer, and it's an incredible increase to our overall budget.

This transfer is a part of that, maintaining, as the breakout of Recovery Alberta happened on September 1, that the funding follows those services that we now provide when it comes to the corporate, laundry, et cetera, that we obviously need to continue running these facilities. I can tell you that the culture shift in work that Recovery Alberta is doing on the front lines is incredible, and I couldn't be more proud of every single Albertan that works in Recovery Alberta and the life-saving care that they provide for Albertans.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to cede the rest of my time to the outstanding Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat if possible.

Mr. Wright: Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Getson: My apologies.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, which minister would you like to . . .

Mr. Wright: I'd love to jet-set to the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

The Chair: Would the minister be amenable to going back and forth?

Mr. Jones: I guess.

The Chair: Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Wright: Wonderful. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade: I'm going to be referencing page 46 of the supplementary estimates. Access to affordable, high-quality child care is essential for families across Alberta and especially in my riding. It ensures parents can be confident in our system, knowing that their children are cared for in a safe and supportive environment.

On page 46 of the supplementary estimates, roughly \$91 million is requested along with \$15.6 million made available for lower than budgeted expenses in other programs to provide approximately \$107 million for the child care program to support access to affordable, high-quality child care fully offset by dedicated revenue. Can the minister please elaborate on this funding and how it will distribute across various child care programs? How will specific contributions to improve access and affordability happen for families across Alberta? Does the ministry anticipate any challenges in implementing these changes? If so, what steps are being taken to address them?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Chair, and through you to the member for the question. As we continue transitioning to a primarily government-funded system, Jobs, Economy and Trade provides funding to child care providers through affordability grants, which lower the cost of child care and support the delivery of high-quality, inclusive, and accessible child care. The approximately \$107 million referenced in the question will be distributed through our existing mechanisms, again, primarily through the affordability grants.

On April 1 government is introducing a more sustainable funding approach for day cares, family day homes, and preschools to reimburse for the reasonable costs of delivering quality child care by region. With these new funding approaches funding will be more streamlined and equitable, with about 85 per cent of daycare providers and the majority of family day home educators receiving increases to their child care fees. These changes will ensure daycare facilities and family day homes have the flexibility they need to deliver innovative, high-quality child care that meets the diverse needs of Alberta families.

To support high-quality child care the government will now be covering approximately 80 per cent of child care fees on behalf of Alberta families through this affordability funding that we provide to providers. We also provide early childhood educator wage top-ups, professional development, and release time funding. We also pay the employer side of the wage top-ups. We make a number of investments across the system in addition to the affordability grants, but through all of these efforts Alberta's government is increasing access to child care, which is essential for Alberta families and helps us continue to grow the economy.

Every day approximately 162,000 children are enrolled in licensed child care across Alberta. Not all of these fall under the Canada-Alberta Canada-wide early learning child care agreement. This would also include out of school care. As we continue to make child care more affordable and accessible for Alberta families, demand for licensed child care is increasing. We've seen the utilization exceed 90 per cent, and, as I referenced earlier, in response the system is adding about a thousand spaces per month. Overall this funding, referenced in the question, will support child care providers in meeting this demand, again primarily through affordability grants, and, again, this money is being provided by the federal government and being carried forward from the previous year.

Through you, Chair, to the member, I hope that answers his question.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Madam Chair. Following up on my last question, the supplementary amount of roughly \$3.9 million is requested to provide enhancements to the early learning child care IT system to transform it to a more user-friendly and efficient website, fully off-set by dedicated revenue. Can the minister, in order for Albertans to gain clarity on accessing child care services, (a) provide further details on the IT system and how it functions? And (b): what are some of the metrics used to monitor the efficiency of this system?

Mr. Jones: Yeah. Thank you for the question. Jobs, Economy and Trade is investing in the modernization of its child care information technology system. I would highlight here that this work is being led by our Technology and Innovation minister and his team, who

do great work, the same team that successfully rolled out the affordability payments a few years ago.

Through streamlined technology systems and processes the ministry is focused on reducing red tape and minimizing the administrative burden for parents and child care providers. This includes the introduction of a new claims system to enable child care providers to submit their monthly claims for child care services as well as wage top-ups and mandatory employer contributions and a child registration system which will strengthen financial accountability for public funds, better monitoring to ensure that programs are delivering child care services that support safety, security, and well-being. Eventually it will give parents clear information on how much government funding they're receiving to reduce their child care fees.

Every piece of technology is being updated and modernized to be more efficient and easier to use and to lower administrative burden but also costs. Again, that tremendous work is being led by our Technology and Innovation minister and his team. A big thank you from the child care team. The unsung hero of all ministries; technology is the backbone.

Thank you to the member for the question.

Mr. Wright: Madam Chair, I have no further questions and would turn it over to the members opposite.

The Chair: Are there any other members of the government caucus – you don't get to decide who speaks and who doesn't; I do – that would like to take the remaining two minutes? It's okay for you to not take the time either, if you like.

Mr. Wright: I'll ask a question, and I'm going to ask it to the Minister of Technology and Innovation. I see on page 66 of the supply estimates that \$15 million is requested for debt repayments to Alberta Enterprise Corporation for recapitalization from 2020 to 2021. Can the minister explain how this additional funding will benefit Albertans?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Technology and Innovation.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm feeling the love tonight. Great question from my colleague. You know, in a nutshell, since its inception Alberta Enterprise Corporation has received commitments of funding from the government of Alberta of \$350 million, but not all of that cash has been transferred to them right at the beginning because in the venture capital business it takes time for you to do your due diligence on prospective investments, so you sequence that investment out over many, many years. They've only accessed a portion of that \$350 million.

9:00

What we found is that in this current period just the timing of the due diligence on a couple of investments was shifted outside of what we had originally budgeted for. This isn't new money; it's just moving from one period forward into another. It's not a new \$15 million; it is just that they're drawing down on an already existing commitment so that they can make their next series of investments.

Now, in terms of how this will benefit Albertans, well, I've said it before; I'll say it again. Alberta's tech sector is booming. We have more tech companies than ever before. They're growing faster than ever before. They're raising more money than ever before. I believe that the work that Alberta Enterprise Corporation's team is doing is in large part responsible for that momentum and that positive

success, so we're pleased to continue working with them on the timing.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Hon. members, that concludes the 20-minute block for the government members.

We will now go to members of the Official Opposition for the next 10-minute block, where you may go back and forth for 10 minutes or blocked five-minute time. Which minister would you like to . . .

Ms Sigurdson: The Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

The Chair: And would you like to go back and forth?

Ms Sigurdson: Yes, that would be lovely.

The Chair: Perfect. Does that work for you, hon. Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women?

Ms Fir: I'll do blocked.

The Chair: Blocked? All right.

Hon. member, you have the first five minutes.

Ms Sigurdson: Okay. That's fun.

I'm going to refer everyone to page 15, line 2.7 of the supplementary supply. It's referring to the investing in Canada infrastructure program, community, culture, and recreation. Would the minister provide examples of how the \$405,000 in supplementary supply is being used to support culture in Alberta? Is this funding for projects that have been endorsed by the province and approved by the federal government but are not yet announced? Interested in what this is about. Another question: now that the federal program is closed, does the minister have a plan to continue to invest in arts and culture infrastructure going forward, and what is that plan?

Also, we have seen losses in funding for the arts and culture. In 2025-26 the funding for arts and culture has not increased with population and inflation, resulting in cuts to heritage funding, the Francophone Secretariat, and other areas of the ministry. This is very concerning. In relation to funding transfer and line 7 on page 15, can the minister confirm that there were no cuts to arts and culture programs in '24-25 to enable this transfer?

Now I'd like to refer to the status of women, same page, line item 7. I'd like to ask about the approach to funding women's services across the government. Looking at Budget 2025 and the supplementary supply, I noticed that, despite having a dedicated status of women portfolio, critical programs that directly affect women are scattered across multiple ministries: \$7.25 million to Children and Family Services, \$1.3 million to Indigenous Relations, \$2.1 million to Justice, \$1.05 million for Advanced Education. Why is this funding for programs that primarily serve women spread across so many different ministries rather than being consolidated under the status of women? How does this fragmented approach affect the government's ability to develop a cohesive strategy on women's issues?

What specific funding and programs related to women's services fall under the status of women's \$19.78 million budget that's identified in the supplementary supply, and how is co-ordination between status of women and the other ministries that administer these programs carried out?

Certainly, we know that women in Alberta would be better served if these programs were consolidated under the status of women and a comprehensive budget and mandate. Why is this not happening? I've certainly heard many stakeholders say how confusing it is and very difficult for them to navigate. Is the status of women just a symbolic office with limited real authority given that most substantive programming for women appears to be housed elsewhere?

Also, I just want to demonstrate that on page 30 the business plan lists outcome 2.4 as "co-ordinate government efforts to implement . . . [a] 10-year Strategy to End Gender-based Violence," yet the funding and service delivery responsibility sits with the Children and Family Services ministry. Why is this critical work fragmented across the ministries, creating confusion and lack of clear accountability?

Another example is that page 35 of the Children and Family Services business plan discusses reviewing and updating government's investment and long-term vision for shelters, key objective 1.4. While Arts, Culture and Status of Women claims to co-ordinate this strategy, which ministry is actually accountable for ensuring women's safety in Alberta?

Also, last year Children and Family Services overspent their budget for 4.2, prevention of family and sexual abuse, by \$2.6 million. So why was this line decreased this year? We know that Alberta has some of the highest rates of family violence in the country. This funding should be increased. Why has it not been increased?

With that, Madam Chair, I'd ask the minister to answer my questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Twenty-three seconds left. Well done.

The hon. Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

Ms Fir: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'll speak to supplementary estimates. That's why we're in the House tonight: for supplementary estimates. If the member opposite had questions related to my budget, she could have attended my estimates. If she was there, she would have realized that many of the questions she's asking were asked in estimates and that I answered them.

Even though it's not related to supplementary estimates, I can't help but to answer her question about why funding is scattered among various ministries and which ministry it is really that cares about women. Every single ministry in this government cares about women, and every single ministry in this budget from this government has funding related to women. But, of course, the relevant ministries with the expertise should handle it. The Minister of Justice should handle matters as they relate to justice about women. The Minister of Health should handle health matters as they relate to women. For her to say that it's causing confusion and fragmentation is false.

But I'll quickly go back to why we're here, supplementary estimates, and list a couple of key points. My ministry with respect to supplementary estimates reflects transfers of federal dollars to partner ministries as well as a cash-flow adjustment on a capital project. My ministry received \$15.7 million in federal funding in '24-25 for programming related to ending gender-based violence. A portion of that funding, \$10.7 million, is being transferred to other ministries for associated programs, as I say, ministries that have expertise in what they do: \$7.2 million to support women's shelter programming, including targeted grants for community capacity building, prevention, and Indigenous-led initiatives through Children and Family Services; \$1.4 million for Indigenous Relations to implement Indigenous-led initiatives that advance

Alberta's MMIWG Roadmap; and \$2.1 million to Alberta Justice to strengthen support for Albertans navigating the justice system, including developing more survivor-centred, culturally sensitive, trauma-informed services.

The remaining \$5 million supported other programs and initiatives to prevent gender-based violence and support survivors. The other changes related to moving cash flows between fiscal years for a federally funded investing in Canada infrastructure, ICIP, project. There is no change to the project overall budget.

The Chair: All right. We'll go to the next 10-minute block with members of the government, should they choose to use the time.

Seeing none, are there any members from the Official Opposition who would like to take the next 10-minute block? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

To which minister would you like to ask questions?

Member Kayande: The minister of energy.

The Chair: The minister of energy. Would you like to go back and forth or block time?

Member Kayande: I would prefer to go back and forth if the minister is amenable.

The Chair: Minister, are you amenable to that?

Mr. Dreshen: Any day.

The Chair: Was that the minister or the one beside him?

Mr. Jean: Absolutely.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. member, you may proceed.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to the minister for going back and forth. There's a \$51.7 million cost of selling oil supplementary supply requisition. I confess that the crude selling functions of the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission is something that my understanding is not very clear on, so I just wanted to ask a few questions about how that \$51.7 million arises. Since we're going back and forth, like: is this primarily volume, or is it price? Are these discounts? Are they transportation fees? Just a little bit more colour if the minister will.

Mr. Jean: All of the above.

9:10

Member Kayande: Is there a breakdown? My understanding of the supply chain is that the royalties are taken in kind. They're taken in kind at the field site. Then they are transported either to Edmonton or to Hardisty. From there they are sold off, very likely to another entity, an intermediary that probably holds the long-haul pipeline space, unless the APMC actually holds long-haul pipeline space itself, either on the Enbridge main line or on TMX.

These are the questions that I'm trying to understand: to what extent there's auditability on the discounts at the various different stages and predictability of those discounts at various different stages and whether taxpayers can receive some insight. That's why I'm asking for the quantum. You know, how much of this \$51.7 million is due to higher volume, which is, of course, wonderful, because it means that we are selling more royalty oil, and how much

is due to actually increased costs, which is maybe a little bit less wonderful and may need to be tracked a little bit more closely?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Jean: Well, first of all, most of it is good news. In fact, it's all good news pretty much, because if we sell more oil, actually, it costs us more money to do business. If we get more profits on oil, we actually get the ability to have more product through the pipeline and vice versa.

In this particular case, there are actually three hubs, one in Saskatchewan as well. Usually brokers take possession at that stage and start, you know, blending it or sending it to different pipelines to the United States primarily or to TMX. I don't know if you're aware of it, but this cap on emissions from the NDP leader and the coalition in Ottawa with our new friend, Carney, will actually really hurt the jobs here in Alberta, really cause a lot of problems. In fact, we will see this price, the cost of selling oil go down even way, way further, because, of course, we'll be making less money. So if you have a chance to talk to Mr. Carney, maybe you could talk to him about that and drop the cap.

Member Kayande: I'm very sorry. I don't have the Prime Minister on speed dial. But I have kept my questions very closely related to the \$51.7 million supplementary supply, and so I would humbly request that the minister answer my questions in the spirit in which they're intended, which is to try and understand the supply chain.

At various different stages of handling the oil, what are typical discounts that we would expect, and how is the ministry tracking those numbers and trying to keep them as tight as possible? I haven't received an answer yet on what the quantum is of how much of this \$51.7 million is due to volume and how much of it is due to price. Again, I would like to get an answer to that question. How much of this \$51.7 million is volume, and how much of it is price?

Thank you.

Mr. Jean: Well, you asked about accountability, and I will tell you that they keep track of every single penny as do all the oil companies at the three different hubs. When it changes hands, of course, they keep track of it and there are accountability mechanisms, but these price changes aren't, you know, from any discount. They're actually from things such as tariffs, trucking costs, which I was impressed that you identified, and other expenses that they've gone through. This increase is actually \$51 million, and there were some savings overall, but yes, the change is primarily due to anticipated oil price revenues being more and costs going up, which is actually good news, because we've had revenues increase. But I answered you the very first time. It was all of the things you mentioned.

Member Kayande: Different entities have different levels of competence and capability at managing crude discounts and have different levels of ability in selling crude. The APMC is responsible for selling our taxpayers' crude that we have as royalty volumes, and they are in a shockingly competitive business taking on the likes of Glencore and Vitol and Goldman Sachs. I think it is a reasonable question for taxpayers to ask: are the discounts that they are receiving on their oil going up against these sharks in the commodity market? Reasonable given the quality of the oil that we are receiving as well as the locational discounts. I'm a little bit disappointed that – like, I'm expecting an actual dollar amount. Of the \$51.7 million how much of that is volume? How much of that is price? I'd just like to point out: the third time I'm asking this question now; I have not received a dollar amount.

With that, I cede my time.

The Chair: You cede your time?

The hon. minister. I suppose there is time. Three minutes.

Mr. Jean: Sure. I think I've answered the question. Thank you very much. It is good news for Albertans. They are receiving more revenues as a result, and the cost is actually minuscule compared to the revenues received by the Alberta government: \$23 billion, \$3 billion from income taxes and more or less \$19 billion from royalties, Madam Chair. They do a great job for us. APMC should be congratulated for what they do. As we move forward and do even more things for Albertans, we will take it very slowly and do a great job for them and make sure that every i is dotted and every t is crossed.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Chair: Order.

Hon. member, there are two minutes remaining in this block.

Member Kayande: That's okay. I cede my time.

The Chair: All right.

Any other members?

Okay. We'll go to the next 10-minute block for members of the government. Are there any members wishing to join this portion of the debate?

Seeing none, I will go back to members of the Official Opposition for a 10-minute block. Seeing any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows. Which minister would you like to ask questions?

Mr. Deol: The Minister of Municipal Affairs. [interjections]

The Chair: Order.

Would you like to go back and forth or block time?

Mr. Deol: Sure. I would like to go back and forth if the minister likes.

The Chair: Minister, is that amenable to you?

Mr. McIver: Yes.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Hon. member, please . . .

Mr. Deol: You may get more time to ask the questions.

The Chair: Wait. Both the member and the minister are going to speak through the chair, I'm sure.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Chair. My questions, through the chair to the minister, are around page 59, line item 6.5, \$9.4 million in capital grants to fund community-based infrastructure projects in municipalities. These projects are apparently funded and then cost shared with provincial governments, so the question around this item is: is this \$9.4 million just price matching to federally funded projects through the investing in Canada infrastructure program? If you wanted to answer this question, then I can ask another one after that.

The Chair: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Okay. I was listening as carefully as I could. I think I got most of the question, Madam Chair. If I didn't, I'm sure the hon.

member will ask me another question in a minute so that I can get it right for him. I think he was asking about the \$9.4 million added in expense to the Canada community building fund. Okay. Well, that is essentially a carry-over. The supplementary estimates for Municipal Affairs asked for this. This Canada community building fund, the CCBF, is federal money that our ministry negotiates with the Canadian government for Alberta municipalities. It's very much a flexible fund in terms of how the municipalities get to spend the money, one of the things that they like the best about it.

In fact, since this particular program with the federal government has been in existence – back, I think, when it first started, it was called the gasoline fund. It was so much per litre for the gasoline sold in Alberta, and it's evolved to the current name. But what's most important here is that it was always flexible until this year. The federal government tried to put a bunch of – really tightly restrict how it's spent. So we negotiated with them. We got the flexibility back.

9:20

All the money didn't get spent this last year, so in order that the municipalities don't lose it, supplementary estimates will have it moved forward to the next budget year. Some of the things that they wanted to spend it on, they were not able to get the money spent, either because the construction didn't have time to get it finished or some other issue. It might have been shortage of labour or materials not arriving right on time. At any rate, we're moving the money forward so that municipalities get full value for what they expect to get from this important program.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Minister. Once again through the chair, I didn't hear it clearly. Like, my question was around if this is matching funding to the ICIP, the federal program. I'll be happy to, you know, get an answer if you can clear it once again.

My next question on this same line item. Through ICIP we would have received \$3.66 billion, and more than 235 infrastructure projects were funded in more than 50 communities. My question through the chair and once again to the minister: can the minister advise how much was invested under the bilateral agreement? And can the minister provide examples of cultural infrastructure projects that were funded under this stream?

I can ask you more questions if you want to answer all together.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Sure. I think I heard some disappointment there that I didn't mention ICIP, but ICIP is another federal program. It's money that flows through. In a way it doesn't really affect our fiscal situation in Alberta because it's money in, money out. The government neither gains money nor loses money, but what's important is that the municipalities do. We administer that for the federal government and get it to the municipalities. Again, ICIP: there's a fair bit of flexibility with the municipalities, too, and we try to be as flexible as we can.

The \$3.7 million in CCBF was carried forward, again, as I talked about earlier. The new management agreement does allow for up to half a per cent to be used for program administration costs, pretty small amount. Unspent administrative funds can be requested for future years and allocated to municipalities if not required to cover administrative costs. That's good news, too, because we do our best not to use any more than we can for administration. Sometimes it even is less than the half of 1 per cent.

The ICIP adjustments, again, are carried forward, \$5.7 million to this year, which is necessary to match the municipal cash-flow

requirements. The cash-flow timing is dependent upon the submission of claims by recipients. The lag time between when the costs are incurred and subsequently submitted for reimbursement impacts the cash-flow projections. The funds not claimed in one year are carried forward so the municipality doesn't lose the money.

It was a straightforward question, and if it sounds like a trick answer, it's not. The fact is that the conditions whereby we carry the money forward for the CCBF turn out to be pretty much exactly the same conditions where we carry forward the money on the ICIP. This is a matter of us making sure the municipalities are whole and don't lose any of the funding that we flow to them from the federal government. That's why we have this supplementary estimate, to make sure that the municipalities don't lose anything.

I think that answers, I hope, some of your question.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Madam Chair. How much time do we have?

The Chair: Three minutes.

Mr. Deol: Three minutes.

Yeah. I can just ask – they're very small questions. I can ask all these questions together so the minister has time to answer all these questions. My question around the ICIP, once again, is: does the province play a role selecting which project is funded under this stream, or is this a parallel decision? Like, who gets the funding?

Also, on page 59, line item 6.5, where did the \$30,000 come from? Which other programs had lower than budgeted expense? It says, "with \$30,000 made available from lower than budgeted expense." My question around this is: which other program had lower than budgeted expense? Why were these expenses lower?

One more question, if you can answer with that. The province has to cost share on municipal projects at a minimum of 33.33 per cent of eligible costs. What rate did the province cost share for these projects funded by this \$9 million?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. the minister.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Madam Chair, the \$30,000 is some operating funds, and again it's the same thing; they are dedicated to the municipalities. If they don't spend it in this year, we go through the process we're going through right now. If it wasn't used last year – I guess it is still this year – it can be used next year and doesn't get sent back to Ottawa or unused by the municipality.

This is simply, all these things here – the supplementary estimates of Municipal Affairs aren't all that exciting. There's not really anything new happening here. It's all money that was dedicated to the municipalities. If they didn't or couldn't or were unable to spend it this year, if we get this approved, it'll still be there for them to use next year, which is starting April 1. I don't know. It's a dedicated revenue program.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

There's no change to the overall ICIP cost for the 13 ICIP projects awarded grants by Municipal Affairs over the life of the program. Municipal Affairs manages the administration of one community, culture, recreation stream project, one green infrastructure project, and 12 rural and northern community stream projects. The city of Red Deer's G.H. Dawe Community Centre

expansion is one of the projects. But what's most important is that they're all projects that the municipalities chose, all projects the municipalities want. We at Municipal Affairs simply do our very best to make sure the municipalities get all that money, which is why we have it brought forward.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We now go to the government side for the next block of questions. No questions from the government side?

Back to the opposition. Any questions? The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. Just to clarify . . .

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Yes. To the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

The Deputy Chair: Back and forth?

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Yes, please.

The Deputy Chair: Is that – yeah? Okay.
Please proceed.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Chair. Line item 3, page 43. There's no specific information about the projects that will be funded to address and prevent violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit-plus. Could the minister please elaborate on what specific projects will be funded?

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

Mr. Wilson: As you know, we have a board set up, the Premier's council, and through that we have a group that comes together. They've gone through our report on how we can protect Indigenous women and girls, and through that they've come up with various ideas of what they can come up with. We've got a road map as they move forward, and we leave it up to them. I put the gas in the bus, but I let them drive it and steer it and decide how they want to go.

One of the things they've come up with is an app so we can trace and track how many Indigenous women and girls are actually missing. It's kind of staggering. Oh, this is horrible. They keep about a three-month track. I believe there are 97 currently in the last three months that have gone missing across Canada. It's a horrible statistic, and we're doing everything we can to try to improve that. One of the big things we try to do is make people aware of what's happening out there because you just don't hear it on the news. It's crazy. If this was happening in other communities, I think it would be the biggest news going. That's why you always see me wearing my red dress, to bring that awareness out there.

Thanks for the question. There are a lot of things that this group is working on right now.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm curious. With this app that will be invested in, will it be connected with the minister of public health and safety to ensure that this app speaks to the police?

9:30

The Chair: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. It was actually developed by a private group, and then we helped them to get the funding to do it. Eventually that's our goal, to connect not only our province but throughout Canada. You may have heard of what we're calling a red dress alert.

That would be our ultimate goal, to create this awareness throughout Canada so that if somebody does go missing, we can put it out on the alert. Then people who follow this app can see a person has gone missing in Maskwacis and somebody can say, "Oh, no; we've seen them in Cold Lake," or whatever, so they know they're all right. But if nobody comes up with an answer, the police have the tool out there to say, "Well, this person was seen here; they were seen there," and we can kind of track it down and hopefully bring people successfully back home to their families.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Minister.

Line item 3, page 43 again. Would the minister provide examples of what projects are going to be funded in '24-25 with the transfer of \$1,363,000?

Mr. Wilson: Can you expand on that? Sorry.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: On page 43 there's a transfer of \$1,363,000.

Mr. Wilson: I don't have that in front of me. Maybe we could talk afterwards. I can get back to you on that one. I just don't have that right in front of me.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Okay. I'll go to my next question, which is line 7, page 43. There are no specificities about the projects that will be funded in terms of infrastructure with the supplementary amount of \$3,353,000 together with the \$4,056,000 made available from lower than budgeted expenses in other programs to provide \$7.4 million for infrastructure projects at the end of the fiscal. Have these projects already been approved? On page 43, line 7.

Mr. Wilson: I'll get back to the first one that you asked, if you don't mind.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Great. Thank you.

Mr. Wilson: The expense transfer is from Arts, Culture and Status of Women for Indigenous women's initiatives to address and prevent violence against Indigenous women and two-spirit people. That was that one.

I believe the other one, if I was listening correctly: we had a decrease of \$3 million to come up with the \$4 million in land and legal settlements to reprofile funds from '24-25. That's for the TLEs, treaty land entitlements for people who don't know, that weren't completed, and that'd be due to the federal government not completing those agreements. We keep the money available so that it can be – an example would be the Lubicon band, where we completed the land transfer there, and then there's monies to go along with helping to do some stuff with them.

There was also a decrease of \$500,000 for First Nations and Métis relations for reduction in federal funding for the employment partnership program. This is a great program. We still got \$4 million there, and we make sure that every penny of that gets out into the communities. A good example of that one is when we did the Cascade power plant out at Edson. Six First Nations were full partners in building a power plant out there. It's providing 8 per cent of Alberta's power right now using good, clean Alberta natural gas.

I'm going to try to make everybody cry right now. There was a young girl that actually came up to me and said that I saved her life, if you can imagine. She'd heard about getting a job, that there

were jobs available and training. So here she was training and apprenticing to become an electrician under this employment partnership program. What a great program, and I try to run that out wherever we can. We always have more people asking for it than what we have money to provide.

Then there was another \$500,000 in your savings for consultation, land and policy for reductions of the Métis credible assertion funding. That's just because they haven't completed their total assertion yet. The money is set aside for them for later on if they do get that completion of the credible assertion.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Would the minister provide examples of what projects will be supported in which communities, again on page 43, line 7, from the supplementary amount of the \$4.1 million that's freed up from lower than budgeted expenses from other programs in this ministry?

The Chair: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Wilson: Yes. That's going towards the investing in Canada infrastructure program. We weren't able to complete those at this time. Due to various reasons the projects weren't completed, so that money is set aside for the following year that we can move forward with some programming there, but at this current state and time there's nothing moving forward.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: I would like to thank the minister and cede the rest of my time.

Mr. Wilson: You're welcome.

The Chair: Another member of the Official Opposition for the last two and a half minutes?

Seeing none, I will go to the members of the government. Anyone wishing to speak?

Seeing none, back to the members of the Official Opposition. Any members wishing to speak?

Seeing none.

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Chair: I will decide when the question gets called.

Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2024-25 General Revenue Fund

The Chair: Hon. members, as there are no members that are left that wish to speak, I will now put the following question. We shall now proceed to the final vote on the supplementary supply estimates.

Those members in favour of the resolutions for the 2024-25 supplementary supply estimates, general revenue fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Chair: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.

Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

I would now like to invite the hon. Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report the 2024-25 supplementary supply estimates, general revenue fund.

Mr. Schow: So moved.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Airdrie-East.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions. It reports as follows and requests leave to sit again. The following resolutions relating to the 2024 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, have been approved.

Arts, Culture and Status of Women: expense, \$405,000.

Energy and Minerals: expense, \$41,651,000.

Environment and Protected Areas: financial transactions, \$3,291,000.

Forestry and Parks: expense, \$251,378,000.

Health: expense, \$26,200,000.

Immigration and Multiculturalism: expense, \$809,000.

Indigenous Relations: expense, \$3,353,000.

Jobs, Economy and Trade: expense, \$91,631,000; capital investment, \$3,887,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense, \$9,381,000.

Public Safety and Emergency Services: expense, \$45,479,000.

Technology and Innovation: financial transactions, \$15,000,000.

The Committee of Supply has also approved the following amounts to be transferred.

Transfer from Health expense vote to Mental Health and Addiction expense vote, \$137,502,000.

Transfer from Arts, Culture and Status of Women expense vote: to Children and Family Services expense vote, \$7,250,000; to Indigenous Relations expense vote, \$1,363,000; to Justice expense vote, \$2,100,000.

9:40

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So ordered.

I would like to alert hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 61(3) following the Committee of Supply's report on supplementary estimates, the Assembly immediately reverts to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of the appropriation bill.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 43

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2025

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 43, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2025. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Bill 43 will provide authority for the government to pay from the general revenue fund for additional costs that are not already covered or otherwise provided for during the current fiscal year. When passed, the estimates will authorize approximate increases of \$470.3 million

in expense funding, \$3.9 million in capital funding for the government, and \$18.3 million in other financial transactions.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a first time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:42 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Committee of Supply

 Supplementary Supply Estimates 2024-25

 General Revenue Fund..... 2649

 Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2024-25

 General Revenue Fund..... 2666

Introduction of Bills

 Bill 43 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2025 2666

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