



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 25, 2025

Day 91

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
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Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),
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Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Edmonton-Ellerslie
Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 36

Independent: 1

Vacant: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my great honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through me – now, it's said that a Speaker should never pick favourites, but I think it's well known that my favourite is here, and it's not the Member for Morinville-St. Albert. It is the hon. minister of arts and culture's mom and dad, who've joined us in the Speaker's gallery: my favourite, Josie Fir, followed closely by her husband, Tony Fir. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Kayande: M. le Président, je vous présente les élèves et le professeur du Lycée International de Calgary, une école de Calgary-Elbow. Ils sont ici toute la semaine. Levez-vous, s'il vous plaît et acceptez les félicitations traditionnelles de cette assemblée.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature an incredible group of students from Rochester school in my constituency together with their teachers and support, Val, Brooke, and Lori. Would you all please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to introduce to the Assembly a number of guests from APEGA, including President Tracey Stock and CEO Jay Nagendran, along with some outstanding students in recognition of National Engineering and Geoscience Month.

I am also honoured to introduce President Annette Trimbee and guests from MacEwan University. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Dreeshen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, I would like to welcome some incredible constituents of mine from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake to the Chamber. Terry Raymond will be receiving his King's coronation medal. He's joined by his family: Brianne, Victoria, Hudson, and Harlow. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, thank you for already introducing them, and I, too, would like to welcome my mom, a frequent visitor and your biggest fan, back to the Legislature. I would also like to welcome my dad to question period. While you can't tell by the look on his

face, he is thrilled to be here. Mom and Dad, thank you for being here.

The Speaker: Are there other introductions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce two representatives of the Crossroads BIA, and for all out-of-town guests, that's the 118th Avenue shopping district. Jamie and Marc, please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly. Colleagues, please spend your money in their businesses.

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Mr. and Mrs. Joel and Deborah Mullan from Spruce Grove and their support dog Misch, great members of the community, and we welcome them to the Legislature. If they can stand up and get the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

Government Priorities

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak directly to my colleagues across the aisle. I know you. I know many of you well, and I know that despite our political differences every single one of you got into politics because you wanted to do public service, because you wanted to do good things for your neighbours. I know that many of you come from a lifetime of service in the nonprofit sector, from volunteer work to municipal government, and I know that many of you are people of deep faith.

So today I ask you: is this the government you thought you were signing up for? The Premier and her cabinet have multiple ethical lapses and seem to only care about enriching themselves and their friends. This is not a government that is interested in governing or making life better for the average Albertan. The UCP's corrupt care scandal is riddled with bloated contracts that were handed out to their friends in private surgical facilities, none of which have made the health care system better. Wait times have only increased. Operating rooms are broken, not serving Albertans. Even worse, the Royal Alex hospital hasn't done a hip or knee replacement in nearly a year. It would only take this government \$240,000 to reopen the Alex, but this government isn't interested. They would rather spend hundreds of millions of dollars handing out contracts to their friends who take them to hockey games.

Now we have a Premier who's playing fast and loose with Canada. She herself has said that she wants to provoke a national unity crisis if she doesn't get her way. Is this the leadership you were aiming for? Is this the kind of government you want to be associated with? There's a better alternative. Listen to your constituents. Fight for Canada. Fight for Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Automobile Insurance Reform

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Auto insurance is annoying. It's a product we all pay for in order to drive and one that's frustrating, opaque, and often expensive. When you're in a collision, it often means years of waiting for court dates, giving a significant chunk of your settlement up in legal fees, and having to wait months or years to get the care you need.

That's why we're making changes to the system. By implementing the care-first system, Albertans who have been in a collision will get the best care possible when they need it and from the health care practitioner of their choice. Instead of having their benefits capped at \$50,000, they will get medical treatment for as long as they need it. They won't have to sue anyone to get it. Under the current tort system, if there isn't an at-fault driver to sue, Albertans can't even get their care covered. They are forced to pay out of pocket with only a small portion of their care covered. Now Albertans will be able to get medical treatment regardless of whether they're in a collision with an at-fault driver or not. They will get it for as long as they need it, with the best benefits in Canada, and they'll get their income replaced, permanent benefits if necessary, and without waiting or paying.

On top of that, they'll save money. A report commissioned by our government found that under the care-first system, Albertans will save \$400 a year, providing even more relief to Alberta families in addition to the income tax cut. If an Albertan is hit by someone committing a crime, they can still sue. If they are out of pocket for more money than they receive in benefits, they can still sue.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, care-first insurance means just that: care first. Thank you.

Government Priorities

Mr. Ip: Cuts, chaos, corruption: I know the Premier appreciates the English language, but this particular alliteration lacks any redeeming qualities and has come to define this government's dismal incompetence. The Premier is seemingly more preoccupied with image, theatrics, and hobnobbing with conservative elites in the U.S. than tackling the dizzying number of scandals erupting here at home.

Let's start with corrupt care. This government has repeatedly been telling Albertans: "Just trust us, and let us investigate ourselves. There is nothing to see here." But it is now clear that on the very day internal investigators were due to release a report on AHS procurement irregularities, the entire board was fired. To any Albertan and outside observer this would raise a red flag, but rather than call a public inquiry at the first opportunity to ensure transparency and restore confidence in government, the Premier and her cabinet have been parading a sham investigation that is limited in scope and will do little to get to the bottom of a scandal that is getting bigger by the day with new revelations and allegations of wrongdoing by the most senior officials in the UCP government.

1:40

All of this chaos isn't just tabloid fodder; it has real impacts on everyday Albertans. In my riding of Edmonton-South West I recently heard from a constituent who has been waiting for 18 months for hip surgery and lives with unbearable pain. Another parent with a child with special needs shared with me the heart-wrenching story of how her child has been unable to go to school because of the lack of supports amid the recent education workers' strike. I talked to families with loved ones with disabilities who feel forgotten and bear the brunt of funding cuts by this government.

Mr. Speaker, I hope this week when the Premier spends taxpayer dollars to enjoy her glass of champagne in sunny Florida, schmoozing with Ben Shapiro, that she doesn't forget the everyday Albertans she has left behind.

Alberta Disability Assistance Program

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, every Albertan, regardless of ability, deserves the opportunity to pursue their dreams and live a full and meaningful life. Everyone deserves to have their chance to feel that

they are needed in the workplace, that they are an asset to the team, that they are capable of finding success, and that they can pursue a career that they want. It's important that we empower people with disabilities to reach their full potential.

Albertans with disabilities deserve the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of working such as earning a paycheck, building relationships, developing skills, and providing a sense of purpose, independence, and belonging to a community. I'm incredibly pleased that the Alberta government is creating a new program to empower Albertans with disabilities to pursue a fulfilling job while continuing to receive the financial, medical, and personal supports they need.

I've had the pleasure of serving on the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities alongside numerous extraordinary individuals. Throughout that work I've heard first-hand about the positive impact that this program will have on the lives of Albertans with disabilities.

Albertans with disabilities need supports that meet their unique needs and abilities, not a one-size-fits-all approach. I'm glad to know that the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services has committed to additional consultation before the new program is implemented. By listening to Albertans with disabilities and employers, we can ensure that we strike the right balance and create a system that works for everyone.

I know that both the Premier's council and Alberta's Advocate for Persons with Disabilities are going to work tirelessly to ensure that Albertans with disabilities have their voices heard as this program is designed. At the end of the day, our number one goal is to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Crime and Public Safety

Member Brar: Mr. Speaker, like many Albertans, I was shaken and heartbroken to see the video of a young woman being attacked at the Calgary city hall LRT station. No one should ever experience that kind of violence, especially in the heart of our city at a public transit station which is meant to connect us, not traumatize us. I'm relieved to hear that a suspect has been arrested, but let's be clear. An arrest alone doesn't erase the fear that many Calgarians live with daily. That young woman is someone's sister, someone's daughter, someone's neighbour. She could have been any of us.

Mr. Speaker, public safety is not a political talking point. It's public trust. It is the promise we make with every Albertan that whenever they step out of their home, they will come back home safe, but after six years under this UCP government that promise feels broken. They have stripped away police funding from municipalities, gutted community organizations, and failed to address the root causes of crime: poverty, homelessness, untreated mental health, and addictions.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot build a safe society by ignoring the suffering in it. Alberta's New Democrats understand that real safety is more than just reaction. It is prevention. Our public safety blueprint offers real solutions. Yes, it supports law enforcement, but it also supports people. It brings back investment in housing, mental health, harm reduction. We know we can't just sweep pain off the streets; we have to heal it at the source.

To every Albertan watching, especially those who feel unsafe or unseen: I see you, I hear you, and I will never stop standing up and speaking up for you. That is not just possible, it is necessity.

Continuing Care System

Ms Sigurdson: The UCP has decided to overhaul our health care system, but instead of providing better care for Albertans, things

keep getting worse. In fact, the dismantling of AHS has exposed the real reason for the overhaul. The UCP is further privatizing our health care system and giving bloated contracts to their elite friends. Of course, the UCP always seems to benefit from something in return. Box seats at Oilers playoff games come with a price, and that means that cuts, chaos, and corruption are the payment. Meanwhile seniors in the continuing care system languish. The insufficient staff-to-resident ratios mean staff are overworked and seniors are not supported in a timely manner.

Last April the UCP changed the Continuing Care Act to remove minimum daily hours of care from the legislation, leaving families and seniors with no legal recourse to challenge operators when residents were neglected. Sufficient staffing levels make a big difference in the lives of seniors. Without this, seniors must wait longer for support with hygiene, eating, and other aspects of general care. Sadly, I've heard from many families concerned about this. Also, there have been many Albertans reaching out to me regarding the staff being laid off or having their hours cut. A significant issue in the industry has been the lack of full-time staff. Operators often only hire health care aides on a part-time basis so they do not have to pay them benefits, but without full-time work many must have another job, which creates instability in the workforce and lower standards of care for the residents.

Evidence of the serious situation in continuing care is the dramatic increase in founded allegations relevant to the Protection of Persons in Care Act. Last year founded allegations increased threefold. This should be a clarion call to the ministers of Health and Seniors, Community and Social Services. Instead, both ridiculously blame others for their own incompetence.

We have a UCP government that does not care about vulnerable seniors. Their lack of integrity and compassion is jarring. Cuts, chaos, and corruption.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 48, the iGaming Alberta Act, sponsored by the Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Member Arcand-Paul: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table the requisite copies of an e-mail from Shannon Fuhrer, who raises issues about the closure of SACE. I urge that side of the House to read this as a concern for closing up that important centre.

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

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a press release from Inclusion Alberta dated March 20, Media Release: Government of Alberta Depriving Tens of Thousands of AISH Recipients Poverty Relief by Clawing Back Canada Disability Benefit.

I also have a copy of one e-mail of hundreds from a young person talking about the extraordinary costs related to their disability.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Minister LaGrange, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Alberta Health Act office of the Alberta Health Advocate's 2023-24 annual report.

Oral Question Period

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

Premier's Remarks on U.S. Tariffs

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's call for foreign interference in our Canadian elections should be denounced by everyone, but the Premier never apologizes for wrongdoing, never admits mistakes, and never stands down from the worst possible positions that hurt our province and our country. Two weeks ago the Premier told extreme far-right Breitbart media that she would hope, quote: that we could put things on pause is what I've told administration officials. End quote. Why won't the Premier admit that it was wrong to call for foreign interference in Canada's election?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Asking for officials not to interfere is the very opposite of interference. I would hope that the members opposite would like to see everything possible done to ensure that we do not have tariffs imposed on Canada at all on any product. That's what I've been advocating for since November. It is what I will continue advocating for. We had some success in our advocacy in getting the administration to realize that energy resources had to be treated in a different way. That was not because of the work of the federal government; that was the work of Alberta.

1:50

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier keeps doubling down on what has been deemed foreign interference by so many across this country. Don Braid, writing in the *Calgary Herald* said, "Her advocacy has shaded into political meddling." He said that she "seems far too cosy with the adversary. Saying our national government should be in lockstep with Trump's 'new direction' could hardly be more tone-deaf." He says that the Premier "seems almost infatuated with far-right influencers in America" and says that the Premier "needs to cancel that speech immediately – and then keep quiet." Will the Premier take this excellent advice?

Ms Smith: Well, Laurie-Anne Kempton, the assistant secretary to the cabinet on communications, says that it doesn't meet the definition of interference, so they're not looking into them.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, for months not only myself but all the Premiers and also the federal government have been doing everything we possibly can to reach out to federal counterparts. We actually were encouraged to do that, to reach out to federal counterparts, to do everything we possibly could in order to prevent tariffs from being imposed. Do you know what's happening? The members opposite haven't made a single phone call. That's the reason why they're attacking us today.

Ms Gray: Everything possible but travelling to meet in person with other Premiers and the Prime Minister.

Rick Bell also weighed in about just how bad this is. He wrote a memo to the Premier in the *Calgary Herald* saying, "Just stop talking." Just like Don Braid, Rick Bell says the Premier should cancel her trip to fund raise for the extreme far right with Ben Shapiro. Why won't the Premier take that advice, cancel her U.S. speech, and stop calling for foreign interference into Canada's election?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, why won't the members opposite just give us one name, one person they called, one effort they took to try to advocate against tariffs? Why don't they tell us what work that they

did to try to push back against the federal government wanting to impose export tariffs on our oil and gas or on our Saskatchewan neighbour on potash and uranium, like the new Prime Minister just threatened once again in the last couple of days? Why is it that the members opposite, every time push comes to shove, don't support Team Alberta? They support Team Liberal and Team Carney. They should get onside with Alberta.

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

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I'll admit we have not called any racist Islamophobes who want to annex Canada.

Health Services Procurement Process

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, last week in the never-ending corrupt care saga Athana Mentzelopoulos filed an additional statement of claim in her court case against this government. She lays further accusations at the feet of this Premier concerning what her office knew about Jitendra Prasad and when they knew it. This is about a former government employee who worked for MHCare while also procuring things for the government. On what day specifically did the Premier's chief of staff brief the Premier about Jitendra Prasad's conflict of interest?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's lots of gossip and rumours and theories, but what we need is facts. What we have done is responded with our statement of defence in the court of law, and we are going to see how that process plays out. We also have had a lawyer who has looked at and interviewed all of the individuals named in that statement of claim. We're going to make sure that all of the information is given not only to the Auditor General but also to the retired judge in Manitoba. We'll get to the bottom of it.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, what would dispel gossip and rumours would be a public inquiry.

Ms Mentzelopoulos says that the then ADM of Health Darren Hedley texted her on October 30 saying, "We're terminating JP's IT access to [Alberta Health] tonight as well. I will meet with him in the morning to let him know we're putting him on administrative leave." Then this same official briefed the Premier's chief of staff and the Health minister's chief of staff. Clearly, there were deep concerns from the top, and this looks like a cover-up. Why were the two most senior political staff in this government briefed about an IT contractor?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have said from the very beginning that we are looking into the allegations. We have launched a couple of internal processes as well as external processes. All of the information will be available, and it will be reported online in a public document in July. I'm looking forward to seeing if there are some improvements that can be made. If there are poor practices that are already within Alberta Health Services, we don't want to replicate those poor practices when we take over procurement in Acute Care Alberta, which begins April 1.

Ms Gray: On November 29 Darren Hedley announced Prasad's retirement. That's a month after the Premier and Minister of Health's chief of staff were both briefed about the situation with Mr. Prasad's IT access. The strange thing is the Premier's office had known about this for a month before his retirement. What had officials discovered that warranted shutting down Mr. Prasad's

access a month before his retirement? Why was this so urgent that the Premier's top political staffer was briefed about it on October 3? What did the Premier know, when, and when will the Premier understand that to restore trust, she needs a public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, we have a statement of defence filed. There's a statement of claim that's there as well, and with the passage of time we will see what the court determines, because none of the allegations, rumours, and gossip have been verified by the court. What I can tell you is that the reason we are making the changes in the refocusing of Alberta Health Services to be a hospital-only delivery agent and operator is so that we can have a greater range of service delivery so that we can have chartered surgical centres. They're the only things reducing the wait times, and we're going to continue doing it.

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

Premier's Remarks on U.S. Tariffs

(continued)

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the topic of foreign interference has taken over the federal election because of the Premier's ridiculous and dangerous comments. The *Globe and Mail* reports that officials from India were secretly working to influence the outcome of the federal Conservative leadership race that Pierre Poilievre won. They report that CSIS learned Indian agents "were involved in raising money and organizing within the South Asian community for Mr. Poilievre during the . . . leadership race." Why would the Premier invite more foreign interference into Canada's elections at a time when the country is under threat?

The Speaker: I might encourage the Leader of the Official Opposition to find ways to ensure that the questions that the Premier is answering are specifically about matters of provincial jurisdiction, in particular government policy, which is, of course, the reason for question period.

The hon. the leader of the government.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask them once again: just give us one name or one action that they took to try to stop tariffs from being implemented. I have two pages of the people that I met with. I met with Montana Senator Steve Daines. I met with the Oklahoma Senator Markwayne Mullin. I met with West Virginia Senator Shelley Capito. I met with Congressman Bruce Westerman. I met with Congressman Scott Peters. I also met with François Poirier with TC Energy, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. I met with the American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers. I met with the CEO of E3 Lithium. I met with countless people. They can't even name one. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, all those meetings, the Premier has admitted, were part of a selfie tour and were at parties. Meanwhile our leader was at the first ministers' conference and the U.S.-Canada summit. That's where we've been.

Now, the Premier's remarks to Breitbart aren't the only time she's invited foreign interference in Canada's election, and they aren't even the first time she's gone to the extreme far-right Trump supporters in the U.S. to do so. Last winter the Premier asked the extremist Tucker Carlson to help defeat Justin Trudeau. I'm so curious: how many times has the CPC asked you to stop? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think their leader spends a lot of time doing TikTok videos, not a lot of time talking to American influencers. That is the way that you actually influence the decision on tariffs. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: You talk to American influencers such as . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Ben Shapiro wouldn't even be in the same room as Nenshi.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would like to ask a question, I encourage him to rise to his feet to do so.

Until then, the Premier.

Ms Smith: Let me continue, Mr. Speaker: Doug Burgum, the Secretary of the Interior, who I've met with; Chris Wright, Secretary of Energy; Marco Rubio, Secretary of State; Pete Hegseth, Secretary of Defense; Devin Nunes, chair of the President's Intelligence Advisory Board; Texas Senator Ted Cruz; Florida Senator Rick Scott. I can go on. They can't name one person.

2:00

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Don Braid and Rick Bell are both urging the Premier to cancel her Ben Shapiro trip, but it's not just them weighing in. Gary Mason of the *Globe and Mail* writes: "people aren't stupid and they can add things up for themselves. Her words are her words . . . she can't now take them back." He says: "It's offensive and wrong. It's certainly no way for a provincial leader in Canada to behave in the midst of a national crisis. In fact, it's just the opposite." Why won't the Premier do the right thing, cancel her trip to Florida, and stop bragging about selfies? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I note that when other Premiers go and do American media, they're praised. I wonder why it is that when I go and do American media, the members opposite have nothing but criticism. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

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

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, when we began four months ago in our lobby efforts, we were encouraged by federal officials, by other Premiers across all political parties to use our contacts and network to do everything possible to stop tariffs. I have done that. Now all of a sudden Team Carney comes along, and the members opposite are parroting Team Carney's talking points. Why is that? They're certainly not standing up for Alberta, and I wish they would.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for question 4.

Ms Gray: The Premier is not getting the praise she wants because she's terrible at what she's been doing.

Health Services Procurement Process

(continued)

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, at an AHS board meeting on December 19 of last year three deputy ministers were present. The deputy ministers for Health, for Seniors, Community and Social Services, and for Mental Health and Addictions were all at that AHS board meeting, and at that meeting the board was briefed that a forensic audit was in place that the CEO started. These officials must have informed their ministers and cabinet about the serious allegations, including the recommendation to take this to the RCMP. What did they share and when?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you the refocusing that we're doing in Alberta health care is vitally important. The three deputy ministers in question have all set up separate agencies that are going to be managing different parts of the health care system. This is the entire reason for the refocusing. It is the entire reason why we are getting Alberta Health Services to be refocused to focusing strictly on hospitals. It's why we did not need to have a board overseeing that any longer. We have Acute Care Alberta that has had its legal day one as of February 1, and it will be taking over a lot of the operational roles as of April 1.

Ms Gray: Three deputy ministers were at that meeting, three of them present for a discussion about the forensic audit, and I am certain they would have all taken detailed notes. Mrs. Mentzelopoulos has claimed, "All 3 Deputy Ministers heard the recommendation by other AHS Board members that the investigation potentially be expanded and the matter be forwarded to the RCMP for potential criminal investigation." When three senior officials learned of the need for an RCMP investigation into criminal matters involving this government, why did nobody call the cops?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you look at this statement of defence, it clearly states that there was no reason why the government couldn't proceed with extending the contract for ASG. That is what the report said, that was what was quoted in our statement of defence, and that is the reason why we are looking to see if there is any evidence whatsoever of wrongdoing. We have an independent judge who is looking at the same evidence, including the two reports in question. We are also having an internal review, and in addition to that we are making sure that the Auditor General has what he needs.

Ms Gray: "We are looking" is not good enough. We need an independent inquiry.

Now, three deputy ministers heard serious accusations about criminal activity on December 19 of last year. Instead of taking action, this Minister of Health fired the CEO, this Minister of Health fired the board, and then they put gag orders on all of the staff, swept it under the rug, and pretended nothing was happening when three of her government's most senior officials learned of criminal activity accusations in her government. Despite the answers given in this House across weeks, I find it hard to believe that no one briefed the Premier. When did you learn of these things?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I mean, we were waiting to see if there were any credible allegations that had come forward that required our action, and there weren't. Quite frankly, that is the reason why we are continuing the investigation with an external judge, a former

judge in Manitoba, as well as the Auditor General. The member opposite well knows that the Auditor General can speak to both current and former employees. We encourage him as well as the judge from Manitoba to do a thorough and comprehensive investigation and give us some advice on whether any wrongdoing has occurred and whether any changes need to be made.

Premier's Remarks on U.S. Tariffs

(continued)

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Lisa Young, a University of Calgary professor, wrote that the Premier “wasn’t asking them not to levy tariffs but to postpone them until after the election. Is her position that tariffs aren’t a problem in and of themselves, but only if [it] helps the Liberals?” It’s a good question. The Premier should have been demanding that tariffs are cancelled, not paused. There are tariffs in place right now with more to come next week. Why would the Premier barter away Canadian free elections for Pierre Poilievre?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have consistently said that our position is that we should have a tariff-free relationship between Canada and the United States, all provinces, all products, and make sure that we don’t see any imposition in the future. Whether now, whether in the middle of an election, whether after the election or ever, my position has stayed the same. I’ve repeated it time and time again. I’ve repeated it in meetings with American officials. The members opposite have done zilch. That is what we’re learning today in the questioning of me. They have done absolutely nothing to try to defend Alberta, absolutely nothing to stop tariffs from coming in. Maybe they’re feeling a little defensive.

Ms Gray: That is not what she said on Breitbart, and we have the recording.

Given that Professor Young goes on to say, “Let’s take a moment to consider the sheer stupidity of bragging about this to a media outlet. Breitbart isn’t exactly mainstream journalism, but the ‘News’ in the title does suggest that they are likely to publish what you [say to] them,” and given that no Albertans asked the Premier to go on Breitbart news and given that Albertans do expect the Premier to stand up for Canada, why is she so willing to do anything for Team Trump instead of anything for Team Alberta?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite had any contacts at all in the United States and had done any work at all to try to stop tariffs, what they would understand is that you have to speak to influencers in the United States in order to get a breakthrough. I can tell you that we’ve already heard Energy secretary Chris Wright saying that it is his expectation that there will be zero tariffs on energy when we get to April 2. The reason for that is because of the work that we have done with the American Petroleum Institute, the pipeline companies, the refiners in convincing the administration that it’s a bad idea. That’s the work we’re doing.

Ms Gray: The Premier keeps taking credit for others’ work. In January she said that she wasn’t asking for carve-outs, and then she took credit for them. It’s ridiculous.

Given that Professor Young says that the Premier would be wise to cancel her trip to the “Trumpian ‘PragerU’” and given that she says, “The best gift she could give Poilievre would be to retreat to Panama for the next six weeks, to avoid reminding voters elsewhere in Canada of the ties between some Canadian Conservatives and the

MAGA movement,” does the Premier not realize how much damage she’s done to Canada by encouraging Trump interference?

The Speaker: I might just remind the Leader of the Opposition that after question 4 all supplementals must be done without the use of a preamble.

Ms Smith: I don’t know, Mr. Speaker. Are they for real? Do they really think that Justin Trudeau was the one out there advocating on behalf of the energy industry in the United States, the guy who imposed the no-more-pipelines bill, the tanker ban, an emissions cap on oil, an emissions cap on methane, net-zero power regs, net-zero vehicles, net-zero building construction? Those are all policies advanced by the NDP. It’s the Liberal-NDP coalition that is damaging this province, damaging our industry, and I’m the one standing up for it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Every Kid Can Play Program

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ensuring kids have access to sport and recreation is incredibly important. Sport is about more than just having fun. It teaches teamwork, builds confidence, and promotes healthy lifestyles that last well into adulthood. Our government recognizes the importance of getting kids access to sport and recreation, which is why two years ago the Minister of Tourism and Sport created the every kid can play program. To the Minister of Tourism and Sport: how many children has the every kid can play program helped get off the sidelines and into the game?

2:10

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

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the hon. member’s question and the opportunity to rise here today and talk about a very important program, the every kid can play program. Our government is committed to breaking down financial barriers and making sure that no kid is left on the sidelines and everyone gets a chance to compete and play. That’s why since its inception the every kid can play program has helped over 21,000 kids register in . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. As I mentioned earlier, if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar wants to ask a question, I urge him to rise to his feet at an appropriate time and do so. Until then, I should at least be able to hear the minister.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, we can disagree on quite a bit in this Chamber, but I find it a bit odd that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is protesting helping underprivileged kids get off the sidelines and play sports and recreate.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to creating a healthy, happy province, and this is part of it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given the outstanding success of the every kid can play program in supporting families in need across our province so they can access sport and recreation programs through registration assistance and given that in the face of the current economic uncertainty there continue to be families that need support in order to register their

children in sport and recreation programs, to the same minister: how does Budget 2025 continue to support the every kid can play program and break down financial barriers to accessing sport and regulation?

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

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This program actually started coming out of COVID. It was called return to play. It was a \$4 million program encouraging underprivileged kids to get back in the field of play after the global pandemic. It was so successful that we doubled the budget to \$8 million, and we've held that firm because we know that this is changing lives. Imagine all the kids whose families have to make that difficult decision between paying grocery bills, between paying the mortgage, and making sure their kids have a chance to play. [interjections] I don't know what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has against that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that access to sport and recreation is limited by more than just financial barriers but also by the number of spots available in these programs and given that these programs are often nonprofits run by passionate volunteers and parents who believe in the importance of sport and given these programs are funded almost entirely through registration fees and donations, where hard work is needed to keep the cost of registrations down, to the same minister: how is Alberta's government supporting these community and provincial nonprofits that provide sports programming?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schow: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The every kid can play program also supports incredible community- and provincial-level nonprofits that provide sport and recreation programming for youth, reducing the financial pressures on those amazing organizations, and it can open doors for even more kids across Alberta. Budget 2025 through the every kid can play program has \$5.5 million that will go towards supporting more than 100 nonprofits that provide sports programming for children and youth. These are programs that otherwise would not be able to train coaches, rent facilities, rent equipment. These kids are becoming healthier because they get a chance to play.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Gray: The corrupt care scandal keeps growing. The former CEO flagged serious concerns when an employee was caught working for MHCare at the same time as he was working for government. The minister and Premier's staff pressured the AHS CEO to sign bloated contracts for private surgical centres that cost more than public surgeries, and the minister fired the AHS board the day they were supposed to get the results of the investigation. Albertans know that something is rotten here. Will the Premier admit the government's cover-up isn't working and call a public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier has said and I have said repeatedly and many others here have said, there is an independent investigation by former Judge Wyant as well as an Auditor General investigation. We want to get down to the bottom of things. In the meantime I'm very proud to say that we are making great strides with the refocusing. We are seeing tremendous work happening. In fact, we had 474 more registered

physicians at the end of December of 2024. It results in a 4 per cent increase in physicians from 2023.

Ms Gray: Given the Health minister is alleged to have said to the former AHS CEO, quote, I think you've done some phenomenal things in Alberta Health Services; like, honestly, I really do, end quote, and given that just weeks later the government wrapped up her internal investigation, ordered the halt of a forensic audit, and fired the CEO and given that it appears the former CEO has recordings of what really transpired, will the government turn over any recordings that they have of meetings with the CEO or other health officials to the RCMP and the Auditor General today, and will they call on all those involved to do the same?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, we've said time and again that we will work with whatever investigative bodies are looking into this event, but here's the reality of what actually transpired. We had a former AHS CEO that actively concealed the results of multiple investigations that she herself began. The reason for that was that it didn't tell her what she was hoping to hear. That's what actually happened. That's what's articulated in the statement of defence. We're happy to share that with the opposition, who obviously haven't read it yet, and we'll continue to defend this as we have.

Ms Gray: Given that on December 13 the minister and then CEO met to discuss serious concerns involving Mr. Prasad, also known as their guy, given that December 16 AHS was told to move forward with the hand-picked private surgical centre because the Premier had made commitments and given that the former CEO says that political interference around AHS-funded procurement had become commonplace, to the Premier: will the government finally admit that they are in too deep and that a 'shamvestigation' is not working and finally call an independent public inquiry?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition needs to have faith in the processes that are already taking place, again, all independent processes, all independent investigations looking into this. This government has already committed to working with those investigations to provide whatever it is that they need. I don't think that the member has any faith in this, but we certainly do in the independent offices of this Legislature.

Premier's Travel to Florida

Mr. Deol: While Alberta faces the threat of a trade war that could cost tens of thousands of jobs, the Premier is flying to Florida to fund raise for PragerU, a far-right extremist media company at a private \$25,000-per-table event. This isn't about winning American hearts and minds; it's about bolstering her relationship with far-right content creators. Don Braid and Rick Bell have called for her to cancel it. Why won't the Premier do the right thing and cancel the trip?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the Premier will do nothing of the sort. She will continue to do exactly what she was hired by the people of Alberta to do, which is defend Alberta's best interests and promote our trade relationship with the United States. Over the last several months she has done exactly that by meeting with several legislators and secretaries, including high-ranking officials like Marco Rubio, the Secretary of State; Pete Hegseth, Secretary of Defense . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Schow: . . . Texas Senator Ted Cruz. Mr. Speaker, at any point the Premier could pick up the phone, call these individuals, and

continue to make the case for Alberta. Maybe the NDP should call, pick up the phone, and ask Justin Trudeau for some direction. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Deol: Given that while many Albertans are trying to keep their money within the country's borders, this Premier is spending their tax dollars flying to Florida to court far-right extremist influencers, given that according to her press secretary their goal is to message with an active, engaged, and influential U.S. audience, but a recent poll shows that 93 per cent of Americans don't even want to take over Canada – talking to far-right extremists won't convince anyone else. It only weakens Alberta's place on Team Canada. So why is the Premier still going?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that Alberta is on Team Canada. We're simply asking Team Canada to be on Team Alberta as well. That includes supporting our best interests, which is improving our relationship with the United States. We are certainly facing uncertain times with the potential of looming tariffs, but right now our Premier will continue to do what she has been doing, which is meeting with state legislators, federal legislators, and secretaries, including Doug Burgum, the Secretary of Interior and chair of the National Energy Dominance Council. These are people who have the President's ear, who can help us make a difference and continue to strengthen our relationship with our neighbours to the south.

2:20

Mr. Deol: Given that instead of working with Canada against the real threat of trade war, the Premier is wasting taxpayers' dollars jetting off to Florida to help fill the coffers of PragerU, an extremist media outlet; given that she will share the stage with Ben Shapiro, who spreads homophobic and Islamophobic views and repeatedly calls Canada a, quote, silly country, and wants to make our great nation an outlying U.S. territory, why would the Premier align herself with this man when Albertans want her to cancel the trip and focus on protecting Alberta's interest?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Tourism and Sport I know a fishing expedition when I see one. I can tell you that right now the members opposite are casting a line in the water, seeing what they can pick up from that ever-dwindling group of supporters. In the last year alone three members have jumped ship from the NDP caucus. When will they figure out that their ship is sinking? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Provincial Tax Policies

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While Alberta is competing for job-creating investments, families are facing rising costs of living due to failed Liberal and NDP policies, yet the provincial NDP once again shows how out of touch they are, with the Calgary-Foothills MLA recently calling for B.C.-style taxes, including a 7 per cent sales tax and \$20 billion in higher taxes, while Edmonton-Decore's MLA dismissed the value of cutting taxes for hard-working Albertans. To the Minister of Finance: what impact would these disastrous B.C.-style taxes have on Alberta families and businesses?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance, the President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. If Alberta were to adopt the same taxes as British Columbia, it would cost Albertans and Alberta businesses an additional \$20.1 billion, or roughly \$2,100 per family. An additional sales tax would cost Albertans roughly \$1,200 per family. With the income tax cut that Albertans are receiving this year, they will save up to \$750 in income taxes and still pay nothing in sales taxes.

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

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Albertans have repeatedly voted in support of keeping taxes low in our province and given that the NDP MLA for Calgary-Elbow has also pushed for a sales tax, dismissing the value of putting money back in the pockets of everyday Albertans, and given that Budget 2025 provides savings of up to \$1,500 per family and \$750 per individual, helping Albertans pay for groceries and save for the future, again to the same minister: what does the UCP track record look like compared to the NDP on keeping taxes low?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. The short answer is that the track record is very good. The NDP brought in the largest tax increase in Alberta history with the carbon tax, the tax they legitimized in this very Chamber for the Liberal government in Ottawa to bring forward. Absolutely shameful. They raised taxes on job creators and businesses. They raised income taxes and more. We got rid of the carbon tax. We cut taxes on our job creators and brought in even more revenue at 8 per cent than the NDP did at 12 per cent. Now we're cutting income taxes to save Albertans up to \$750 a year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Minister. Given that the former Calgary mayor turned disastrous NDP leader's record speaks volumes by increasing taxes by nearly 81 per cent, driving up the cost for Calgarian homeowners and families, and given that the NDP is doubling down on their unaffordable agenda, supporting a sales tax, higher income taxes, and opposing tax relief for workers and families, to the Minister of Finance: how is Alberta's government protecting families from higher taxes and maintaining the Alberta advantage?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. The phrase "Alberta advantage" was first coined in August 1993 in this very Chamber. The throne speech from that year stated: "[the] government will not try to buy prosperity through higher taxes. Instead, it will build on Alberta's existing advantage of low taxes and... free enterprise spirit to develop the most competitive economy in North America." That is still the goal, and it should be the goal of everyone in this Chamber. We're keeping that alive. Albertans pay \$20 billion less in taxes than the next lowest province, and we're cutting taxes again.

Premier's Remarks on U.S. Tariffs (continued)

Member Boparai: Mr. Speaker, back to political interference in our elections. Columnist Gary Mason writes of the Premier in the

Globe and Mail, “She urged U.S. administration officials to pause the tariff threat until after the election.” He goes on to say, “That looks like a Canadian Premier asking a foreign government to do something to alter the outcome of an election campaign in order to help the party and the federal leader she supports.” Mr. Speaker, why won’t the Premier apologize for this national unity crisis caused by her calls for U.S. political interference in our elections?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the Premier will do no such thing because there was no interference whatsoever. Any suggestion that the Premier interfered by asking the U.S. to interfere with the Canadian election is absolutely absurd. The opposition knows this, everybody knows this, but they can spin and make up facts all that they want.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier from day one has been defending both Alberta and Canadian interests day in and day out, and she’ll continue to do that for the benefit of not only Albertans but of all of Canada.

Member Boparai: Given that Mason writes, if a provincial premier met with officials of the Communist Party of China, which was in the process of trying to destroy this country with brutal tariffs, and asked them to halt those economic threats until after a federal election campaign was over in order to better guarantee the result the premier was hoping for, there would be national outrage.

Mr. Speaker, conservatives would be outraged if such a thing occurred, so why is it okay when the Premier calls for Trump to interfere in our Canadian elections?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I wonder why the hon. member doesn’t express the same anger and frustration with the quarter billion dollar loan that Mark Carney received from China. That’s a bigger question that I think he should be standing up in this House and waving his hands in the air for and speaking out against.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that this Premier has been working day in and day out from the very onset to defend Alberta’s interests, to defend Canadian interests. This is the Premier of Alberta and of the rest of Canada. We’ll stand by her till the end.

Member Boparai: Given that Mason goes on: people aren’t stupid and they can add things up for themselves. Her words are her [version.] She can’t now take them back.

He concludes with:

It’s offensive and wrong. It’s certainly no way for a provincial leader in Canada to behave in the midst of a national crisis.

In fact, it’s just the opposite.

This Premier is offside with opinion leaders, experts on elections, and the Alberta public. Why won’t she apologize for inviting Trump to politically interfere in our elections?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the only real expert on this is Canada’s Chief Electoral Officer. He’s weighed in already, and he has said in no uncertain terms that there are rules on spending and third-party activities. He’s weighed in on foreign interference, and he says: the facts that you refer to do not trigger any of these. The opposition needs to take lessons if not from us, from Canada’s Chief Electoral Officer.

The NDP record on the Liberal-NDP coalition is very, very clear. They do not support Alberta; they do not support Canada. They only support Team Carney, Mr. Speaker. That’s not what we stand for at all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Oil and Gas Export Market Development

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta holds the third-largest oil reserves in the world, containing approximately 165 billion barrels of oil, accounting for 97 per cent of Canada’s total proven reserves. With these vast energy reserves, our government has signed an agreement with Enbridge which the Premier has stated will increase exports of the province’s heavy oil to the United States. This will expand pipeline capacity and strengthen Alberta’s oil and gas industry. To the Minister of Energy and Minerals: how can agreements like this benefit our economy, especially in an uncertain future and relationship with the United States?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hard-working member for the great question. It is true. Agreements like this are critical to economics for Alberta’s future. It gives certainty; it gives clarity to industry. They know they can come to Alberta and invest. Just don’t do it with the federal government. We saw what a mess they made of the Trans Mountain expansion.

But the truth is that we need more access to tidewater. We need more opportunities to get our products to other nations. It’s quite simple: the more pipelines we have to the coast, the more international markets we can reach. And, Mr. Speaker, it’d sure be nice to see the NDP support a pipeline for a change instead of protesting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta will now collect bitumen royalties in kind in addition to conventional royalties in kind, helping secure top prices for oil resources and positioning Alberta as a significant growing player in the energy market, and given that these royalty exchanges will promote increased pipeline capacity and could enable the overseas transport and sale of approximately 2 million barrels per month, could the same minister please explain why the bitumen royalties in kind are being implemented and elaborate on how it will impact our oil and gas industry?

2:30

Mr. Jean: It will make more certainty, more predictability, Mr. Speaker, and more options for Albertans to get more value out of their oil resource. This product belongs to Albertans, and we take that very seriously. The potential combined volume of bitumen and conventional oil will turn the province into a major player on the global scene. This will put us above most players. This will help the province to derisk future infrastructure projects, and more importantly it’s going to mean more production, more jobs, more money for schools, hospitals, and all those things Albertans want, and less NDP.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Dyck: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a potential trade war could impact our oil exports to the United States and given that while we will continue to pursue a primarily diplomatic approach in dealing with U.S. delegates, we will also respond to any unjust U.S. tariffs in a measured way to protect Alberta’s interests and further given that Alberta can be a significant contributor and world leader in exporting oil internationally, could the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade please explain to this House the strategic plan for expanding our oil and gas export markets internationally?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's strategic plan for expanding our export markets focuses on diversification and diplomacy. In 2024 Alberta's exports reached \$182 billion, a 4.2 per cent increase, with key markets including the U.S., China, Japan, South Korea, and Mexico. We're actively diversifying into sectors like agriculture, technology, and clean energy while building on our global leadership in traditional energy. The Alberta export expansion program is empowering small and medium-sized Alberta businesses to promote their products, build global partnerships, and join us on international trade missions, and we're going to keep helping them succeed.

Thank you.

Provincial Response to U.S. Tariffs

Mr. Haji: Since Donald Trump came to power, Canada has faced existential sovereignty and economic threats. Albertans are outraged and expect their government to demonstrate leadership in these challenging times. The Premier failed to show such leadership by not standing alongside Canadian Premiers and preferred to voice her views on Breitbart media, where she used the tariff threats as a political opportunity. Why is the Premier ashamed to stand alongside fellow Canadian Premiers yet finds a lot of time to sit down with extreme far-right Trump supporters?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to building relationships with our federal counterparts and members of the state and federal legislators across the United States, we will take no lessons from the members opposite. I don't think there's a single person on that side who could pick up the phone and call anyone across the line, because they don't believe in that. They didn't even think that it was important to go to Ottawa and talk to Justin Trudeau when Bill C-69 was introduced when they were in government. They're not even on Team Alberta. On this side of the House we'll defend Alberta, and we'll defend the people here in this province.

Mr. Haji: Given that the Premier didn't go to the first ministers' conference or the U.S.-Canada summit – the Alberta NDP leader was there – and while she's in Florida, our leader will be meeting with Canadian and U.S. leaders in Toronto, can the Premier confirm to this House that she will be there for Alberta?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm to everyone in this House and everyone watching on TV: the Premier will always be there for Alberta. That's why over the past several months since the election in the United States the Premier has continued to meet with state and federal legislators such as West Virginia Senator Shelley Capito, Congressman Bruce Westerman, Congressman Scott Peters, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. This is an exhaustive list of people the Premier has met with to continue to tell the United States how important our relationship is with them.

Mr. Haji: Given that the Premier is embarking on another U.S. trip, this time to share a stage with Ben Shapiro, someone who calls Canada a silly country, and given that formal meetings have minutes and agendas, not selfies, when will this Premier stop playing for Team Trump and instead join Team Canada and stand strong and united against Trump's threats? When?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have been on Team Selfie since 2015 when Justin Trudeau was elected. They have been a lapdog for Justin Trudeau, and now that he's not there, their best friend and ally, they're jumping on Team Carney and

Team Jagmeet Singh. You can't serve two masters. I'm curious. Who are the members opposite voting for?

Premier's Remarks on U.S. Tariffs

(continued)

Ms Ganley: Yesterday the Premier put her English degree to good work playing word games, but Albertans aren't buying her word salad. The Premier would have us believe that pushing members of the Trump administration to pause tariffs until after the Canadian election is just business-as-usual diplomacy, but it isn't. Can the Premier or, really, anyone over there explain how asking a foreign government to take action to affect the outcome of a Canadian election is anything other than interference?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, the reason why the Premier made the comments that she made was because we have no Parliament to defend us on our behalf. There's no Parliament in this country to negotiate with our foreign neighbours. The fact of the matter is that this Premier has been doing . . .

Ms Hoffman: Corruption.

Mr. Amery: . . . what we elected our federal officials to do.

Ms Hoffman: Cover-ups.

Mr. Amery: Unfortunately, they've failed us miserably, so the Premier of Alberta has been defending . . .

Ms Hoffman: Interference.

Mr. Amery: . . . not only Alberta but the rest of Canada and Canada's interests to the United States and all across.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:36.

Ms Ganley: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the problem is this Premier's refusal to be on Team Canada and given that the Premier admitted on alt-right radio, no less, that she asked officials in the Trump administration to take action to influence a Canadian election, apparently what she thinks are her normal duties, and given that she has so far refused to tell Albertans who she spoke to in the Trump administration, will the Premier tell us: who is it she asked to interfere in a Canadian election?

Mr. Amery: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, I think we've made it abundantly clear that the Premier asked that U.S. officials refrain from placing any tariffs until we actually had a government and a Parliament in Ottawa that could negotiate under CUSMA or renegotiate the terms. That is a standard operating practice. If you don't have a federal government to negotiate with our international partners, the idea is that we wait until we actually have a competent one to do so. Unfortunately, we have not had one for some time because the federal overlords that run the NDP Party in Alberta are in hiding, so we have to wait until the next federal election.

Ms Ganley: Given, Mr. Speaker, that implying that there is no government in Ottawa when, in fact, there is something a Minister of Justice should know much better than to do and given that the Premier asked the Trump administration officials to, quote, put things on pause, end quote, until after the election and given that these Trump tariffs have real and devastating impacts on the lives of Albertans, on our costs, on our jobs, and more, why did the

Premier fail to call for an end to tariffs rather than just a pause when she met with U.S. officials?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to hear that the member opposite understands that tariffs are economically devastating to this province. That's exactly what the Premier has been doing since day one. We know how weak the federal Liberal Party has been and the federal Liberal government with an absentee Prime Minister who has failed to defend on our behalf, so the Premier of Alberta has stepped up to the plate not only to defend Alberta's interests but the rest of Canada. The members opposite should be thankful for the work that the Premier has done, because we all are, and we all are better for it as Albertans.

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

2:40

Hon. members, we are now at points of order. At 2:01 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to withdraw that point of order, but I know there's another one after that.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:36 is the only other point of order that I have on record. The hon. the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Schow: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Just bear with me for a moment as I go through this. I believe that this point of order called – the word used in isolation would not be a point of order, but I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time noted, the Minister of Justice was speaking and answering a question with regard to, you know, relationships with the United States. I think, if I'm really paraphrasing this, something to the effect of, "the Premier has engaged in," and then at the exact same time as that word was finished or at the end, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora said, "corruption."

Now, again, Mr. Speaker, in isolation this word would not rise to the level of a point of order, and maybe even today in your ruling you may not see it as a point of order. However, you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly, and finishing the minister's statement by suggesting that the Premier herself is corrupt would create disorder in this Chamber. I understand the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is quite talented at finishing our sentences on this side of the House. Sometimes it's actually not too bad. Sometimes the member is pretty clever. But in this instance to suggest that a member of the government, particularly the Premier, is engaged in corruption, I think, is unparliamentary, and I would ask that you would consider this and future rulings as being a point of order.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader, the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In this case, under 23(h), (i), and (j), I do not believe this is a point of order. I believe that this is a matter of debate, that as the Minister of Justice was speaking, assuming that the Government House Leader's accounting is correct – I will admit that without the benefit of the Blues I do not know for sure what was said. But the frequent use of short, relevant, witty interjections in this place is common practice.

I believe that this is a matter of debate because the fundamentals of the issues of corruption are what this Chamber has been embroiled in for weeks now. We will continue to be talking about these in questions and also as the dialogue continues in this Chamber. There was certainly, I know, knowing the Member for Edmonton-Glenora as well as I do, no intention to accuse an individual in any way, shape, or form but to participate in debate in this place as per the practice of this place.

I believe it's a matter of debate. I leave it to your hands, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule, and I sort of have the benefit of the Blues. I do not have the benefit of all of the words that were spoken, in particular the words of the hon. the Minister of Justice when he was speaking. What I can say is that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora can be heard and is noted in the Blues at 2:36:37 saying, "Corruption"; at 41 seconds saying, "Cover-ups"; and at 44 seconds saying, "Interference."

What I will say is that on March 20, 2025, page 2615 of *Hansard*, the Speaker of the day said:

As I've said on numerous occasions, just because something is a point of order today doesn't necessarily make it a point of order tomorrow. There are a number of parameters and challenges, including context and precedent and all sorts of things, that the Speaker uses. I do think that in this case [it] has risen to the level of a point of order, and I will ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to apologize and withdraw.

I also think that in this case – you know what? In this case I will say this, that without the benefit of exactly what the Minister of Justice was saying at the time at which those very clear heckles were heard, I won't rule this a point of order as I did on March 20. Certainly it feels a lot like the intentions of the member were similar, but without evidence of that I won't require an apology and withdrawal but provide a caution to her that such heckles have become the source of multiple points of order and are not leading to good decorum. That's not to say that questions broadly about corruption cannot be asked, but done so in the appropriate manner and in a parliamentary fashion, and decorum will certainly improve as a result of that. This isn't a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 42 Appropriation Act, 2025

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move second reading of Bill 42, the Appropriation Act, 2025.

This act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government of Alberta for the 2025-2026 fiscal year. This includes the following amounts from the general revenue fund: \$166 million for the Legislative Assembly; \$66 billion for the public service, including the government's various ministries and departments; \$56.8 billion for expense; \$3.9 billion for capital investments; \$1.5 billion for financial transactions; and \$4 billion in contingency expense to help the government respond to disasters and emergencies, other unanticipated needs, the

implications of collective bargaining currently under way, and for '25-26 to deal with possible U.S. trade tariffs in our programming.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Altogether this funding will ensure the government has the resources it needs to continue providing Albertans quality programs and services over the coming fiscal year as laid out in Budget 2025, a budget that is meeting the challenges facing Alberta. It provides the highest ever investments in education and health and lowers taxes for families. In order to meet the challenges ahead, we've taken a cautious approach with Budget 2025 to meet Albertans' needs and maintain our advantages. Despite the threat of tariffs we're expecting moderate but continued growth in oil production and investment.

The budget invests \$26.1 billion over three years from the capital plan to build a province that is ready for the future. Madam Speaker, this vital investment will support about 26,500 direct and 12,000 indirect jobs each year through '27-28. We're also thinking into the future of our workforce. Hard-working Albertans are one of our most important assets, and for good reason. That's why we're investing \$135 million each year for skilled trade programs such as apprenticeship and adult learning initiatives. By building up our trades workforce, training more nurses, empowering thinkers to harness the power of up-and-coming technologies like artificial intelligence and quantum computing, it supports access to job opportunities and drives growth across our economy.

As I said last month, this past year has been one of many ups and downs. The province faces a storm of economic conditions and pressure from population growth. Budget 2025 reflects this reality and meets the challenge. These include empowering our health and education systems, investing in our communities, and cutting taxes.

Madam Speaker, Alberta has an advantage over other provinces; we're expanding that advantage. Taxpayers earning less than \$60,000 will see their personal income taxes fall by up to \$750. If we had the same taxation rate as the next lowest province, Albertans would pay about \$2,100 more in income taxes. We're fulfilling this promise now because Albertans have been clear that they need this support as soon as possible. With savings for Albertans at \$1.2 billion in 2025-2026, \$1.3 billion in 2026-2027, and \$1.4 billion in 2027-2028, our government remains proud to be there for Albertans. This work makes our province one of the best to live, work, and raise a family.

Schools are feeling the pressure from Alberta's population growth as more families and students have moved here. We meet the needs of that population growth through Budget 2025 by providing an additional \$9.9 billion over three years to fund enrolment growth, hire more teachers and support staff, build more schools, and strengthen supports for students. We know that students deserve to learn within quality spaces. Almost \$1.1 billion will be provided over the next three years to address growth and to hire more than 4,000 new teachers and classroom support staff. To support students with specialized learning needs, we're spending \$1.6 billion in 2025-2026 so that they receive the focus and attention they need.

2:50

To meet the challenge of Alberta's health care needs, Budget 2025 makes another record investment of \$28 billion this year to support the refocusing of the health care system. We're investing \$644 million for primary care to attach every Albertan with a primary care team and improve access to family doctors, front-line health care professionals, and nurse practitioners. Acute care receives \$4.6 billion to help meet volume and costs and to improve

acute care in hospitals, urgent care centres, surgical, and other health facilities.

We're providing addiction and mental health services with \$1.7 billion to help people with addiction and mental health issues access the supports they need to pursue recovery and wellness. We continue to build recovery communities across the province, expand mental health classrooms, and implement the compassionate intervention framework.

And, Madam Speaker, we are transforming continuing care, providing \$3.8 billion to assisted living Alberta to provide wraparound supports to people, home care, and more.

While we have prioritized the services and supports Albertans need, we are also focused on working to ensure Albertans have safe communities and a safe border. Budget 2025 provides \$25 million for our border security initiative to purchase equipment and develop border patrol facilities, and we're increasing funding to public security, mainly to secure the 298-kilometre-long Alberta-U.S. border. A new interdiction patrol team will combat drug smuggling, gun and human trafficking, illegal border crossing, and other illegal activities. More peace officers will provide enforcement along the international border.

Madam Speaker, we also remain committed to protecting Albertans' communities and businesses from natural disasters. Budget 2025 builds on our commitment to prepare for, mitigate, and respond to the impacts of wildfires we've seen in recent years. This year we're providing \$160 million of base funding for wildfire equipment, personnel, and training. This money will ensure trained personnel have the tools like aircraft as well as fund an additional night-vision helicopter to fight wildfires more effectively. Investments will also support volunteer and community wildfire response programs.

Budget 2025 is meeting the challenges we're facing. Meeting the challenge means being clear-eyed about what is right in front of us. It means being ready to do what we need to. It's why Alberta's government remains focused on keeping our province the best place in Canada to live, work, and raise a family. It's why we're continuing investments in education and health, we introduced a lower tax bracket, and are focused on supporting our workforce. We're spending responsibly today and saving for tomorrow.

Colleagues, I ask you to support this bill today and help us deliver on our responsibilities to support Albertans and enable a promising long-term future for our province. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak today to Bill 42, the Appropriation Act, 2025, and this government's strategy or lack thereof to address the needs of Albertans. This budget, the work we do in this Chamber, impacts all Albertans, and we have a duty to represent everyone, including vulnerable Albertans and Indigenous people. We are all treaty people and have a duty to acknowledge and respect treaty.

Madam Speaker, we had been engaging with Albertans through town halls, round-tables, individual meetings. We had met with thousands of Albertans. As we consider Bill 42 and Budget 2025, we need to understand that Albertans are Alberta's real advantage, Albertans driving the economy, attracting investment, delivering services. We can learn from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, who understand that the environment, the economy, and communities are interconnected. They are not separate and distinct from one another. This bill and Budget 2025 should consider the lives, the struggles, and the opportunities faced by all Albertans.

Too many Albertans struggle to make ends meet. Costs have risen. Wages have not kept pace. Young Albertans face challenges

securing well-paying jobs while rising costs for essentials like insurance, gas, housing, and food add to their financial strain. A government and a budget that fails to prioritize Albertans' needs and ignores their duty to uphold fiscal responsibility through actions such as signing bloated contracts has made this worse.

Albertans are deeply concerned about our relationship with the United States and the economic impact that they're now facing. Tariffs threaten jobs in key industries, including oil and gas, agriculture, manufacturing, forestry, and more. Alberta, with the highest percentage of its economy tied to U.S. exports, needs a clear plan, not submission to America's demands. We must prioritize local industries and diversify markets, products, and sectors to secure our future.

Albertans want a province where everyone thrives, earns a living wage, and has access to quality education and health care, but the UCP in this budget and now in Bill 42 has failed to address these priorities, cutting support for housing, persons with disabilities, education support workers while interfering in pension investments and pension plans and refusing to back down from plans to exit the Canada pension plan.

The political interference and corruption at the heart of the corrupt care scandal underscores their disregard for ethical, competent governance and calls into question this government's ability to steward the finances of this province. I've heard this government talk about how the tax cut included in this budget would make no Albertan worse off. Madam Speaker, what an incredibly low bar we're setting, that no Albertan should be worse off. Why aren't we striving for all Albertans to be better off?

Madam Speaker, Albertans want better health care. They want access to a family doctor. They want wait times across the board to get shorter. But with this budget, that isn't what they will see. When we consider population growth and inflation, the Health budget is shrinking. Albertans want strategic investments that save public dollars over the longer term. Underfunded public services have led to ER closures, longer wait times, and inadequate health care.

How does this government think that they will improve services when the real dollars allocated aren't keeping up with our growing population and don't give consideration to the rising costs of everything?

The government is spending more on health care. Where are they spending more on health care? They're spending more on chartered surgical facilities. Madam Speaker, chartered surgical facilities are at the centre of the corrupt care scandal, and this government is doubling down with Budget 2025. Corrupt care is the largest scandal facing Alberta in a very long time. The allegations are serious, that the government was interfering with the decisions of AHS, forcing them to sign contracts that would be more expensive to deliver services than if delivered through public facilities.

This isn't the only place where they're spending more money on health care, Madam Speaker. The government is also allocating marketing funding to develop logos and campaigns for the new entities that are being created. I guess we need those logos and marketing campaigns to sift through the confusion that Albertans and people working in health care are experiencing as the deck chairs are shuffled. This government has been focused on moving the deck chairs instead of doing the real work to improve health care outcomes for Albertans.

3:00

Madam Speaker, Budget 2025 and Bill 42 deliver cuts, chaos, and corruption. This budget also delivers less money per student to deliver the world-class education the children of this province deserve. Alberta is already facing overcrowded classrooms and insufficient educational assistance to support children with

developmental disabilities. The funding in this budget ensures that Alberta maintains its position as the lowest per capita funder of public education in the country. The lowest. This is what this government is proud of. This is what the government is proud to table in Budget 2025 and this Bill 42.

This past September we acknowledged this government for announcing a generational investment in school construction. We thought the government was recognizing the desperate need for new and refurbished school spaces across this province. Madam Speaker, how many new schools will we see constructed with the funds allocated in this budget? I'm sure Albertans were hoping for a number higher than zero. The cold hard reality is that this budget and Bill 42 deliver not one single dollar to build a new school. All of the funds in this budget are for design.

[Mr. Cyr in the chair]

Even if they were funds allocated for construction, Albertans still wouldn't be seeing a school for some time. The residents of Calgary-Foothills were excited when they saw construction funding allocated for a Catholic school in Nolan Hill in Budget 2023. But, Mr. Speaker, ground hasn't been broken for that project. It took a full two years to negotiate a P3 contract and for that negotiated contract to be signed off by Treasury Board and Finance. Two years to negotiate the P3 contract for that school. At the time they were negotiating the schools' contracts for only seven. So I think Albertans are questioning this government's ability to pull off 90 schools as they profess to do in the next few years.

Not only are there no funds for school construction projects this year; there are no funds for construction projects in 2026 or 2027. Where is this government spending more money on education? Increased funding for private schools, setting a precedent of undermining public education that doesn't exist anywhere else in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, this budget delivers cuts, chaos, and corruption. Albertans are concerned with affordability and their very real struggles to pay their bills every month. But Budget 2025 and this bill do not address those very real concerns of affordability. This bill makes life more challenging for low-income Albertans, for vulnerable Albertans. Budget 2025 will increase the provincial portion of property taxes by 14 per cent, and by the minister's admission those taxes will increase again next year.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The increased property taxes will raise taxes owed by hundreds of dollars each year. That includes the homes of those aging in place, living on fixed incomes. That includes Albertans living in rental accommodation, who will be paying higher rent. The owners of those rental units: they won't absorb those increased fees. They will pass them along to their renters, who have already been experiencing the highest rent increases in the country.

Madam Speaker, Albertans deserve a government and a budget that consider all Albertans. It is clear this government considers only themselves and their wealthy friends. The corrupt care scandal has called into question this government's ability to manage their hard-earned tax dollars.

I see that I still have a little bit of time to speak, so I'll chat a little bit more about what Bill 42 and this budget are not doing to address the needs of seniors, persons with disabilities. Let's talk about the needs of businesses in this era of uncertainty. Madam Speaker, businesses fear nothing more than uncertainty. The tariffs being introduced and the rhetoric coming from the President of the United States are generating more uncertainty than businesses experienced during the pandemic, more uncertainty than businesses have

experienced maybe in living memory. But this budget reduces funding for businesses to explore new lines of business and new export markets just when we should be allocating more to support businesses. This budget also reduces funding for skills development and retraining. Skilled individuals are what Albertans need to grow their existing businesses and start new businesses and new lines of businesses.

This government does nothing to address the cuts that advanced education has experienced since the UCP came into power, in 2019. Students are paying an almost insurmountable amount of tuition, causing undue stress, and can we really expect our university students to perform at their best when they are stressed with tuition payments, with rental payments, with grocery bills?

This budget doesn't do anything to address higher electricity and utility bills, which is saddling those who don't have access to credit with higher utility bills. And what does this budget do and what does the government do to respond to that? They launch an advertising campaign telling people to explore their options when, in fact, there are many Albertans that don't have an option.

This budget and this government are increasing auto insurance 7.5 per cent this year and next.

This government is increasing the fees for the Alberta advantage immigration program. It's difficult to see how it's an advantage when we're tripling the cost of the fees for that program, to apply to that program, over just two years.

Albertans want the government to deliver health and education and address affordability and even give opportunities for business growth. Budget 2025 and Bill 42 do not do that. Madam Speaker, Albertans deserve better. Better is possible with Alberta's New Democrats.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak to Bill 42 today, the Appropriation Act, 2025, which is really about approving this budget, which, as my colleague has already said, really is asking for around \$57 billion, much of which is not focusing on what we know Albertans need.

What do Albertans need? Well, I've been hearing this for years. What we need in terms of our health care system is absolutely not addressed by this bill. People need access to health care, and I'm not the only one hearing it. Everyone is hearing it. I'm copied on the e-mails that go to the Premier, that go to the Minister of Health. The many complaints: we hear this at town halls; we hear this when we knock on doors. Access to health care means that we need a stable workforce. What has this budget done to help stabilize our workforce?

One group of people within our workforce is our paramedics. We know – and it's been known for several years now – that the biggest reason, the most common reason why paramedics are not there to take their shifts is because of mental health distress from the traumas that they experience on this job. It is in the range of about 20 per cent at any time off on long-term leave because of these traumas that they've experienced. There have been working groups put together and that have reported ways to deal with this, but there is nothing that is happening to move forward on the known ways to support our paramedics. One of the ways we can stabilize our workforce is to keep people that are already there and already trained working. This is a group on which we could really focus. There's a large proportion of shifts that remain unfilled, of ambulances that don't go out every day. This is impacting our rural

populations even to a greater degree than in the cities, yet we don't have these procedures implemented.

3:10

How about physicians? Well, we've been losing that battle over the last several years since trust has been lost and since the need for new payment models has been coming. Now, finally, we're getting there with the first step, which we should have implemented long ago. Promises – promises – are not getting us there. We need to be putting money into team-based care. We know that we're not going to get to providing primary care for our population by simply training more doctors or recruiting more doctors. We know that we need to do those things, but we need to keep them. We need to retain the doctors we have, but we also need to build our teams. That includes nurse practitioners. But they're a very tiny group of people within this system, and nurse practitioners don't only work in primary care.

There's nothing in this budget that is working to build our teams. One of the ways that we have in Alberta is our primary care networks, but are we seeing any significant change and increase to help build out those teams? No. We're not seeing those changes that we need to build our teams. We need to improve care by bringing in and incorporating in our system of care people like our optometrists and our pharmacists. And while we have groups there, is there anything in this budget that is to help to bring them into co-ordinating care with other members of the primary care team? No. It's just left up to every individual out there. They're not being supported.

In fact, cuts to the fees, some of the core fees that they can help provide that primary care, have been made in this past year, and we're not seeing any change in bringing anything back so that the follow-up visits that may be needed for some children and seniors can happen. We're not seeing the follow-up that pharmacists can do and contribute. Those fee codes have not come back. There's no way that the system is helping to link a pharmacist in a community pharmacy with primary care physicians nearby. We also know that we need pathways to care. It isn't just about providing bits and pieces all over the place but knowing how to connect them together. We need the system to help with that.

One of the things that has happened, which is just a shot at breaking down the acute-care system, has been to break up the strategic clinical networks, which were focused on planning and bringing in pilots that could show better ways of doing things. Where that has been a problem is in – let's take the surgical strategic clinical network, which has done a lot of work around pathways. It has brought in and piloted some early access clinics. And in breaking up the strategic clinical networks, the people doing that key work and the programs that were being funded, which early on are showing great benefits at getting people in for early assessments for when they have specific problems that may need surgery, they had to scramble to get those programs fitting in some other part of the system. So there's chaos, and instead of moving ahead, we're trying to patch together things that already existed and were moving forward because there hasn't been planning.

The chaos is created by just breaking things up without coming up with a specific plan, and this budget is contributing to this. It's pulling people that worked in planning now into the Health ministry. But they're not working with the people that they planned things with, so we're going to have more and more of the top-down decision-making that doesn't even apply on the ground because we're breaking up those teams.

We also need facilities space. The Stollery is bursting. Yes, there's some planning money, but let's get going on this at a much faster pace. What are we doing with the Cross Cancer Institute? We

know that wait times for cancer are way too long for the majority of people. One of the things that's contributing to that is that even if we could put more clinics and have more physicians, there's no funding for the teams to support them, and they don't even have space that they can run extra clinics in. There's space in Calgary in the Arthur Child cancer centre, but there's no staffing to fill it.

Also, there's nothing in this budget to bring in innovative ways of upskilling and increasing the roles of care providers that we have. Part of building teams is to have some of the roles that previously were done or sometimes are still done by a physician, for example, done by someone else. And that has primarily been – over time we've done a lot of work in nurse practitioners taking on those roles. But we also know that there are groups like radiation therapists that can take advanced training, can have legislation that increases the scope of their practice, and they can take on roles that can do many of the things that radiation oncologists could do. There's nothing in this budget that supports the processes that we need to do to move in that direction. The training programs are developed; we just need to bring them into Alberta. The roles are there. The evaluations are there. We just need to bring them in so that we can get our wait times down.

We also need to have our teams working on flow. We know that there need to be processes to get people moving through the system. One example is these early access or quick access clinics in surgery, where people can get in within a very short period of time with some very specific issues. What they can do is that they can identify who actually needs to see a surgeon because many of those people will need physiotherapy, and the smallest proportion of people seen there actually need to go on to surgery. So we can free up more time for the surgeons while we get people care faster, and we get them in the right hands, which is often a physiotherapist.

We aren't putting money into these kinds of programs that can markedly increase our care. Instead, we're pulling money back to the ministry. We're hearing that the government views Alberta Health Services as a big black box. I don't know why; they've been there six years, and everything is pretty transparent. It's becoming a bit of a black box because the people within them now, because of the chaos, don't even know what pillar they're going to be part of. The chaos is creating that. For example, people that work in translation services and their leaders don't know where translation services is going to go. It's needed in different parts of the system; where is it going to go? Instead, everything is frozen, no decision-making. All our money is going in the wrong direction, into high-level administration instead of focusing on the problems that we have today.

We need to stop the corruption. We need to stop putting money into things that are, quite frankly, ridiculous. Anyone that works in the area of pharmaceuticals clearly would have known that ordering this Tylenol was a ridiculous idea. I've worked in a limited area related to that and knew that this was really pretty much impossible, and then you hear about the huge amount of money that's wasted on this.

3:20

I can't stand by this budget when they're spending money in stupid ways. It has not got planning, and we're not focusing on the things that people need. We need to make the contracts publicly available. Who's getting what for different services? We need to listen to the evidence that's there and was there before they started going down this path of more and more chartered surgical facilities. By moving more and more towards the chartered surgical facilities, we're seeing less of other important surgery that needs to be done, and putting money there is contributing to longer wait times for everything else, including cancer surgery, because, of course, these

contracts weren't just giving them money; they were also giving them guarantees of support of anaesthesiologists and guarantees of numbers of cases that would come to them. Therefore, we're putting all our money in the wrong places.

We also need to work on our workforce, build our workforce by not bringing in what I'll call silly rules. I know the Alberta Medical Association argued against it, but this minimum of 500 patients in a panel means that we're not taking advantage of many physicians who do other kinds of work but could be enticed to stay and practise.

I would like to call on this government to change things. This budget is not going where it needs to go. Call a full and public inquiry into the corrupt care scandal so we can begin to rebuild trust and move towards a government that gives us the services we need.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is a pivotal moment for Alberta. Our economy faces unprecedented threats: tariffs, inflation, and a government that has no plan to steer us through these rocky waters. Bill 42 and this UCP budget aren't just misguided; they are a betrayal of Albertans' priorities: jobs, affordability, health care, education, and public safety. This budget fails on every single one. Let's be clear. This isn't fiscal responsibility. It's simply a recipe for cuts, chaos, and corruption, and Albertans will pay the price not just today but for generations to come.

The UCP budget assumes a 15 per cent tariff on Alberta goods yet offers no plan to protect workers or industries. Let's take the beef sector, for example. Cattle herds are at a 36-year low. Ranchers are selling off livestock. The UCP's response? A pitiful \$2.3 million over three years. That's not a plan; that's a surrender. It's hurting families, ranchers, and farmers that have been farming and herding for generations. Our ranchers and farmers are integral to Alberta's economy and to our economic growth and sustainability.

Furthermore, they've cut postsecondary funding by \$300 million, slashed retraining programs, which will impact young Albertans and their future as they look for employment, and handed students a 6.7 per cent tuition hike. The UCP's answer? When tariffs hit, where will displaced workers go? Nowhere. Not only will the students be displaced but so will the workers. The make-Alberta-great-again slogan simply won't pay the bills. It will not pay student tuitions, and it devastates any international or national student recruitment strategy that any of our postsecondary institutions try to mobilize and implement.

This government boasts about a \$2-a-day tax cut while quietly raising 39 taxes and fees, including a 14 per cent spike in education property taxes. Let's just break down what that \$2-a-day tax cut actually buys Albertans. Auto insurance: it's still the highest in the country. Utilities: rates have quadrupled under this government. Families are now making decisions between lights on, lights off, groceries, heating the home. You know, Albertans are hitting the food bank more than ever before. Housing: rents are rising faster than anywhere in the country. Where are people going to live? Sadly, the reality is that the \$2 won't cover a cup of coffee at Tim Hortons let alone the inflation crisis. This isn't a relief; it's an insult.

Albertans believe and want to trust that a doctor, a nurse, a facility is going to be there in time of crisis or when there's an injury. We all want to make sure that we receive the care that we need, that when our children are sick with fevers, they get the care they need. However, health care is getting a real 3 per cent cut while our population grows. A cut while we grow is not great math. That

means longer wait times. That means longer wait times for surgeries, and families will suffer. Emergency rooms are already overflowing. Rural hospitals are shutting down. Doctors are fleeing. British Columbia took many of our doctors, but the UCP's priority: \$80 million for bloated private surgical contracts while the Royal Alexandra sits alone and waits.

You want to talk about corruption? The Alberta Health Services contracts that are under investigation, health facilities sold off to UCP insiders, and a minister caught endorsing private clinics on taxpayer letterhead. This is not reform. This is a racket, and it does not serve Albertans. This government claims they are looking into it, yet they refuse to hold a public inquiry. This government also claims they'll build schools, yet zero – that's zero; none – of their 11 promised schools break ground this year. Classrooms are packed; hallways are overcrowded. We're seeing hallways adapting into classrooms, libraries into makeshift rooms where one teacher is hired for 48 students. Forty-eight students per one adult. Our children are our most precious resource, yet we are neglecting them.

The UCP's solution? A funding formula tweak while under-spending \$157 million on already previously announced projects. Who will suffer? Alberta families. Educating our children is about economic sustainability and our viability in the future. If we do not educate our children and invest in our children, how are they going to be able to make proper decisions for us when we need care as seniors? Meanwhile we see this shift into the privatization of education. Tuition now covers more than provincial funding at postsecondaries. A message that this government is sending loud and clear to young Albertans is that your future isn't worth investing in, and it's shameful.

Not only education is hurt with this. We see towns like Slave Lake begging for highway repairs, opening their emergencies, and the UCP spends \$355 million on private recovery centres and \$9 million on a mental health war room to silence critics. They'd rather fund Donald Trump's policing ideas than actually put police in our own cities and towns, and highways that will be safe for Albertans. Even their own backbenchers are revolting. UCP MLA Scott Sinclair is voting against this budget . . .

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please. The proper names of members of this House are certainly not acceptable.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: My apologies.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll let you apologize and withdraw for that.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: I apologize and withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

And I'm going to take this opportunity to remind all members that if you want to have a conversation, perhaps this place is not the place to do it. It's getting a little bit loud in here, and the only one with the call is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Member Calahoo Stonehouse: Thank you. One of the UCP's very own MLAs voted against this budget, calling it urban-focused and reckless. When your own team abandons ship, you know it's sinking.

Albertans deserve a government that fights for them; not tax cuts for the wealthy, not privatization scams, and not chaos. Albertans need real tariff protections, real plans that are going to work for farmers, that work for Alberta's workers. We need to see investment in health care and schools to ensure that the next generation is well and thriving and making decisions about Alberta's economy, Alberta's future, Alberta's forests with really

thoughtful, critical minds, which means we have to invest in public education, not corporate private handouts.

We need affordability relief in our province that actually lowers costs for Alberta's families, rather than choosing between putting food on the table or the lights on in your home. This is the Alberta dream, that all families are prosperous, because better is possible.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Member Hoyle: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm actually happy to rise to speak to Bill 42, Appropriation Act, 2025. I stand in opposition of this bill as it stands. This government's budget is not focused on what Albertans actually need. Instead, it's full of broken promises.

Every day I am inundated with e-mails, phone calls about overcrowded schools and classrooms, how impossible it is to find a family doctor, and with people sharing their heartbreaking stories of being unable to afford the daily necessities of life.

Budget 2025 continues the legacy of this UCP government by cutting critically needed resources. This means that for everyday Albertans services won't be there when they need it most. This UCP government will give you a maximum of \$2-a-day savings, that's required to pay for, let's see, a record increase on auto insurance, still the highest in the country; utility rates that have as much as quadrupled; housing costs that are out of control. Alberta's inflation rate will still be the highest in the country, but, hey, you at least have \$2 extra a day to deal with it.

There are 39 tax and fee increases in this budget, including an increase to an education property tax of an unprecedented 14 per cent. The budget includes hundreds of millions in new and increased taxes and fees that will make everyday life for Albertans more expensive, including increases in court fees, program application fees, licensing fees, and substantially increased property taxes. Albertans want strong public services, fiscal responsibility, and an ethical, competent government. The UCP budget only delivers cuts, chaos, and corruption.

The UCP's plan is sending Alberta down a path to a failing health care system, schools that are bursting at the seams, skyrocketing insurance and utility costs, and zero relief for families and their household budgets. Albertans want good jobs and help with the increased cost of living. They also want investments in public health care, public education, and public safety.

With billions in cuts, the UCP's budget fails to meet the needs of Albertans, Madam Speaker. Budget 2025 effectively cuts public health care but doubles down on more private surgeries, which are at the heart of the corrupt care scandal. This budget effectively cuts education funding, keeping Alberta at the lowest per-student funding in the entire country. While this government guts public health care and public education, they're spending more of Albertans' money on corrupt care. Albertans deserve a budget that makes their lives better, and this budget doesn't even attempt to do that.

To make matters worse, the budget fails on job creation. Alberta has been dealing with high unemployment over the past few years. At 6.7 per cent in January of 2025 Alberta still has above average unemployment. Red Deer has the highest rate of any city nationally at 9.7 per cent, and Calgary and Edmonton have also consistently been well above the average regarding the unemployment rate over the past two years. According to StatsCan data Alberta lost about 20,000 full-time jobs in January of 2025, 20,000 full-time jobs. Essentially all of those lost full-time jobs were attributed to women. Other large provinces like Ontario, Quebec, B.C. all saw net job

gains in January. So, Madam Speaker, what is this government doing to address jobs, job attraction, job retention?

Now we have here, with the threat of Trump tariffs, these numbers are expected to keep increasing for a while, especially with rural areas being impacted the most in our province. Overall, the threat of Trump tariffs on Alberta goods is massive. Alberta jobs are disproportionately exposed to the U.S. trade, making it so that tariffs will pose a disproportionate and significant threat to the province. What does this budget have in relation to dealing with the tariffs? This budget has no concrete plan to deal with tariffs. For example, the UCP has thrown the beef industry to the wolves. There's nothing in this budget about retaining for people who are unemployed or about restoring the massive cuts the UCP has made to postsecondary education. They're not investing in bringing new industries to Alberta or focusing on anything beyond the tired, old make-Alberta-great-again economic policies that do not work.

Budget 2025 shows that there's no real plan to deal with the upcoming challenges facing our economy. Instead, the Premier would rather pander to extremists and take her seat on Team Trump. This budget shows that the contingency fund will increase to \$4 billion in 2025-26 to provide the government with more flexibility to address unforeseen implications of increased economic uncertainty, but there is no detailed mention about the purpose of this contingency plan or how it will be used. Albertans deserve to know what potentially is coming, at a minimum, and how the government will be responsibly handling this crisis. This is a fundamental safety issue. If Albertans don't feel that this environment is safe to have a job, to raise a family, to live in this province, why stay here? Why come here?

Energy, forestry, minerals, and agriculture are some of our provincial industries that have a lot to lose in a trade war with the U.S. As a resource provider Alberta would be hit particularly hard by the U.S. tariffs since oil and gas extraction accounted for over 50 per cent of our exports. Canada is the U.S.'s number one source of oil imports. In 2022 60 per cent of U.S. crude oil imports were sourced from Canada.

3:40

And while this is lower than tariffs on other Canadian goods, the 10 per cent energy tariff will still have a negative impact on Alberta. This will also be an especially difficult time for farmers and ranchers because their industry relies on rules-based, predictable trade. In 2023 the U.S. was the destination for 49.8 per cent of Alberta agricultural exports. Leading exports to the U.S. in 2023 were beef, at \$3.1 billion; crude canola oil, at \$1.2 billion; live cattle, at \$980 million; and processed potatoes, at \$716 million. This no-plan budget will send Alberta's economy into complete chaos, and while Albertans desperately struggle to pay their bills, the UCP is making lives more expensive.

While tariffs will undoubtedly affect Alberta's job market, this is an opportunity for Alberta to be a leader in interprovincial trade in the face of looming market uncertainty. Our urban centres, mid-sized cities, rural communities have the potential to be a global powerhouse for trade. Alberta needs to secure trade agreements and advance policies that open doors to other international markets, helping local businesses grow and stay afloat. Supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs should be at the forefront of government procurement plans. Now more than ever, we need to be positioning Alberta as one of the most attractive places to move to and invest in, yet broken promises from this UCP government extend across the province.

But they're equally felt by the people of Edmonton-South. After spending 69 million of taxpayers' dollars, the UCP cancelled a hospital that is absolutely essential for accommodating the growing population in Edmonton. The last hospital that opened in Edmonton

was more than 35 years ago. Since then Edmonton's population has nearly doubled. Our community is one of the fastest growing communities in Alberta, yet we've been strung along when it comes to critically needed infrastructure. Many Albertans were relying on this hospital. I've recently heard from seniors in my community that were absolutely devastated by this cancellation. In fact, they are still livid with this government's out-of-touch decision-making.

This decision doesn't only affect folks living in Edmonton-South but those living in neighbouring rural communities as well. It seems that if things were up to this Premier, we could just drive to Red Deer if we need access to hospital care. These comments and her blatant disregard for overcrowding and understaffing in hospitals is reckless and will result in further chaos for those seeking health care.

I will say here that when I think of the challenges to folks in Edmonton-South with the lack of access to quality health care when they need it, it's an atrocity that this government has not even made the decision to invest in it. I will say, Madam Speaker, that I am unable to support this bill the way it stands and the fact that Edmontonians are not being served as well as they could be.

With that, thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that would like to join the debate on Bill 42?

Seeing none, I will call on the Minister of Finance to close debate. So waived.

The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance has moved second reading of Bill 42, the Appropriation Act, 2025.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:45 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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

4:00

Against the motion:

Al-Guneid	Ellingson	Metz
Batten	Eremenko	Schmidt
Boparai	Hoyle	Shepherd
Calahoo Stonehouse	Irwin	Sigurdson, L.
Deol	Kayande	

Totals: For – 47 Against – 14

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a second time]

Bill 43 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2025

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move second reading of Bill 43, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2025.

This act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government of Alberta for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. The document I'm tabling today reflects the government's ongoing commitment to support Albertans and their communities, including some of the issues we faced and needs we've addressed since Budget 2024 was tabled in February of last 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.

The estimates include additional funding to the following 11 offices and 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 would help provide for various programs, services, and obligations, including disaster relief and management, expanding health care supports for vulnerable and underserved Albertans, and funding and grants for public safety and child care programs.

Arts, Culture and Status of Women requests \$405,000 together with \$550,000 made available from lower than budgeted expense in other programs. This will provide \$955,000 for the investing in Canada infrastructure program, community, culture, and recreation.

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. As Alberta produces more barrels of oil and the market price for oil increases, both the cost to sell the crude oil royalty volumes increases and the royalty revenue increases. The cost of selling oil is variable and volume based. It's therefore subject to market price fluctuations, which are influenced by current and future demand for oil and global supply levels.

Moving on to other ministries, Environment and Protected Areas is requesting the supplementary amount of \$3.3 million for obligations to remediate contaminated soil and groundwater at various sites.

Forestry and Parks. A devastating wildfire tore through Jasper during last July, and the firestorm destroyed about one-third of the buildings, both commercial and residential. Wildfires across the province also led to thousands of Albertans being forced to evacuate, with many losing their homes, belongings and being out of work for extended periods. In response to these devastating wildfires, the provincial government matched donations to the Canadian Red Cross, provided short-term financial assistance, accommodations support, and tax relief to affected residents and businesses across the province. Forestry and Parks requires \$251.4 million for wildfire fighting and support, which, along with the \$455.4 million from the contingency, will provide a total of \$706.8 million.

Health requests a supplementary amount of \$26.2 million, with \$25.6 million for expanding supports for vulnerable and underserved Albertans plus another \$600,000. Health will enhance access through a virtual care program initiative. These initiatives

are part of the federal-Alberta bilateral agreement, working together for improved health care for Canadians. The increases are off-set by a reprofile of unspent federal funding from 2023-2024. Our government is building a refocused health care system to provide Albertans with access to high-quality, reliable services close to home. These supplementary funds support the government's plan to provide targeted, specialized care in the four areas of acute care, primary care, mental health care, and continuing care.

Immigration and Multiculturalism requests \$809,000. Together with the \$170,000 made available from lower than budgeted expense in other programs, this will allow them to provide \$979,000 to cover a funding responsibility from 2023-2024. That's when we faced higher costs to provide emergency hotel accommodations for Ukrainian evacuees late in the fiscal year.

Indigenous Relations requests the supplementary amount of \$3.3 million together with \$4.1 million made available from lower than budgeted expense in other programs. Using money reprofiled from 2023-2024 from the federally funded investing in Canada infrastructure program, this will provide the ministry \$7.4 million for infrastructure projects that support Indigenous communities and initiatives. This increase was off-set by \$4.1 million made available from lower than budgeted expense in other programs, including \$3.1 million in land and legal settlements, \$500,000 in First Nations and Métis relations, and \$500,000 in consultation, land, and policy. The land and legal settlements lapse is related to the Bigstone treaty land claim, which includes the creation of new reserve lands under Peerless Lake, Trout Lake, and Chipewyan Lake. Most of the funding was used for remediation of contaminated soil. The First Nations and Métis relations lapse reflects the reduction in the forecast revenue from the federal labour market transfer agreement.

Jobs, Economy and Trade requires \$91.6 million. Together with \$15.6 million from other programs, that will provide the ministry \$107.2 million to improve access to affordable, high-quality child care. An additional \$3.9 million in capital investment funding will enhance information technology systems for early learning and child care. These supplementary estimates support the ministry's goal of providing a sustainable early learning and child care system that works for Alberta families and operators. These dollars are fully off-set by federal dedicated revenue carried forward from 2023-2024.

Municipal Affairs has requested \$9.4 million with another \$30,000 made available from lower than budgeted expense in other programs. This would carry forward funding from two federal infrastructure funding programs, the Canada community building fund and the investing in Canada infrastructure fund. Carrying forward unused federal dollars from the previous fiscal year is a standard practice that helps ensure Albertans get the most benefit possible from federal programs.

Public Safety and Emergency Services requires the supplementary amount of \$45.5 million. The bulk of this, or \$43.3 million, will support the work of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, which led the wildfire response, including the one that roared through Jasper, destroying one-third of the townsite in July of '24. The expense is fully off-set by federal funding through federal disaster financial assistance arrangements. Emergency money was needed to cover wages of volunteer firefighters and overtime costs for salaried firefighters and municipal staff. More was used to protect structures from the fire and repair infrastructure damaged as a result of wildfire suppression operations. In addition, the expense will cover the cost of creating reception centres and providing accommodation, food, and transportation for people.

4:10

On top of this expense, Public Safety and Emergency Services requires another \$2.1 million for fighting organized and serious

crime under the federally funded gun and gang violence action fund. The \$2.1 million is a reprofile of 2023-2024 federal funding under the gun and gang violence action fund, which will now be spent in 2024-2025 to support initiatives in Edmonton, Calgary, and Camrose.

Technology and Innovation requires the supplementary amount of \$15 million to provide for the financial commitment made to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation in 2020-2021 for recapitalization. The payment is a cash transfer and does not affect the government of Alberta's surplus or deficit.

Finally, we need to make two notable financial transfers: first, from Health to Mental Health and Addiction and, second, from Arts, Culture and Status of Women to various other ministries. Mental Health and Addiction is requesting an expense transfer of \$137.5 million from Health. This will cover indirect costs related to addiction and mental health treatments and services such as pharmacy and laboratory services, laundry and food services, and corporate services. Even though Mental Health and Addiction holds the budget for these services, they are currently being supported by Alberta Health Services through a shared service agreement.

Moving forward, many of these services will be supported by a new organization that will support Alberta's entire health care system, including provincial health agencies and service providers. This entity will provide services like information technology, finance and human resource functions as well as digital communications and marketing. This transfer is a result of the health system refocusing work and transferring mental health, addiction, and correctional health services to the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction. Since September 2024 the newly established Recovery Alberta has been operating as the provincial health agency responsible for the delivery of mental health, addiction, and correctional health services.

Turning to Arts, Culture and Status of Women, this ministry requests the transfer of \$11.7 million to four partner ministries for the prevention of family and sexual violence program. This is funded by the federal government under the national action plan to end gender-based violence. Of the \$11.7 million needed, \$7.25 million is for Children and Family Services, \$1.4 million is for Indigenous Relations, \$2.1 million heads to Justice, and \$1 million to Advanced Education.

The amounts in these supplementary estimates are needed to help the government address a wide variety of priorities for Albertans. Our government is committed to ensuring health care and education are well funded and meet the needs of Albertans. We remain focused on responding to and mitigating the effects of natural disasters for Albertans. Above all else, we are committed to ensuring Alberta is the best place in Canada to live, work, and raise a family. I urge my fellow members to support this bill today and help us deliver on our responsibilities to support Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I will accept that I may have missed it, but out of an abundance of caution might you please do the following: move second reading of Bill 43, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2025?

Mr. Horner: I move second reading of Bill 43, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Excellent. Thank you.

Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has moved second reading of Bill 43. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has risen to join in the debate.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for introducing Bill 43 for us to debate today. I was

really pleased to be able to have the opportunity to sit in the estimates, with my colleague from Calgary-Foothills, on Treasury Board and Finance. You know, I think the minister raised a number of points on which myself and my colleague here and probably a number of the other members on this side of the aisle would agree; that being, we are in some ways in uncharted territory when it comes to the geopolitical and financial circumstances that Alberta and Canada are currently in, and that bodes for challenging times ahead when it comes to making challenging financial decisions. It is in fact what we are all here to do on behalf of Albertans as stewards of their taxpaying dollars, as stewards of the future in this province and of the assets that ultimately belong to every single Albertan.

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

It is not an easy task, and I really do stand alongside the minister and probably every member in this Chamber when it comes to the seriousness with which we approach some of these very challenging financial decisions that we have lying before us when it comes to our economic future, our energy future, the investments that need to be made in these fundamental public systems on which we all rely and on which we want to ensure that future generations can also rely.

In a world of tremendous uncertainty I believe that we need a government that provides certainty and predictability. Unfortunately, I don't think that is what we have seen from this government. There is chaos where we need predictability. Where we ought to provide accountability to Albertans, we are facing the greatest scandal possibly that Alberta has ever seen since it became a province in this great country. Where there ought to be maximum value for dollars spent, there are bloated contracts and a frustratingly little amount of public reporting on impact and outcomes for those dollars spent.

I think Albertans deserve better, Mr. Speaker, and on that note we'll get into some of the finer print on Bill 43. Bill 43 is asking for an additional \$470.2 million to be transferred from general revenue fund into the various ministries that the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance has listed for us. That is an underestimation in the budget of nearly half a billion dollars. It is nothing to sneeze at when it comes to Budget '24-25 and just how significant the overspend was.

Clearly, the government has sought to remediate that in moving ahead with a contingency fund of \$4 billion as a result of some of the uncertainty that we're looking at environmentally, geopolitically, financially, and such, but at the end of the day I think we still do need to hold government to account on, really, two key elements of this \$470 million ask: why had they underestimated the budget so significantly in '24 and/or why did they overspend so significantly? Was it a lack of planning, or was it really considerations that were totally out of our control? I think that, at the end of the day, those are the kind of answers that Albertans deserve when it comes to whether or not their government is in fact stewarding the taxpayer dollars with that fundamental piece in mind.

I would say that another point that the minister raised in estimates last week is that incredibly important point of value for dollars spent. What I believe is that Albertans will pay for services delivered when they can actually feel and experience and see in the lives of their families and in their communities and in their children's classrooms that the taxes that they pay are in fact going to the front-line services that make lives better for every single person in this province.

That is what we all should want. It's not about the dollar amount; it is about the value delivered for the dollar spent. It's not about what we used to call it in my fundraising days in the nonprofit world

— I don't know if I can say that. It's not about how many seats are filled in a particular class; it's the outcome from that class. It's whether or not there has actually been a recorded and measurable, positive change in that attendance.

That's what Albertans deserve, and I'm seeing very, very little. When we're talking about a request for an additional \$470 million, in addition to the transfer that I'll certainly get to around \$137 million more to Mental Health and Addiction, what is it getting us? What is it actually doing for Albertans so that they can continue to thrive? Right now this is a government that I think has been pretty lean on positive impact and positive change, Mr. Speaker. Over six years of a UCP government homeless rates are up, housing prices are through the roof, cost of living is skyrocketing. We are seeing reduced access to a family doctor. We're seeing reduced health outcomes, greater and greater challenges in rural communities and further disparity between urban and rural communities, further disparity between the haves and the have-nots.

4:20

That, in my mind, is not delivering on the kind of impact that we should all expect when it comes to the very hard-earned taxpayer dollars that go toward the coffers of this province and other orders of government. "What is the impact of the \$470 million?" I think is ultimately what I'm asking to see. If it is, in fact, around poor planning, then I think that the government needs to take a very long, hard look in the mirror to understand where they got that wrong and that they have a responsibility to then report that to Albertans, to say: hey, folks; this is where we underestimated some of the spend.

On that note, I'd like to talk about Mental Health and Addiction and the transfer of \$137 million. Really, that number should be \$50 million greater, Mr. Speaker, because it was by that amount that Recovery Alberta, the new provincial health agency, exceeded their budget for '24-25. The reason, though, that they didn't ask for a transfer of \$184 million is because they underspent in community- and grassroots-serving programs.

I stood in these Chambers just, I guess, a week ago now to ask about the small community-run organizations in Ponoka, in Barrhead, in Edmonton, and elsewhere, small communities around the province who are delivering incredible value — there's that value for dollars spent once more — on very lean budgets. Those programs are no longer going to be funded by the government of Alberta. We saw the same thing happen in disability-serving organizations, these community-based groups that keep people engaged, that prevent them from social isolation, that keep them involved and healthy and as engaged in community as they can possibly be.

I think those programs both serve community and they also serve around prevention and early intervention. When we're cutting those programs — this is nothing new. I think any single person in this room can attest to the fact that when we invest in prevention and early intervention, we ultimately save ourselves a whole lot of cost down the road. But when we have people treating emergency departments and emergency rooms as primary care — now, don't get me wrong. I want people to go to the emergency room if they are sick and if they need care. If that is the only option available, please take it. But it is by far the most costly option.

Just like in Mental Health and Addiction, when we are eliminating those programs that are down the street in my little town in, you know, central-east Alberta and I can't go there anymore, then where on earth am I supposed to go? That is exactly what has happened in Mental Health and Addiction. To the minister's points around making challenging financial decisions under a great deal of uncertainty, it seems to me that it's a very important opportunity and an opportunity that should be kind of grabbed with both hands to invest in the prevention and early intervention, to invest in those

community-based, back-to-the-basics organizations that help people where they're at rather than responding with very costly solutions that ultimately I don't think deliver the kind of impact.

For example, the Ponoka Rising Sun Clubhouse had an annual budget of roughly \$320,000 a year, and they served over 150 people per year following discharge from the local mental health and brain injury centre there in town. I mean, that's a pretty incredible value. That's about \$2,000 per person when we're looking at the whole operating budget.

On the flip side, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction funded therapeutic living units, which are dedicated treatment beds in corrections, to the tune of 12 and a half million dollars in one fiscal year, and 14 people completed the program. Excuse me; I'm sure many more started the program but didn't finish. Twelve and a half million dollars; 14 people went through. Is that, in fact, the value for dollar that Albertans deserve and that they expect? It's those kinds of decisions that government really should be answering to, and I don't know how they could. With that kind of output and that little impact, I'm not sure how they can excuse those kinds of spending. Somebody is benefiting from the program. Those 14 people certainly are, but I'm not sure who else. So it's about value, and it's about impact.

Last evening we had, I think — well, there were a lot of really good points raised on this side. The answers on the other were not quite as specific as, I think, many of us would have hoped. My colleague for Calgary-Acadia raised some very critical points around child care. Another point where I would wonder is if Alberta families are feeling any better off in the last six years when it comes to child care. Goodness knows, when I was paying for two kids so that both my husband and I could work full-time, it was more than our housing costs, Mr. Speaker.

I still hear those stories all the time. What about those federal dollars? When do we get to see that impact on my family? When do I get to go back to work and benefit from the investments that I've made in my own education and in my own career development? We are no better off. That is not a family that is thriving. That is a family that is just getting by, and they deserve better.

For the \$91 million that is going towards child care and improving access, what is taking so long? It is a level of ideological dithering that is setting families farther back every single year when they have to make the decisions about whether or not a parent can go back to work or just have to make that financial decision of staying home because child care is just too expensive. It is nothing new. I certainly would have thought that after six years of a UCP government they would have figured that out by now.

You know, lots of conversation around the \$250 million that is going towards Forestry and Parks. It was a truly tragic year, Mr. Speaker, in Alberta, and one that I know all of us are really nervous about seeing repeated this year and into the future. It's a really scary prospect to know that a warming planet is resulting in unfathomable risks to our forests, to our industries that are associated with that, to tourism, and the communities in every single corner of this province that could potentially be absolutely clobbered. I understand that that amount needs to be whatever it needs to be to keep our communities safe.

Once again, looking at prevention being worth a pound of cure, my colleague from Banff-Kananaskis hosted a terrific event just last weekend on wildfire preparedness on the eastern edges of her riding. It was, by all accounts, an incredible success. You know, over 100 people, I understand, came to attend an afternoon in beautiful Bragg Creek, Alberta, to learn about what they can do to be better prepared for the wildfire season that approaches this year and into the future. It was an opportunity to bring together experts and talk about — I believe there was an individual from Jasper, from

Parks Canada. I mean, this was the kind of collaborative endeavour, again, community-driven and really speaking to the needs of the local community, that generated incredible value and great benefit for everybody in attendance. I'm sure that's going to have a multiplier effect when people start talking to their neighbours. Wasn't terribly expensive, Mr. Speaker, but I think once more generated the kind of value and the opportunity to prepare in a way that people are just absolutely hungry for.

My colleague last evening asked some very good questions, I think, around wildfire preparedness. How much of that \$250 million went towards, you know, wildfire fighting versus wildfire suppression and response? That is going to continue to be a very challenging issue here for us in Alberta and certainly across the country as well.

4:30

At the end of the day, under challenging circumstances there is an opportunity to go back to basics: public education, public health care, community initiative, grassroots organizations that are nimble and responsive to the needs of community, that are culturally competent and culturally relevant for the people that they are looking to serve. Government doesn't have to do it all, Mr. Speaker, but what government can do is exercise its planning and its strategy to make sure that for every single dollar spent, Albertans are garnering maximum value. Unfortunately, that is not what we have seen from the UCP government. It's what I want to advocate for for Calgary-Currie and residents of every riding represented here because that is ultimately what they deserve. And, boy, when I see the kind of impact that an organization funded at \$300,000 a year can provide versus a pretty burdensome and overly bureaucratic program run at \$12.5 million a year – I appreciate those are organizations and initiatives of very different scale, but when it actually comes to the people who are going through those programs, all the more reason to make sure that we are funding the lean and mean organizations that ultimately have very big bang for the buck.

I'm just going to look to my colleagues here for a bit of a time check on how much more I've got to go. [interjection] Two minutes. Thank you. I'm going to take, then, the last couple of minutes just to look at the budget overall. We've looked at Budget 2025, and we've looked at what we are expecting to be cuts to the legislative offices, cuts to a whole lot of program and operating expense, though we are still seeing significant investments when it comes to capital. I think, ultimately, what I want Albertans to leave with is whether or not this is a government that they can trust to make some of those very challenging decisions under challenging circumstances.

Very shortly we're going to be seeing compassionate intervention, or involuntary treatment, legislation introduced in this House. If and when it's actually delivered, Mr. Speaker, that will be a program that costs close to half a billion dollars to actually execute come 2029, when the kind of respective buildings are actually open and launched in 2029 per the government schedule. Those are exactly the kinds of incredibly costly, expensive, highly bureaucratic and administratively intensive programs that I think will not be achieving the impact Albertans expect them to, Albertans deserve them to. Before we start going to these dramatic legislative conclusions, I think this government needs to demonstrate that they have exhausted all other options when it comes to more affordable, more impactful, more community-led and community-informed programs and initiatives that I think will ultimately generate far greater benefit and value for Albertans.

On that note, I will pass it along to my colleague. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow I'll recognize.

Member Kayande: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to discuss the supplementary supply bill. I always find it easier to talk about a bill when there's some meat in it, and supplemental supply, unfortunately, is money that's already been spent, so it's kind of like: "Okay. We spent this money. Please give us appropriation for it." You know, it leaves out of scope a lot of what my colleague from Calgary-Currie was talking about, which is a lot of the why and the effectiveness, because by the rules of this House the place to talk about the why and the effectiveness and the outcomes and the outputs that we're legislating to are actually in the budget debate. So, unfortunately, perforce, we have to go very deep into the weeds and have extremely boring conversations about, you know, what's this \$100,000 here; and what's this 6 and a half million dollars there; and, oh, why do we need \$440 million of unbudgeted expenditures to begin with? A lot of it is, frankly, like in the case of forest fires, just very difficult to predict just how bad a forest fire season will be and exactly what those appropriations will be spent on.

Now, the challenge that I have, though, is that – like, when I look at the energy appropriation, for example, it's an extra \$51.6 million, which is off-set by \$10 million that, unfortunately, I didn't take the time yesterday to ask in estimates about exactly what that piece was that came out. But let's focus now on the \$51.6 million of additional appropriation. Thematically, this is all good news. We have more royalty payments, and therefore the cost of oil sales is actually going to go up.

Unfortunately, I'm just really unable to figure out – like, there's just no transparency. Again drafting on my colleague from Calgary-Currie, there's just no way of knowing whether Albertans are getting value for their money from the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission. It's a little bit unfortunate because the APMC, just to back up a little bit, is kind of a dumping ground. It's the Dumpster for a lot of stuff that governments probably shouldn't have done, one being – I mean, this is a bipartisan fail – the Sturgeon refinery. As well, the Keystone XL pipeline is a unipartisan fail where, unfortunately, the Kenney government attempted to build a pipeline that did not have its construction permits in the United States – oops – failing to realize that 99 per cent of a pipeline is just as expensive as building 100 per cent of the pipeline but significantly lower valued. So that got dumped in there to manage.

The one thing, though, that the APMC does on a consistent basis is manage the crude oil royalty in kind and the bitumen royalty in kind. Oil supply chains are exceedingly complicated. When we go to the gas station and we fill up our cars, you get a very consistent grade of oil or grade of gasoline or diesel, if that's how you roll. It's the same stuff with three different versions, which is like the octane number. Unfortunately, even that is just enough to be like – you know, sometimes I put the wrong octane of fuel in.

You can imagine that with crude oil supply chain, there are multiple, multiple, hundreds, maybe even thousands of different grades of oil that are associated with things like boiling points, things like sulphur composition, things like the gravity, the density of the oil, the viscosity of it. Basically, depending on the kinds of useful products that that crude oil got turned into and the processing intensity that that requires, now, you know, that barrel of crude has very different pricing. Its pricing depends kind of on where it comes from and where it's ultimately sold.

Unfortunately, I'm just having a devil of a time trying to figure out, you know, basic information like: what is the size of the oil royalty in kind program? How much of the massive resource bounty that Albertans depend on to thrive, that is responsible for this province's prosperity, is actually received in kind? And, therefore, how much of that is the APMC's responsibility to then sell on to

other buyers to get turned into useful products? It seems incredibly difficult to find that basic, basic information.

Now the government is coming back for a supplemental supply estimate of \$51.7 million and saying: don't worry; it's because we had higher revenues than we expected, so of course we've got higher costs. Well, that's great and probably true – I mean, unparliamentary. Sorry. It is most definitely true because it must be in this House. But we don't know as the people of Alberta whether we're getting value for that APMC money and whether that cost of selling oil is a cost that, frankly, is the lowest possible.

4:40

This is a government that is mired in a corruption scandal right now. It touches multiple ministries, and it is therefore a reasonable question. How do we know that the oil volumes that are purchased and sold according to the bitumen and oil and crude oil royalty in kind programs, that we as Albertans are getting the maximum value for our money, that we're maximizing the royalty on that barrel of oil?

As I said before, this is complicated. The oil is picked up at the wellhead, I assume, for in-kind volumes. By the way, I am making this up, so if I am wrong, I'm perfectly happy to get corrected because I have had to, like, just trawl through the documents and try and figure out and piece together my own assessment, based on my understanding of the industry, of how this could probably work.

The oil volumes are picked up at the wellhead. They are either trucked to a terminal or they are, like, pipeline-connected. From those little feeder pipes they go to a trading hub where they are put into a tank, and then at that point they are either sold or moved down long-haul pipes.

This I don't know: does the Alberta government actually purchase long-haul pipeline space? When they're making their purchase decisions or when they're acquiring volumes at the wellheads, are they paying firm pipeline capacity tolls, which is riskier because if the volume doesn't show up, then you're still on the hook for the toll, or are you paying interruptible volumes, which is lower risk but more expensive?

These are questions that are actually, like, trade-off questions. They're economics questions, and the people of Alberta have a right to know how the APMC is thinking about this decision-making and how they're making those decisions, not just because I'm a nerd about this and I want to know but because the amount of money involved is really significant. It is \$360 million a year under the circumstances of the budget that we're thinking about.

You know, that's just a lot of money. It's a money river, the kind which if you're not watching where those pennies are going, like, a penny on every barrel suddenly turns out to be a significant, significant amount of money. It's like the old saying, a \$100 million here and \$100 million there and suddenly you're talking about real dollars. That's what I wish I knew about this \$51.7 million additional appropriation.

Now, I asked the energy minister last night in estimates. I mean, I'll be honest, his answers kind of left a little bit to be desired. First of all, he blamed Justin Trudeau for the whole problem, which was interesting. Really, what we just want to know is: how do we know that Albertans are getting value for their money in a government agency, the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission, which, quite frankly, takes just a lot of the trash from bad government policies in the past and is responsible for managing it?

The other problem is that crude oil trading is complicated. There are sharks in this business, and I don't know the extent to which we have – like, building a good trading system is very hard. I don't know whether the APMC is managing the trading itself by, you know, setting out contracts, maybe like BP or Glencore or some

other commodity trading house, Cargill, does it, or whether they actually have traders that are sitting on the desk.

Just from my experience of watching traders being managed – I have fortunately never ever had to manage traders; thank goodness – you know, like, they're sitting around and they're sitting at their computer terminals, and you ask them: hey, what's going on here? "Oh, hedging. We're just hedging. There's nobody here but us hedgers. We're certainly not taking speculative risk." Okay. Maybe.

But these systems are complicated, and they have to be built properly, and traders have to be managed, and then there are big counterparty credit issues, where if you are selling your oil down the line, the cash doesn't cross every day. You get paid on the 25th of the month. So you have credit risk, on average of 55 days for your counterparty to pay you, and if you're not managing that credit exposure correctly – like, counterparties do blow up often. How are we managing those exposures?

These are things that we kind of just don't know. Like, I should be able to go to the website and say, "Hey, here's our risk management policy" or "Hey, here's how we actually collect the oil; this is where we sell it off." We transacted trading hubs at access and at Edmonton, at Hardisty and at Cromer, but I can't find out any of that information, so I have to take the minister of energy's and the Minister of Finance's word for it that, yes, for sure, this is just a matter of, you know, additional volume. When prices go up, we have to pay more for marketing costs, but what we don't have is a sense of: well, why is that? Can we instead be having fixed-dollar marketing amounts? Or, like, why is that just a stupid question? It's information that I wish that we had so that the people of Alberta can look at this, like, \$360 million line item – my goodness. Boy, that's a half a Mraiche, you know? This is real dollars – it's a semi-Mraiche – that I just wish we could get a little bit more insight into.

Okay. So \$51.7 million: it's already been spent. And I'm glad that we have a really good year for bitumen royalties. I hope that our subsequent years are just as good although, of course, the province is forecasting lower oil prices, which will bring that cost down.

You know, in the budgeting process I kind of wish that costs – like, there's got to be a better way for costs that are inherently unpredictable. If we have to forecast bitumen volumes, which is not easy but much easier than forecasting prices, and if we need to forecast prices, then maybe there should be a way to document that, hey, in this state of the world this is what we expect so that the government can be held accountable. That way we know: oh, this isn't just a normal price and volume thing; this is actually out of the ordinary because it was beyond what was forecasted.

Can I get my time, Mr. Speaker? Would you mind?

The Acting Speaker: Thirty seconds.

Member Kayande: I'm done. Thirty seconds. All right.

Thank you very much. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to the supplementary supply estimate. Yeah. Thanks very much.

The Acting Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? The Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Elbow for that elaborate energy analysis and a crash course in oil trading. We learned a lot, so thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on Bill 43, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2025. The objective of bills like that is to seek and to provide supplementary funding authority to the

government of Alberta from the general revenue fund for the fiscal year. Such bills are typically introduced by governments to address additional funding requirements that were not anticipated during the initial budgeting process. As the Member for Calgary-Elbow mentioned, the Energy and Minerals ministry is asking for a \$51.7 million increase for the cost of selling oil. It's hard to understand. How does the minister explain such a significant forecasting error in the budget planning? The question is truly about transparency and clarity and trust. Why should Albertans trust this financial management when the government's estimates were off by over \$51 million? It's not 51 cents or \$51; it's \$51 million.

Then there's another supplementary request here showing that \$10 million is being redirected from the economic recovery support capital grants and resource development and management to cover oil marketing costs. These are, obviously, very crucial areas for Alberta's economic future and should be taken seriously, so why were these strategic programs underspent at a time when Alberta needs a real economic diversification plan more than ever?

4:50

Mr. Speaker, at a time when the Trump tariffs against Canada and Alberta would result in economic chaos for a long time, at a time when Alberta needs to be truly preparing for the future economy, this budget and this supply is coming across as a missed opportunity, a waste. The saying goes – I believe it's Winston Churchill who said: never let a good crisis go to waste. This budget could have shown some real long-term planning to respond to the economic upheaval Alberta will continue to face under a Trump presidency.

The Premier, we know, has used taxpayer money to go to events, taking selfies in Mar-a-Lago and DC, and she never actually made it to the Trump inauguration, by the way. The ticket was cancelled along with 25,000 other people. Some UCP cabinet ministers have also paid and used taxpayer money to attend prayer breakfasts in the U.S. Perhaps they were hoping to pray the Trump tariffs away. But, you know, for public record here I want to emphasize that none of these taxpayer-funded activities have resulted in stopping the tariffs or bringing investments into our province.

The government needs to understand that working with a bully like Trump is not business as usual. This is not just a trade war, Mr. Speaker; this is a war. This is a question of sovereignty, and we need different ways of thinking in this budget, in these programs, in these ministries in order to remain competitive. I do not see a strategy or long-term thinking in this budget or in this bill. In this bill, Bill 43, there is this unclear grant to Alberta Enterprise Corporation totalling \$15 million to provide the debt repayment to Alberta Enterprise Corporation for recapitalization from '20 to '21 ...

Mr. Stephan: That is the strategy that they want, socialism. Socialism.

Ms Al-Guneid: I see the Member for Red Deer-South heckling me right now, Mr. Speaker.

Really, the question is that this government, this minister, this member cannot explain how the Alberta Enterprise Corporation recapitalization plan – like, why is the department providing a \$15 million grant for this?

While the government provides this grant, we see a cut in the Tech and Innovation ministry, specifically to the Alberta Innovates budget, over the next two years. That's a 23 per cent reduction by 2027, Mr. Speaker, and a reminder that this ministry and its agency, as per their mandate, provides innovation and commercialization programming through Alberta Innovates. So besides the government's chaos and corruption and mismanagement, we're seeing cuts here.

Mr. Speaker, in times of economic upheavals it is time to be doubling down on clean tech and technology commercialization in Alberta. This is our best defence against the Trump aggression. You know, it's not only defending Alberta, but it's also advancing this innovation ecosystem we have in Alberta. How does the minister square cutting Alberta Innovates' budget and putting random grants in this supplementary supply while this is the time to be investing in new frontiers of research and derisking new tech and clean tech for the private sector to attract these investments?

A great example in Alberta Innovates again is bitumen beyond combustion. I understand that the Technology and Innovation minister likes to talk about venture capital money, and it is important, but there are trillions of dollars in the global market waiting to be invested in value-added industries and in low-carbon technologies. I haven't heard the minister speak about clean tech and value-added industries and sectors that will truly spur innovation in these areas. There's a huge potential in developing asphaltene and carbon fibre from Alberta's bitumen. These are multibillion-dollar sectors. The Member for Calgary-Elbow just did a master class in energy analysis and bitumen and oil trading.

We need strategic government investments and programming, not cuts to some of the best research agencies that provide the minister and the cabinet with strategic long-term advice. How does this government make cuts in strategic areas while – you know, it's not even anticipated in this supply, in this bill – in these critical times we live in? Truly, my question is: which areas will be cut this year and in the '27-28 budget as well, when the budget to Alberta Innovates continues to be cut?

Mr. Speaker, really, the question is: how does this government position Alberta for the future given that our trade relationship with the U.S. is fraught right now? To protect Alberta, to advance clean tech and our innovation sector under the tariffs threat, the government should be thinking about the repatriation of Canadian innovators and scientists, bringing these innovators back to Canada and Alberta. Where is this plan in this budget and in this bill? I was hoping the minister might plan for some supply in Tech and Innovation to bring Canadian talents and Albertan talents back. We will need to be assisting Canadian technologies, and this budget does not match these priorities.

I believe the minister and the government should be asking Canadian innovators in the U.S. some of these questions, and I'm gladly sharing them. Do you require the government's assistance to bring your technology or pilot project to Canada and Alberta? Are there commitments in your financing agreements that require you to spend capital in the U.S.? What are the penalties to break the agreements? Where is your next market for your product if working with the U.S. is not feasible?

Mr. Speaker, what is the government doing? I do not see a preemptive strategy to deal with the Trump tariffs. This was Tech and Innovation and the lack of preparedness for Alberta's future.

I'd like to briefly touch on the environment ministry and also the lack of planning and, frankly, the additional risks and liabilities this ministry keeps adding to its work. Mr. Speaker, we know that CST Canada Coal Limited was sanctioned recently by the Alberta Energy Regulator with just a small \$9,000 fine for an incident in the spring of 2023, when 1.1 million litres of tailings escaped into the Smoky River. The minister's budget shows only \$16.5 million allocated this year for resource management after the \$17.9 million being overspent last year. The environment ministry is now asking for \$3 million in remediation work in this supplementary supply.

Given the substantial environmental risks associated with contamination and coal mining, including acid rock drainage and selenium contamination that can persist for decades – of course, coal mining, we know, is not the only thing that creates environmental

liabilities – how can the minister assure Albertans that this amount is actually sufficient? Has this ministry assessed the potential long-term environmental liabilities and contamination of approved and proposed projects, and if so, how are these liabilities being incorporated into approval decisions and financial security requirements?

Let's not forget that this is the government that announced an ill-informed policy on coal mining in the eastern slopes, Mr. Speaker. This will impact the land management and resource management planning in this ministry, as seen in this bill and in this ministry's budget. By the way, this government is calling this a modernized coal mining policy. We know that this is an oxymoron. There is nothing modern about coal mining in the majestic Rockies. More coal mining in the Rockies will increase environmental liabilities that no budget or supplementary supply can prepare for.

It is important to remember that the environment ministry made changes to its mine financial security program just last month. But these changes do not fix the structural design issues with this program, and it leaves the looming liability problem untouched in the mining sector.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Energy Regulator confirmed that the mine liability in 2024 was \$57.3 billion and the security held is \$1.71 billion. The liabilities increased from \$47.3 billion in 2023 to \$57.3 billion in 2024. That's an increase of \$10 billion in one year, and the minister hasn't explained how this shocking increase of \$10 billion in liabilities happened in just one year under this minister's watch. A reminder that this minister asked for \$3 million in this supply, in this bill, for remediation efforts from a tailings spill. Let's remember. How did liabilities increase by \$10 billion in just one year? So many liabilities.

Mr. Speaker, you do not need to be a mathematician to understand that \$1.57 million won't cover \$57.3 billion. How is the environment ministry preparing to address this looming and intergenerational problem that we have here in Alberta? The incompetence is staggering, and our kids and grandkids will pay for these billions in liabilities. No budget, no supplementary supply can cover this mammoth amount of liabilities.

With that, I'd like to end my intervention here, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to comment on this act.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any others wishing to speak? I will call on the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to close debate.

Mr. Horner: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's always polite that you close debate by saying that we've had a lot of good debate on the bill at hand. That's not really the case here today, though. Most of this has been irrelevant to Bill 43. We're not talking about Budget '25. We're talking about, you know, supplementary supply.

Our fiscal rules require us to stay within our contingency with exceptions. They're flexible in that sense. Disaster spending, whether that be wildfire or ag indemnity payments, you know, is an exception, also dedicated revenue. Most of what we're talking about here is federal transfers. I don't think anyone in this House on either side wants to deny federal funds to flow through into these important programs. I think that's something that we can all get behind.

One of the members mentioned, you know: I wish there was more meat on the bone here, more meat in this bill. I'd say that you've got that totally wrong. You should be wishing that this bill doesn't exist or isn't needed. That's what we all want. That's what I want to see next year.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, it's part of why there's a \$4 billion contingency in Budget 2025. We don't want to deny federal transfers to flow through into these important programs. We had another substantial wildfire year and the third consecutive year of a pretty significant drought. I think that's the point here, Mr. Speaker. We're accounting for the things that couldn't be avoided. I would urge everyone in the House to support Bill 43.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a second time]

Bill 39

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to move second reading of Bill 39, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025.

The bill consists of key legislative amendments which, if passed, would implement policies included in Budget 2025. Mr. Speaker, as we heard on budget day, this year's budget takes a cautious approach as we navigate uncertain economic waters. Together our budget choices will help us meet the challenges this province faces.

I'd now like to take a moment to outline the proposed amendments. First, we're proposing amendments to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act that would make our personal income tax cut promise a reality. This year we decided to proceed ahead of schedule with the new 8 per cent tax bracket on the first \$60,000 of income. This change would save individuals up to \$750 in 2025 and in total put more than a billion dollars back into the bank accounts of Albertans to spend on their priorities.

Other amendments to the act will create a supplemental nonrefundable tax credit for taxpayers with certain tax credits totalling in excess of \$60,000. This will ensure no one is inadvertently made worse off by the introduction of the new tax bracket and associated changes to the nonrefundable tax credit rate. These amendments will also establish December 31, 2025, as the last date for the Canada Revenue Agency to make payments under two legacy tax credit programs.

Secondly, this bill includes proposed amendments to the Sustainable Fiscal Planning and Reporting Act that would increase our flexibility in using surplus cash to improve Alberta's net financial position. If passed, these changes would allow government to allocate 50 per cent of surplus cash toward repaying maturing debt or investing in the heritage fund rather than using it all for debt repayment. It would also allow us to focus on improving Alberta's overall net financial position rather than being solely focused on debt repayment.

This bill also includes proposed changes to the Legal Professions Act. If passed, the changes increase the statutory contribution by the Alberta Law Foundation to Legal Aid Alberta to 50 per cent from 25 per cent. Changes would also require ministerial approval of all Alberta Law Foundation grants, gifts, and funding commitments over \$250,000.

The next item I'd like to go over is proposed amendments that would allow us to dissolve the Auditor General's Provincial Audit Committee. This committee is one that is unique to Alberta, and the role of the committee is advisory in nature. This amendment does not change the Auditor General's powers or authority, and Auditor General reports will continue to be reviewed by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts after the reports are released.

Next is a proposed change to the Fuel Tax Act that would increase the tax rate on locomotive fuel from the current 5.5 cents per litre to 6.5 cents per litre. This is a change to bring Alberta's tax rate for this fuel more in line with the rates seen in other prairie provinces. I'd like to note here that the implementation date for this change will be retroactive to March 1, 2025. Railways file and pay their taxes monthly, so this implementation date aligns with those existing filing requirements and avoids additional red tape.

Next I'd like to speak to proposed changes to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. Under this bill we're proposing amendments that would discontinue the development and implementation of the supplemental health benefits program for adoptive families. To provide a bit more background for members, this is an additional supplementary health benefit program that was expected to roll out in January 2025. However, this year's budget must prioritize core programs to keep children safe, support early intervention for children, youth, and families, and assist Albertans who experience family violence and sexual violence.

Alberta will continue to be a leader in making adoption affordable through the current subsidies in the adoption expenses tax credit so that more children can find their forever homes. In 2023 we increased the provincial adoption expenses tax credit by almost \$4,000 to further help with the cost of adoption, and this government is helping subsidize the cost of private adoption through licensed agencies by providing a one-time subsidy of \$6,000 for adoptive families earning less than \$180,000 per year.

Next are amendments that would make it simpler to adjust benefit rates under the income support program. We are proposing to move the benefit rates from the Income and Employment Supports Act into the regulations so we can make it simpler to adjust benefit rates under the income support program. The income support program continues to remain fully funded and available to all eligible Albertans. What this change will do is to standardize approaches to benefits so they are consistent under all programs. The amendments would take effect July 2026 in alignment with the implementation of the new disability assistance program.

Lastly, we are proposing some technical changes to the Alberta Corporate Tax Act to respond to recent changes to the federal Income Tax Act to ensure consistency in the provincial act. Most of the proposed provincial amendments will mirror the recent changes to the federal general antiavoidance rule legislation, which is legislation that ensures people are in compliance with the object, spirit, or purpose of tax legislation and not just the literal reading. Alignment of Alberta and federal tax legislation simplifies compliance and administration.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, these amendments help us meet the economic challenges that the province is facing right now. They would bring in policies that provide some relief to Albertans, help us better manage our fiscal picture, and find necessary efficiencies we need to move forward right now.

To that end, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move the second reading of Bill 39, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. the Minister of Finance has moved second reading of Bill 39. Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Ellingson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 39, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Let me just start out by saying that I am honoured to stand here with my colleagues this afternoon. As we just heard from the minister, this

act covers a lot of ground, amending eight pieces of legislation, paving the way for elements of Budget 2025.

The legislation does create a new tax bracket of 8 per cent for income less than \$60,000, but I do want to put out there a clarification for all Albertans to know that Alberta is not the most tax-competitive province for low-income earners. That title belongs to Ontario and British Columbia. Those in Ontario pay 5.05 per cent on income under \$52,886 while those in British Columbia pay 5.06 per cent on income under \$49,279. Mr. Speaker, throughout the budget documents the government uses both Ontario and British Columbia as comparator provinces for a number of indicators and outcomes, but to reinforce this message, if you earn \$60,000 or less – let's say you work full-time on minimum wage – you would pay a lower rate in personal income taxes in both Ontario and British Columbia.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to talk about our understanding of who benefits from the tax change in this bill. The lion's share of the benefits accrue to higher income Albertans. Benefits are reduced through nonrefundable tax credits, including children, tuition payments. The benefits mostly accrue to higher income Albertans without dependent children, so not families. We have heard that the tax changes were designed so that no Albertan would be worse off. Lower income Albertans, Albertans living on AISH, Albertans living on income supports: it's designed that they would be no worse off. Said another way, they receive no benefits from these tax changes. The government isn't looking at the bigger picture to understand if they are actually making Albertans worse off. This bill introduces several amendments that will in fact make Albertans worse off.

The Minister of Finance and I used a term in estimates last week that we're looking for nickels to add up to dollars. I give the minister full credit for that term. I think I first heard him introduce it presenting to the Edmonton Chamber. While we both maybe agreed on the term of "nickels and dollars," I think we still have some disagreements on where we're looking for the nickels.

Thank you to my colleague the MLA for Calgary-Elbow. I think this afternoon we maybe were just introduced to a new term respecting the financial decisions that are being made.

This bill amends the Income and Employment Supports Act, and these changes are significant. The minister has talked about these changes, that they're to simplify the process and move further changes away from legislation and into articles associated with legislation, but in doing that, it's creating some uncertainty and chaos for Albertans that are receiving income supports. What this bill does is – you know, when you're looking at a chart that had three streams for income supports, it's removing two of those streams, the amount for expected to work for a working household unit and the amount for a barriers to full employment household unit.

The minister did allude to – and presumably, a new program is in development to revise these streams, to perhaps replace the income supports of these streams. But in the absence of having that legislation in front of us today, it's difficult for Albertans and the members on this side of the House to assess whether or not these changes in income supports are making Albertans any worse off. In the absence of that information it appears that Albertans on income supports will in fact be worse off. Mr. Speaker, this is while Albertans are experiencing the highest inflation in the country and they have experienced the fastest increases in rent in the country. The demand for food banks has doubled in only the last two years. And through all of this the government throws out the uncertainty and the chaos of whether or not there will be reduced access to income supports for vulnerable Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, let's return a moment to that new tax bracket and just reinforce that while persons relying on income supports flounder under the chaos that is caused by this government, uncertain whether or not streams of potential income to them are being closed, the new tax bracket that's being introduced isn't going to benefit those same Albertans. Their incomes are below the level where they will see any benefits. Indeed, it is estimated that approximately 30 per cent of Albertans won't benefit from this new tax bracket.

The government needs to acknowledge that they're not achieving their worst-in-class goal that no Albertan is worse off. This act, if passed, will make some Albertans worse off. We need to start acting for all Albertans. We should be working towards making all Albertans better off rather than striving that no Albertan would be worse off. But this bill does make more changes that will make some Albertans worse off.

This act also changes funding for legal aid. With the amendments to the Legal Profession Act the Alberta Law Foundation will be responsible for a greater share of funding for legal aid in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, while the government will say that no Albertan is worse off from this decision because they anticipate that the same number of Albertans will be serviced by legal aid – legal aid is critical for vulnerable Albertans that can't afford legal representation – this government is reducing funding to that program last year and again this year by a further 20 per cent, expecting the current service levels to be maintained with an increase of funding from the Alberta Law Foundation.

But as the foundation complies with this legislation, 65 not-for-profit agencies providing services not covered by legal aid will likely see reductions to their funding. Why? Because they're currently receiving funding from the Law Foundation, which will now be legally required to send more funding to legal aid. The government must fulfill its responsibility to adequately fund legal aid, allowing the Law Foundation to continue supporting those 65 not-for-profits that are supplying information and supports to Albertans to access justice. Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, these funds might only add up to a few 'Tylenols' or a fraction of a Mraiche. While the government is spending hundreds of millions in bloated surgical contracts for their friends, they seem unwilling to ensure that vulnerable Albertans have access to legal aid or income supports.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, there are more examples of how Albertans are made worse off with Bill 39. Bill 39 also proposes to amend the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. Other acts were previously amended to include health benefits for families with adopted children, but that promise, like so many promises from this government, has just been cancelled.

Families adopting children, especially those children with complex needs, face additional expenses to do so. Access to health benefits could have resulted in more adoptions of children with complex needs, but the promise of health benefits has now been replaced with the potential promise of a different kind of financial assistance, assistance that, again, this act doesn't clarify, and a future act that may be coming that we don't have in front of us. We also don't see changes to regulations, so we don't know what's going to happen there.

Mr. Speaker, in 2023 this government thought that extending health benefits to families adopting children was a good idea. It was and still is a good idea, but I guess this government has changed their minds to save \$3 million a year. That's one-third of what this government allocates to Executive Council to maintain the energy

war room, that launches and loses lawsuits to filmmakers making children's films like Bigfoot.

Mr. Speaker, those are just some examples of how this act, Bill 39, makes Albertans worse off. There is so much more in this budget that makes it clear this government is failing in their most basic objective, that no Albertan shall be worse off.

The budget is increasing the provincial share of property taxes by 14 per cent, negatively impacting all Albertans. It will impact Albertans that are aging in place on fixed income in a home that they have owned for decades. They will potentially be paying hundreds of dollars more each year in provincial property tax. Mr. Speaker, the property tax increases are going to be transferred to renters who are already experiencing higher rents. Property owners are not going to absorb this tax increase. They're going to pass it on to renters who are already struggling to put a roof over their heads every month.

There's more. This budget introduces 38 more increases in fees and licences. This includes increases to application fees to the Alberta advantage immigration program. What advantage is there in this budget when they've increased the fees from \$500 to \$840 last year and further to \$1,500 this year, tripling those fees in the last two years?

Mr. Speaker, this government's belief in the Alberta advantage: we need to understand that it doesn't come close to including all Albertans, and we need to govern and make policy decisions for all Albertans. Maybe Calgary-Foothills and the constituencies represented by Alberta's New Democrats are unique in that we have residents who are living and relying on income supports, that there are residents who are or who have family members accessing legal aid or who are families with adopted children that were really hoping that this government would follow through on their commitment to deliver health benefits.

But the residents of Calgary-Foothills now see the government and the United Conservative caucus for what they are, a caucus and a government not dedicated to serving Albertans but dedicated to themselves and their friends, a caucus that instead of looking to support Albertans through the greatest threat to our economy in decades stands proudly behind a Premier that is proud to fund raise for anti-Islamic, homophobic, misogynist, right-wing spreaders of propaganda.

This government, Mr. Speaker, set a very low bar to make sure that no Albertan is worse off. Bill 39 fails to meet that low bar. Bill 39 cancels the promise of health benefits to families with adopted children. Bill 39 takes away supports to vulnerable Albertans seeking legal advice and assistance. Bill 39 takes away income supports for vulnerable Albertans. This government is failing to meet an incredibly low bar. This government should be striving to make all Albertans better off: Albertans with disabilities, children with complex needs, Albertans that need legal support.

A better Alberta is possible, not with this UCP government and not with this legislation in Bill 39 but with Alberta's New Democrats. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to, first of all, thank the Finance minister for his rousing introduction of this bill. He definitely stirred up the crowd when talking about changes to the corporate tax allowance or avoidance provisions. I know that got the hearts racing over here and certainly piqued people's excitement in Pollockville, I'm sure. He's going to hear all about that when he goes home this weekend: tell us more about the corporate tax

avoidance procedures. Anyway, he'll have to set his phone to silent just so that he can focus long enough to give people that.

And I want to thank my friend from Calgary-Foothills for summarizing very succinctly all of the problems that this bill presents to the people of Alberta. I certainly thank both of them for a general overview. There are a couple of areas that I want to focus on in the limited time that I have to speak to this bill, and that's on the personal income tax changes as well as the changes to the Law Foundation's contributions and the effects that will have on legal aid.

Now, on the issue of personal income tax changes I appreciate the fact that the government has met at least one commitment in its election platform, to implement the 8 per cent income tax bracket on incomes less than \$60,000. I think, like my friend from Calgary-Foothills said, that they oversold the benefit of this income tax cut to Albertans. Certainly, they tout the \$2 a day that the person who is receiving the maximum amount of the tax reduction will receive, but of course, as my friend from Calgary-Foothills pointed out, there are 30 per cent of Albertans who will receive no benefit from this tax cut whatsoever and significantly more who will not receive the full \$2 a day in tax reduction.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, what the right hand giveth, the left hand taketh away in terms of other tax increases that this budget takes. Now, my friend from Calgary-Foothills went on at length about the 14 per cent increase in education property tax. It's interesting that certainly we hear members from the government benches complaining about how much our leader raised property taxes when he was the mayor of Calgary, yet they turn around and raise property taxes by 14 per cent in one year on every property owner in the province of Alberta. That's an interesting contrast.

I also want to emphasize the fact that, unlike income tax, Mr. Speaker, which is at least roughly correlated to one's ability to pay, property taxes are not. You know, for those of us who are lucky enough to own our own homes, we purchased that when our income and our expenses were set at a rate at that particular point in time, and our income and expenses don't necessarily keep up with the changes in property taxes. So somebody who owns a house now today that they bought 20 or 30 years ago may find that the property taxes that were once affordable are no longer affordable because the amount of the property tax and the value of the property has gone up way out of proportion to their income and their expenses and their ability to pay.

5:30

It's incredibly concerning to me, Mr. Speaker, that we are shifting the burden again away from Albertans who have an ability to pay their taxes onto the shoulders of people who have less ability to pay for those taxes. We saw the government do this in its term from 2019 to 2023 when it reduced the corporate tax from 12 to 8 per cent. You know, corporations have a very high ability to pay their corporate taxes if they comply with the law. The government shifted the burden of funding government programs and services away from those corporations, some of whom are among the most profitable in the history of humanity, to people like the residents of Edmonton-Gold Bar, who are just struggling to make ends meet and now are faced with an increased share of the burden of the cost of provincial services.

Not only is the government, though, shifting the burden of tax payments from those who have an ability to pay onto the shoulders of those who don't have an ability to pay; through the property tax system they're also increasing fees for a number of services. I think there are 38 or 39 different fee increases in this budget. Again, we are forced to reckon with a shifting of the revenue generation from those who can pay to those who may or may not be able to pay.

One final note on the income tax piece that I want to remind members of is the government's repeated walk-back of its promise to index income tax brackets as well as government benefits to inflation. We saw the UCP introduce legislation last fall that reneged on its commitment to keep those income tax brackets and benefit payments in line with inflation, and now they've brought in legislation that will keep those things in line with inflation, or a rate of 2 per cent, or maybe nothing at all depending on how the Finance minister feels about the budget that year.

What we see in this budget that the Finance minister brought forward was an increase in the tax brackets and personal exemption of only 2 per cent. Well, inflation last year was close to 3 per cent, Mr. Speaker. That means that if you happen to be one of those people who was lucky enough to get a raise last year – I'm thinking of a whole bunch of unionized folks who have struggled against the government and fought hard and won well-deserved pay raises – a bunch of those pay raises will be clawed back because the government is not increasing the personal exemption and the income tax brackets in line with inflation and only increasing it by 2 per cent.

The large print of this budget and this piece of legislation is that you get a \$2-a-day tax cut, with the asterisk that, oh, by the way, you're also going to pay much higher education property taxes, we're raising the service fees for a variety of government services 38 times, and we're also not letting you off the hook when it comes to inflation by not raising the basic exemption in the income tax brackets by the amount of inflation. When you go through all of that, it looks like there's probably not much of an income tax cut here at all for Albertans, and that will be cold comfort to the residents of Edmonton-Gold Bar who have really been struggling with the cost of living.

We know that in Alberta the cost of food has escalated at a rate higher than it has in the rest of the country, we know that the cost of energy has gone up way out of line with the increase in the cost of energy across the country, and, as my friend from Calgary-Foothills said in his remarks, certainly the cost of rent has skyrocketed in Alberta unlike any other province in the country. These small tax changes will not improve the financial well-being of the residents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. My constituents are very, very disappointed to see that what they thought was going to be a tax cut was more of a tax shift.

The second point that I wanted to spend a little bit of time talking about was the cuts to Legal Aid and the changes to the mandatory payments for the Alberta Law Foundation. In illustrating my concern with these changes I want to share a little bit of a story with members of the Legislature. A few months ago I found myself in a courtroom, not defending myself, like members of the government often are, but actually as part of prosecution against someone who had issued some death threats to me. While waiting for that case to come forward to the judge, we were sitting and listening to the preceding case. Unfortunately, I forget the gentleman's name; probably best because he likely wouldn't want this recorded in *Hansard* for the rest of time anyway. He was being sentenced for breaking into his father's house, assaulting him, and stealing some of his money.

Now, this is a person who by all rights should be punished for the crimes that he's committed, but it was clear from his responses to the questions that he was being asked from the judge and even his own lawyer that he had no idea where he was, why he was in court. He didn't understand any of the proceedings that he was being subjected to. He had, fortunately, a lawyer who was trying his very best to make sure that his client understood exactly what was going on and that the people who were prosecuting him and the judge who was presiding over the case weren't taking advantage of this man's

inability to understand his own circumstances and making sure that he was getting fair treatment before the law, just like any of us would hope that he would.

Now, I don't know if that particular person was being helped by a lawyer supported by Legal Aid or any of these other programs that the Alberta Law Foundation supports. I suspect he probably was. I think that somebody who doesn't know where they are or why they're there or is being charged with breaking into their father's house and beating him up and taking his money probably doesn't have the means to hire a lawyer.

This experience really reinforced to me the importance of having a robust and well-funded legal aid program because I don't want people who don't understand what's happening to them when they're being charged with a crime in court to not be able to have a proper defence mounted and to be able to navigate the legal system just like somebody else who has deep pockets and their full faculties about them. That's the foundation of justice, that we all should be treated equally before the law. In many cases that's dependent upon being able to hire a competent lawyer to represent our interests, and Legal Aid and the Alberta Law Foundation supports are crucial to that.

5:40

Mr. Williams: Will the member accept an intervention?

Mr. Schmidt: No. I'm sure that if the member wants to share something, he can go on Breitbart and provide some . . .

The Speaker: Sadly, that concludes the time allotted for your comments this afternoon.

Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Member Batten: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to contribute to the debate against this bill, Bill 39, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025, in its second reading. Now, there are several areas of this bill that I find concerning. Let's start with the bait and switch that Albertans who are or might be considering opening up their homes to adopt a child or youth are facing with this bill. The government promised supplemental supports to adoptive families to help off-set the ever-increasing costs of dental, optical, and so on. This bill removes that completely. Just: poof, gone. Albertan families have been making decisions based on the dollars that they would expect to be coming into their homes, and now what? Get another job? It's ridiculous.

Further, this particular support was in part to help address the complex needs that come with alcohol and/or drug use during pregnancy. Mr. Speaker, of course the need for these supports is of no fault of that child, youth, or adult who needs them. These supports are needed because the government has failed to provide appropriate education, prenatal care, et cetera, for the biological mother of these children.

Fetal alcohol disorder continues to be seen here in Alberta even though the prevention is well known. How is it 2025 and our education system has failed so badly that we need to post the same posters against drinking while pregnant that were up 20 years ago? Directly from the Alberta government website:

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a diagnosis to describe impacts on the brain and body of individuals prenatally exposed to alcohol during pregnancy. FASD is a lifelong disability . . . As [60 per cent] of pregnancies are unplanned, the risk of prenatal exposure . . . is significant.

Mr. Speaker, the key to FASD prevention is education and support. This education should start in the classroom. This education should

start before young women find themselves in situations where they need this education to make the best decisions for themselves.

The Alberta government should be investing in evidence-based, updated, practical sexual health education for youth. Instead, what we're seeing is this UCP government change sexual education in the classrooms to opt-in instead of opt-out. This works against what evidence dictates should happen, which seems to be a bit of a pattern with this government.

Why do Albertans who have FASD need extra supports? They may experience challenges in their daily lives and "need support with motor skills, physical health, learning, memory, attention, emotional regulation and social skills." The list goes on. Again from Alberta's website: "Although people with FASD experience complex challenges, they also possess resilience, strength and abilities, and offer valuable contributions to society."

Are you curious what Albertans are saving by eliminating the support? Three million dollars. Yeah, that's it. The Turkish Tylenol kerfuffle wasted upwards of \$70 million. Yikes. Mr. Speaker, what a terrible message to be sending to Albertans. The message being sent is that you and your adopted children have little or no value in the eyes of this government.

Mr. Speaker, when the government pulls a bait and switch, why should Albertans believe anything coming from this government? Oh, and, of course, this isn't the only bait and switch this government has made for adoptive parents. You might recall Bill 10, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. That bill introduced adoption health benefits and took a step towards making adoption feasible for more Albertans. This bill takes those steps right back.

Mr. Speaker, in Alberta we have far too many children and youth who need a permanent home. They might be in foster care or group homes. They need families, and this government knows that we need more families, not fewer. In fact, it was the same government who put out calls for more foster parents, but now that they've answered the call, they leave them high and dry. Why would Albertan families who are considering opening their home to a child or youth during these challenging times trust this government with any supports that they offer?

Further, Mr. Speaker, fostering and kinship care can transition to adoption, to a permanent home for that child or youth. However, this cruel cut in supports, in addition to the cuts to support for permanency, will not increase the number of children and youth who will be adopted. It is quite the opposite. Families who might once have contemplated adopting their foster child or youth now are faced with far more financial barriers. The message that this government is sending is mean. The bait and switch is not how you grow Alberta. How you grow Alberta is by empowering Albertans, and that includes Albertans with FASD.

Moving on to other parts of this bill that I do not support, the Calgary-Acadia constituency office has been receiving hundreds of e-mails sharing the same message. They do not see themselves in this budget, they do not see themselves in these bills, and they worry that the government has lost sight of their job, which is in service to Albertans. Mr. Speaker, the bill introduces 38 new fees, but no worries, the election promise of a tax break has finally arrived. Albertans want to know, you know: where did this big savings go? Is it savings from cutting these supports or that? What is funding this tax cut?

My constituents, Mr. Speaker, were excited to hear of the income tax cut. Now that it's finally happened, they're not impressed. The new tax bracket amounts to less than \$2 a day. You can barely buy a coffee for that. Another bait and switch. The government ran on the election promise of a tax cut to make Albertans' lives less expensive. Well, a cut here, an increase there doesn't really equal

savings for Albertans, especially when you're introducing 38 new fees in this bill alone.

Now, students, low-income Albertans, those on fixed incomes, those on disability support, and so on will not see a benefit from this tax cut. This benefit is directly connected to your income. You know, what happens if your income is under \$30,000 a year? Well, you're not paying income taxes. Those Albertans do not see this benefit. This tax is not benefiting our most vulnerable Albertans.

Another group who is not served by this bill, Mr. Speaker, are the Albertans who need access to legal aid. Legal aid is designed to support Albertans with lower incomes, but instead of feeding this incredibly important group, this bill continues to starve it. This time the government is punting costs on to a foundation. What's next, a bake sale?

The Alberta Law Foundation is now responsible for more, when they were already picking up the slack from this UCP government and their lack of investment in legal aid. Mr. Speaker, again, what is the message that's being sent to Albertans? What this bill is telling Albertans is that, once again, the UCP government's priorities do not match those of Albertans. Even in this strange global situation we find ourselves in, my constituents continue to tell me that they are struggling. They need this government to work for them and not against them with this tricky bait and switch.

5:50

Mr. Speaker, times are tough, and with this bill the government places an even higher tax on properties, on people's homes. How can this government justify bankrolling their poor management of education on the backs of now homeowners? This increase alone may force Albertans right off the edge. They may not be able to afford their homes. And then what? Well, nothing in this bill, nothing in this budget is going to help them then.

Mr. Speaker, my riding of Calgary-Acadia is home to 48 schools. The Member for Calgary-Foothills is always jealous to hear that, so I'll repeat it: Calgary-Acadia has 48 schools. Even families who send their children to private schools are shocked that this government thinks it's okay to take public dollars to build private schools.

They are also not impressed that any benefit they receive is off the back of the most vulnerable Albertans. An example, of course, of which, Mr. Speaker, is child care. In addition to the new cuts introduced in this bill, a subsidy that benefited families with household incomes less than \$180,000, so that they could access child care, was deleted. It was deleted with little notice or little consultation. The deletion has rippled through the entire province regardless of what this government would like to report. All communications that have come in to my office from across the province – and I know the ministry has also received it as we're all copied on the same e-mails. All communications about this change to child care have been upset. Either they're upset because Albertan families are being blindsided by this change and/or they're upset that fewer Albertan children will now have access to child care.

Albertans are not interested in lifting themselves up by stepping on their neighbours. Albertans are not interested in a two- or three-tiered service to their children. Albertans want their children and their neighbours' children to receive the supports they need to grow into productive, happy, and well-informed adults.

This government appears to have developed a habit of starving nonprofits and bringing it in-house in secret while claiming to provide the same supports. Mr. Speaker, this simply is untrue. Nonprofits work in their communities, know their clients, know their needs, and can advocate appropriately for them. The services they provide are tailored to what Albertans need.

The government, Mr. Speaker, clearly does not know Albertans, given this bill and given this budget and their big old swing from \$5 billion surplus to \$5 billion deficit in one year. Albertans are smart. They can see that this, and I quote, financially conservative government with a \$10 billion swing in the last year is not invested in them. The ongoing corrupt care situation, the pandering to an unstable and rather concerning radical President to the south: how does this government expect Albertans to take them seriously?

This government needs to do better. I encourage everyone to vote against this bill.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has the call.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join debate on Bill 39, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2025. Certainly, my colleagues have all spoken very eloquently about this bill.

One of the things that we want to highlight is that in order to keep one promise, the UCP is breaking several others. Some of the most egregious aspects of it were spoken about by my previous colleague regarding a program that would support adoptive families with dental supports and other supports, psychological supports, optical, and other health benefits. She certainly explained that quite well. That I find extremely disturbing. It's an area that we should be investing in. You know, a program that was promised was eliminated by this legislation.

I just wanted to talk a little bit about the changes to the Legal Profession Act. Of course, this bill is an omnibus bill. There are several pieces of legislation that are changed within it. I wanted to talk about the Legal Profession Act because it's kind of got some stuff in it that really is disturbing in that the Minister of Justice will now have much more control over what an independent nonprofit does with their funds.

These funds – that's the Alberta Law Foundation – you know, lawyers: we know they keep funds in trust whenever you go to a lawyer, and those funds accrue interest, and the interest that's accrued is used to invest in organizations that support people regarding legal matters. It's a very important fund, and there are, like, I think, over 65 nonprofits that benefit from that.

But now it says in this legislation that the Minister of Justice should be approving those funds and where they go. This independent body with, you know, Albertans' money: why does the Minister of Justice have the right to tell them what to do with that money? It doesn't make any sense. Right in the act here on page 17, 145, this actually comes into force already when it's first read in the House, which happens occasionally in our Legislature, but it is kind of extraordinary, and it says very clearly that anything must be approved by the Minister of Justice.

Certainly, the Alberta Law Foundation has a lot of concerns about this because these funds aren't government funds. These are funds that they keep in trust, the interest on them, and invest them back into Albertans. So many organizations do important work like, for example, the Edmonton Community Legal Centre. It offers volunteer legal advice clinics, follow-up legal advice, representation, public legal education, information, and referrals for vulnerable individuals in Edmonton and northern regions, including Grande Prairie. This is very important funding to support people.

The thing is, this centre has said that their intakes have doubled since 2020. There's such a huge demand. People are, you know, really having concerns about being able to make ends meet. Legal issues still happen, and sometimes that threshold for the Legal Aid Society, which has been increased slightly up to \$30,000 annually: you have to have income under that to be able to access that program. If you're just a little bit

above that, what do you do? These kind of nonprofits like the Edmonton Community Legal Centre are so important.

There is also the University of Alberta Faculty of Law. They help Indigenous law research. It's a unit based out of the University of Alberta with the objective of upholding Indigenous laws through community-directed research and learning. Again, this is a very important contribution that these funds make. Will the minister not think that that's an important focus for these funds? It seems like he will have the decision-making power.

Also student legal aid services of Edmonton provides legal information and assistance to the community from the University of Alberta law students. The Islamic Family and social services: culturally relevant multimedia legal education resources in English, Arabic, and Somali. Again, these are important programs that sometimes support newcomers to our province.

The Law Society, the Alberta Law Foundation, you know, collect these funds, are investing in the community, and somehow the UCP thinks it's important that the minister insert himself and that he makes the decisions about these funds, which doesn't make sense to me.

I'll just give you some others. The Institute of African Advancement: provision of translated legal education materials and legal information workshops to help address the barriers faced by African families, youth, immigrants, and newcomers in Alberta. There's Pro Bono Law, youth restorative action project . . .

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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