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The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, March 25, 2024

Day 30

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

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New Democrat: 38

Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, March 25, 2024

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Committee of Supply

[Ms Pitt in the chair]

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

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

I'd like to invite our officials to enter the Chamber as I continue speaking. Please take a seat.

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

Finally, as provided for in Government Motion 30, approved by the Assembly on March 21, 2024, the time allotted for consideration is three hours.

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2023-24 General Revenue Fund

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move the 2023-2024 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund. If passed, these estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$412.7 million in voted expense funding, \$4.5 million in voted capital investment, and \$304.1 million in financial transactions.

The estimates include additional funding to the following offices and government departments: Advanced Education; Agriculture and Irrigation; Arts, Culture and Status of Women; Children and Family Services; Energy and Minerals; Forestry and Parks; Health; Justice; Mental Health and Addiction; Municipal Affairs; Public Safety and Emergency Services; Seniors, Community and Social Services; and Technology and Innovation.

The funding in these estimates would help provide for various programs, services, and obligations, including continuing care and supplemental health benefits payments; agriculture income support and insurance payments; funding and grants for public safety programs, including those that supported wildfire and flood response efforts in 2023; and funding to expand mental health and addiction programs. These amounts would help deliver unplanned services.

I'd like to start with Health, where \$133 million would be provided. Primarily this includes \$69.4 million for continuing care as part of the aging with dignity initiative, which will be fully off-set by federal revenue. Albertans deserve to age with dignity where they choose to, with better access to home care and end-of-life care. It also includes \$63.7 million for primary care as part of the working together for improved health care for Canadians initiative, also fully off-set by federal revenue.

The next largest expense in the estimates comes from the Department of Agriculture and Irrigation. An amount of \$109 million is requested primarily for agriculture income support to provide provincial contributions for disaster response and insurance premiums in support of disaster claims. Our farmers and producers routinely face unplanned costs. This extra funding includes income support and increased insurance indemnity payments to producers.

An amount of \$81 million is requested for the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Services. This funding includes \$68 million for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, which leads and oversees provincial emergency and disaster prevention, preparedness, and response. Also included is \$44.3 million to support Northwest Territories wildfire evacuees, reimbursed by the government of Northwest Territories, and \$24.4 million for commitments under the federal disaster financial assistance arrangements for the 2023 spring wildfires and summer floods.

Our government supports community safety. These supplementary estimates include \$11.8 million for the gun and gang violence action fund to combat organized and serious crime as well as a grant for \$454,000 to postsecondary institutions for combatting trafficking in persons and correctional programs and services such as inmate education. Also included is \$1.2 million in capital investment for the Alberta community safety analytics lab.

A total of \$46 million is requested for Mental Health and Addiction for commitments under a new bilateral agreement with the federal government to expand youth mental health and addiction programs. This includes \$27.8 million for operational expenses and \$18 million for capital grants for treatment and recovery facilities along with \$3 million in capital investment for recovery community facilities and adult and youth mental health wellness centre planning funds.

Other funding is requested across ministry departments to provide for various services and initiatives that support opportunities for Albertans to learn, keep our communities safe, and support economic growth. This includes \$278.8 million for increased student loans to cover rising costs of living and education costs; \$22.7 million in supplementary funding to top up contingency supply vote funding; \$839 million for wildfire suppression and response to address expenses related to last year's unprecedented wildfire season; \$2.3 million for initiatives under the national action plan to end gender-based violence for three ministries; \$1.2 million for assessment services, legal services costs associated with a rise in assessment complaints, off-set by federal funding; \$9.9 million for community justice and integrated services for the drug treatment court and the impact of race and culture assessments; \$25 million to fulfill a government commitment to the Alberta Enterprise Corporation for its recapitalization; and \$7 million for the cost of selling oil due to higher prices.

The amounts in these supplementary estimates are needed to help the government address Albertans' current priorities. My colleagues and I will now be pleased to answer questions from the members of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Chair: We will now move to the first 60-minute block for members of the Official Opposition. Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you're standing for the first 20-minute block. Would you like to take 10 minutes to speak or share your time with the minister and go back and forth?

Dr. Metz: Share time with the minister.

The Chair: Perfect.

Is that amenable to the minister?

Mr. Horner: Great. Yeah.

The Chair: Sounds good.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you very much. Pages 38-39, lines 7.2 and 11.2: this is what I'm referring to. This is the health block. On December 21, 2023, Alberta signed the working together funding agreement, where the federal government agreed to provide \$285.1 million to Alberta for health care. Yet in these estimates, in these lines just referenced, for primary health care and continuing care programs there is only \$133 million noted. To the minister, through the chair: where is the other \$133 million being utilized? Is there any risk of any of the federal money being left on the table?

7:40

Mr. Horner: I think we'll defer to the Health minister, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I seek the indulgence of this committee for members to speak from chairs that are not their own given the guests in the Chamber. Is anyone opposed?

Mr. Schow: Do you want me to make an official request?

The Chair: No. I think, if we agree, that will be okay.

Okay. Sounds good.

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the question. No, we are not leaving any money on the table; that is for sure. The increases on line 7.2, the supplementary supply estimates: that over \$63 million additional funding is being requested for primary care.

Increasing access: what this will do is increase access to primary care providers for Albertans and reduce emergency department visits that could have been addressed by a family medicine office. This will be achieved by expanding team-based care and enhancing virtual care and increasing the number of appointments available to patients, funding community providers to increase diagnostic imaging capacity in the province, reducing wait times for CT scans and MRIs, improving patient care by enhancing Albertans' ability to access digital health services and their own health information by implementing e-referral systems and services and accelerating the secure exchange of data across the health system.

Also, ensuring that First Nations and Métis people have access to high-quality, culturally safe care that meets their unique health needs: this will be achieved through dedicated funding for initiatives to enhance access to primary care in Indigenous communities and funding for communities to develop health workforce capacity and

infrastructure to improve the collection and the use of health information and data.

As well, there's an additional \$100 million that is going towards sustaining, stabilizing primary care, the physicians. That's something that we announced with that \$200 million that we announced for the shared priorities just before Christmas.

Did that answer your questions?

Dr. Metz: Well, I was wondering about the other part. This is \$133 million that's going to continuing care and primary care whereas the agreement signed with the federal government was \$285 million. So was that the part where you're telling me what the money was being spent on that was not part of this \$133 million? Because I'm wondering about the part that's not there.

Member LaGrange: That's correct.

Dr. Metz: Okay.

Member LaGrange: Sorry. The \$63 million is what this is being spent on. Then, of course, there are others that are being reprofiled into the next year, but \$100 million is actually going towards the stabilization for primary care, the family physicians. We allocated \$200 million over the course of two years, so \$100 million will be in the '24-25 budget.

Dr. Metz: Amongst those items that you are spending in the year that we're talking about, the supply funds, is any of that or has any of that gone to reducing backlogs or specifically supporting workers or expanding access to family health services?

Member LaGrange: Well, because it is allocated for the shared priorities and it was really meant for primary care, it is going towards making sure that we have the proper workforce within our primary care. So, yes.

Dr. Metz: Can the minister tell us if she considers pharmacy services to be part of primary care as we have these clinics that are advertising themselves as providing primary care? I'm wondering if any of this funding has been spent on pharmacy professional services given that the estimates document from '23-24 exceeded by almost \$44,000 the amount that was expected to be paid for those professional services for pharmacists.

Member LaGrange: This is . . .

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Sorry.

This is not for pharmacy care, pharmacy-led clinics. Pharmacy: they fund their own clinics, their own physical capital infrastructure, et cetera, but as far as the actual services that they provide, it is through the dispensing fees, et cetera, that they get their dollars. So this does not cover that; this is separate.

Dr. Metz: Can the minister also tell us if any of these funds are to fund nurse practitioners? They are a part of primary care, and we have not seen any of the funding roll out yet for nurse practitioners. I'm wondering if some of these funds from the '23-24 year are to fund the nurse practitioner program.

Member LaGrange: This is part of expanding the team-based care. Nurse practitioners are part of that team-based care, so, yes, there will be funding allocated for nurse practitioners.

Dr. Metz: Then are any of the funds specifically to increase the number of contracted surgeries by the chartered surgical facilities? Recognizing that there's overlap between primary care and what might happen surgically, I'm wondering if any of this money went in that direction.

Member LaGrange: We have allocated separate funding within Budget '24-25 to expand surgeries. It's not coming out of this funding.

Dr. Metz: I would like to cede the rest of my time to hon. MLA Shepherd.

The Chair: Still no names in this committee.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for this opportunity to speak to the supplementary supply. As has been noted, we have about \$64 million here that is being allocated for primary care. We know, of course, that family doctors are in dire straits. They continue to be in dire straits. They have been for some time. They certainly were ahead of the election, when the MAPS report was delivered to the minister. They remained so six months later, when we saw the results of that MAPS report delivered in October.

We had some commitments then to some dollars to go to family doctors. The minister promised \$57 million over three years to provide family doctors, nurse practitioners with support to help manage their increasing number of patients. They said: up to \$10,000 annually per physician. I understand that program has rolled out now, as of the beginning of March, and that's begun. The largest amount that any doctor could receive is about \$2,500. That's if they have a panel of 10,000 patients or more. I did have a chance to speak with one family doctor today who was in precisely that position so has received a payment of \$2,500. He noted that, you know, given that their physician quarter overhead for a comprehensive team is around \$40,000, they calculate the impact of the PMSP program to be about 6 per cent of their overhead costs for the quarter, so not a significant assistance. And we know that these family doctors, Minister, are in fact desperate. That's in the words of Dr. Paul Parks himself, who has noted this. He said that it's very difficult to actually keep your lights on and keep your offices open and pay your staff.

You have said that the \$200 million, which you then committed to in December – so it's been three months, Minister, since that commitment. You have these dollars. You are allocating the \$63 million in the budget. Can you tell us how much of that \$200 million or the \$100 million, which, I guess, would be for this year, has actually made it into the hands of family doctors to help ensure that they can keep their doors open, continue to serve Albertans? Can you break that down according to how much has been paid to physicians in large urban centres, mid-sized cities, and rural areas? How much, if any, has been spent on the creation of the technical and administrative systems required and the staff needed to administer the program and to process any needed applications?

The Chair: Just a quick reminder to direct your comments through the chair.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you for the question. We were very clear that those dollars are being disbursed by the federal government because these are federal dollars. They are coming after the 1st of April, and we will be prepared to start rolling those dollars out as of the 1st of April. I just want to remind everyone that a contract with physicians, with the Alberta Medical Association,

was signed just about 15 months ago. It was worth \$789 million, with 1 per cent for each physician per year, but family physicians actually got 5 per cent through that contract for the four years of the contract.

Additionally, that \$57 million, you are correct to say, has rolled out as of the beginning of March, and we anticipate, as I've said, rolling out that \$100 million, or the first tranche of the \$200 million over two years, as of the 1st of April. We're prepared to send those dollars out the door, and those calculations have been made using the criteria similar to the \$57 million that was rolled out previously.

I may have misheard you. I thought you said \$2,500 for a panel size of 10,000, but I believe that you were incorrect, if I did hear it that way, because it's \$2,500 for a panel size of about 1,000 patients.

7:50

The Chair: A quick reminder for all members to direct their comments through the chair even though we're getting along so nicely.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just checking our time. Excellent.

Minister, then we are allocating the just under \$64 million in this budget under supplementary supply, but you're saying that those dollars are not in fact going to be spent on family physicians this quarter. So that \$100 million which came from the federal government for primary care: that is covering this \$64 million, but none of that \$64 million has actually been received yet from the federal government and therefore will not be paid to any family physicians this quarter. Can you just clarify that for me?

Member LaGrange: This \$63 million is actually being spent. That \$57 million came out of our general revenue for '23-24 and is being spent on primary care. This additional \$63 million is being spent for all of the items that I had previously listed, including diagnostics, including increasing team-based care, including the CT scans, MRIs, enhancing Alberta's ability for digital e-health, ensuring First Nations, Métis, Inuit high-quality, culturally safe care. All of that is being spent. The additional \$200 million is over two years, and \$100 million of that is coming in April. Even though we get funded federally in April and in the fall, we want to make sure the physicians have it as soon as possible.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Minister. I do apologize again for misspeaking, indeed, on the size of the panel. You are quite correct, so my apologies on that.

But just to clarify, then, you are talking about the \$64 million, which you say is going to diagnostics, is going to a number of things. You say that it's going to increasing team-based care. Could you provide a bit more specific detail on that? I mean, I understand how diagnostics are an important part for people in the process and that family doctors may order diagnostics. But, again, we are talking here specifically about primary care, getting people access to primary care. Has anything beyond that first-quarter payment for the PMSP program gone, actually, to family doctors themselves? How many dollars of this \$64 million are actually going directly to family doctors outside of the PMSP program?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Chair. Again I draw your attention to the fact that there have been increases in salaries for family physicians along with all physicians as per the contract that was signed just 15, 16 months ago. Again, I was able to secure that

\$57 million from general revenue, from our '23-24 budget, which, as you rightly said, has gone out the door. Increasingly, we are seeing that family physicians, because they're seeing more individuals, are using more of the fee for service as well. We have seen an increase in fee for service across the province.

Then there is the \$200 million. We are several days away from April 1, on which the first tranche, \$100 million, will be pushed out – I shouldn't say pushed out but given – to physicians as per the arrangements that we've made. We've had those consultations with the Alberta Medical Association. We've been meeting with them regularly to make sure that we are in alignment. We're continuing to work on the new funding model that the Alberta Medical Association has wanted for a very long time. Those negotiations, those meetings are ongoing. We're meeting at least twice a week – and have been for quite a while – to ensure that we're doing exactly what the Alberta Medical Association wants to do in this regard.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Minister.

I was wondering, then. Given that we did recently see with the government's incentive program to bring people to Alberta, I believe, that about 40 per cent of the dollars that the government budgeted went towards administration for that program, you know, and 60 per cent to actually getting it out the door and people's incentives, on the PMSP program, given that that \$57 million does seem to be part of the \$63 million that you're speaking to, can you let us know: how much has been spent, then, on creation of the program, the administration of the program, the systems, the applications program, and the processing to get those dollars out the door?

Member LaGrange: Of the \$57 million?

Mr. Shepherd: In order to enable that \$57 million, how much have you spent on the administration, processes, programs, and administrative staff?

Member LaGrange: We've been working with the Alberta Medical Association for them to actually dispense the dollars. We already have agreements in place with the Alberta Medical Association, and we continue to work with them. I don't have the exact number of what it would cost the Alberta Medical Association to disburse those dollars, but I'm happy to get that and provide it to you.

Mr. Shepherd: So, to clarify, Minister, there has been no additional administration, no additional structure set up within Alberta Health to administer this program? All of the burden for that has been on the Alberta Medical Association?

Member LaGrange: That was in consultation and agreement with the Alberta Medical Association. They do dispense a number of other grants. In an effort to not cause any delays and make sure that those dollars get directly to the family physicians that need it the most, we wanted to ensure that it was done in a timely fashion, and that was the agreement that we worked out with the Alberta Medical Association.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Minister.

Similarly, have any amounts from this \$63 million, then, gone towards the working group to cover the administration of that work, where you're doing the negotiation with the AMA? Now, of course, we know that there was the process that brought you there. We had the MAPS process and a number of other things. But, rather than some direct action in October, you chose to go with another six-month working group. We're hoping to hear from them soon. Of

course, you say that the dollars will be flowing, hopefully next month, when those arrive from the federal government. Can you just clarify if there has been any additional spending, then, to fund the operations of that working group?

Member LaGrange: The working group is comprised of members of the Alberta Medical Association that they chose as well as PARA, which is the resident association – there's a member on from that group as well – and also members of my department, so the costs have been minimal.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Minister.

To follow on the question from the Member for Calgary-Varsity, of course, there was a commitment to a \$2 million grant over three years to the Nurse Practitioner Association of Alberta to help implement the compensation model and encourage nurse practitioners to open their own practices. That was announced in October, when your government was under considerable pressure to show some movement on primary care. The indication was that we would see nurse practitioners opening clinics this year. Of course, we are into the end of the first quarter; we have not seen any significant movement. Can you clarify, I guess, what amount of the \$63 million has been put towards that and give us a sense of the work that's being completed and when we might see actual access for Albertans in primary care through that spending?

Member LaGrange: We have provided the Nurse Practitioner Association with \$2 million to do the work. In fact, we are very close. We have been going back and forth with the Nurse Practitioner Association. They have taken a model to their members for further direction. They have come back with some direction that now we're going to analyze. We anticipate resolving it very quickly. I anticipate shortly being able to provide some further information on the nurse practitioners.

Mr. Shepherd: Will any amounts, then, from this just under \$64 million be going towards clinics for nurse practitioners, or is that going to be, then, in the spending in the new budget?

Member LaGrange: Given that we only have days left within the current budget, it will certainly be in the new budget.

The Chair: The hon. member. Twenty seconds.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you.

Just taking a look here, could we have a time check, Madam Chair? Ten seconds? Then I will simply thank the minister for her co-operation or collaboration, and I look forward to further debate.

The Chair: Hon. members, we will now move to the next 20-minute block with the Official Opposition, because we're going to do 60 full minutes. I will recognize someone. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South. Would you like to share your time?

Member Hoyle: I'm happy to stay with block time.

The Chair: Block time? Okay. You have the first 10 minutes.

Member Hoyle: Okay. I'm going to be referring to the supplementary estimates, page 15, line 3.4, for all of my following questions.

The supplementary amount of \$278,767,000 is requested to provide funding for student loan disbursements related to disbursement increases in 2023-2024, including an encumbrance of \$77,767,000 from 2022-2023. This is due to increased student demand for loans to cover rising costs of living and education costs.

Through the chair to the minister. This is a 30 per cent increase in one year. Does the minister expect the same for next year?

8:00

Alberta Student Aid is currently processing full-time and part-time loan applications from February 6 to the 13th. We can see there is still an ongoing backlog in processing these applications, and it's well beyond the deadline for when tuition was due. Can the minister explain what is being done to address this backlog given the increased demand for student loans?

This government claims that it's focused on ensuring that Alberta is an environment that will continue to attract people to Alberta, that it is the best place to live, work, and raise a family. One of the best ways to do this is to allow postsecondary institutions to be nationally and globally competitive when attracting and retaining students. This will not be achieved as we continue to slash funding to Advanced Education. Postsecondary institutions will have no choice but to put the burden on students, and we already see increases to tuition. The U of A just announced that for 2024-25 domestic undergraduate and graduate students will see a tuition increase of 2 per cent. New international students entering in the fall of 2025 will see an increase of 5 per cent while international students entering the Faculty of Science will see an increase of 6.5 per cent. Through the chair, can the minister explain why taking a more aggressive approach to dealing with affordability, like freezing tuition, is not being considered?

According to Stats Canada Alberta undergraduate students now pay roughly \$800 more per year than the Canadian average. Under the UCP government Alberta's tuition has increased by more than 31 per cent compared to the Canadian average increase of 11 per cent. Given this, why has the minister not considered increasing funding to postsecondary institutions to reduce costs to students?

Student debt is top of mind for many students, especially with rising costs of living and education costs. The Council of Alberta University Students reported that between 2019 and 2024 student debt is forecasted to increase by \$1.87 billion, and another \$1.1 billion is expected to be added by 2026, and the average debt is \$32,000. Madam Chair, what is the ministry's plan to reduce student debt levels to match the national average?

As we know, students are and have been struggling, and they're losing hope, and these are a lot of the messages that I've been receiving from students. Many of them are saying that they're going to drop out of their programs because they're having to choose between affordability of their textbooks and putting food on the table and paying rent. Students have made it very clear that the root of the problem is the loans-to-grants imbalance, with only 5 cents going to needs-based grants for every dollar allotted to student loans. Through the chair, can the minister explain why more of the supplementary amount wasn't allocated to nonrepayable funding?

The ministry will allocate \$182 million in student aid through scholarships, grants, and awards and over \$1.2 billion through student loans. There has been a significant reduction in grants, which we all know have been a lifeline for many students, especially, once again, with the rising cost of living and the cost of education. Through the chair, will the minister explain why there hasn't been more investment into scholarships? As well, can the minister explain why there hasn't been more investment into bursaries and grants, which often support our most vulnerable students and those who are incredibly high achieving?

Students have also made it clear that the root of the problems is not just that loans-to-grants imbalance, with only 5 cents going to the needs-based grants for every dollar allotted to student loans, but many of them are fearing that they're unable to finish their degrees. We all know there is a cost-of-living and affordability crisis and an

increase to tuition. Through the chair, can the minister explain why more of the supplementary amount wasn't allocated to nonrepayable funding?

I'm aware that the minister may not be able to provide the exact details to everything that's been asked here today. If the minister does run out of time, I would be most appreciative if she and her ministry can provide written detailed answers and do this, ideally, if possible, prior to the budget being voted in the House.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. minister, you have up to 10 minutes to respond.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the hon. member for those questions. I will start off by saying that while I appreciated the questions, many of them were out of scope as it relates to supplementary estimates, specifically related to student loan disbursements.

But I will take the opportunity to talk about the amount in the supplementary estimates, and there are two elements to it. The first one, as was mentioned by the member opposite, is about \$77.7 million, which is an encumbrance from 2022-23, and that was a result of increased demand for student loans related to the private career college sector as well as students coming back to the postsecondary space after the COVID-19 pandemic. The second element is \$201 million, which, again, is due to increased demand. That is due to changing demographics. It's due to changes in federal policy, its changes in eligibility criteria. Those are the two elements that make up the supplementary estimate for Advanced Education of over \$278 million.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: We will now move to the third 20-minute block. I promise you there will be time to make up elsewhere.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, would you like 10 minutes dedicated to yourself or to share your time?

Mr. Sabir: Let's share time.

The Chair: With which minister? Pick one, any one.

Mr. Sabir: I'm asking the Justice minister.

The Chair: Perfect.

The hon. Minister of Justice is amenable to sharing time? Sounds like a yes.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Well, thank you. I can see that there is a \$9.8 million supplementary estimate, and the entire sum is fully off-set by federal funding. First, I will go to support for legal aid, page 43, line 5.5. What's the total amount that the ministry gets in federal funding for legal aid?

The second related question is that since this year's budget has almost a \$33 million cut to legal aid – in this budget the government is cutting it significantly, but at the same time the allocated funds in the previous year were clearly not enough, and the government needed at least \$8.4 million more to meet the needs of the population.

The second also related question. According to the Legal Aid 2022-23 annual report 35,449 individuals in 9,774 civil and family cases and 47,910 criminal cases were represented by legal aid roster lawyers. That number was up from 35,857 individual Albertans in 2021-2022. How is the cut going to impact the service delivery, especially with the increased eligibility that was recently changed to make sure that legal aid is accessible to more Albertans? Without

this additional supplementary supply how would legal aid meet all the needs of Albertans seeking support from legal aid?

8:10

The third question. The ministry is a party to a tripartite agreement with the Law Society and Legal Aid Alberta to deliver legal aid to Albertans. That agreement was signed in 2018, and in 2018 the agreement entailed that there would be four instalments for increases in legal aid. The first instalment was given to Legal Aid in 2018-19, making the legal aid budget \$104 million. In 2021 the legal aid budget should have been \$110 million, and in 2021-22, which is covered by the ministry's report, the legal aid budget should have been \$114.9 million. However, the government has not honoured that agreement, and the supplementary supply and even Budget '24-25 don't honour that tripartite agreement. So the question I have is: does the minister have any intention of honouring that agreement and paying up the arrears that are owed to Legal Aid under that tripartite agreement?

Another question. The supplementary budget allocated \$140,000 for community justice and integrated services for impact of race and culture assessments. The figure came to the \$180,000 reduction in the previous budget cycle, 2023-24. Can the minister explain the reasoning behind the initial funding cut and its impact on related initiatives or services? Why wasn't a comprehensive assessment conducted before implementing these budget reductions? Are we going to see similar financial incompetence with the current budget cycle compromising essential services like legal aid?

Through the chair, should I keep going, Minister, or do you want to answer?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Mr. Jean: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I really appreciate the opportunity to stand up and talk about legal aid because Legal Aid, as you know, has had some challenges over the last few decades, and it's been a number of governments that have seen the challenges and not listened to the bar and not listened to what Legal Aid really does, which is help the people that need it most. Whether it's our Indigenous friends from around Alberta, whether it's, you know, people that are less fortunate and don't have the income to actually be able to afford a lawyer, legal aid is there for them, and many of the people within the bar step forward and help and do perform legal aid services.

Now, these are not cuts, though. Let's be clear. We did see a number of decisions by previous governments, including the NDP – and I hate to talk about the NDP because, you know, they really didn't do a lot for legal aid when they were in government. But what we did notice is that there are some opportunities to reallocate, especially given this government's desire to help Indigenous communities be much more successful. We feel that during the period of time that we've been in government, we have allocated monies but also looked at different opportunities for programming changes to make sure that we get the best bang for the dollar.

Now, you mentioned \$140,000 for community justice and integrated services for impact of race and cultural assessments. Now, this was actually new funding, and this is met and matched by the federal government, who is actually funding the program, and fully off-set by federal funding, as is the, I think the member mentioned – and I am old, so I have to put my glasses on – \$8.487 million for supporting legal aid for core legal and criminal services. This goes to making sure that Legal Aid actually responds to what's happening today, and that is that we have a lot of people that can't afford to actually live.

I mean, I know you've seen, as a result of the NDP shutdown of coal, affordability rates go quite a bit up. Of course, as part of the supplementary funding in here we wanted to make sure that we were able to support those people most in need, and those are the people that, of course, had much of their programming cut, because they can't afford to, frankly, fund those programs any more themselves. We've had to look at some of those strategies.

Also, you know, for court and justice services, especially with what happened with COVID and some of the different challenges we had during that period of time, we saw \$250,000 in the supplementary amount out of the \$9.855 million be directed specifically towards court and justice services and business and resolution services. As the member knows, we've moved, on the national action plan, towards more of a resolution service rather than a court service. Even some of the other programs put on by the different levels of court have moved towards a system of justice where we are not in the confrontational scenario of past times but more towards a dispute resolution process to avoid the lengthy costs that the court has.

Whether people are going to Legal Aid for a divorce and they can't afford their own lawyer or whether they're going towards parenting or actually adopting, you know, all of these opportunities for legal aid are there for them as long as they qualify. Indeed, this government is trying to bring more things to the table so they can be represented in those places that they need to.

I'd like to carry on if I could. I'd just like to finally say that, you know, one of the main parts of legal aid that I think I'm the most proud of and the services they provide is child welfare and being able to represent and stand up for children in need and parents and relatives that need that for their child welfare.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think the minister read some numbers from this estimate. This document has a good chunk of public money, and Albertans, us as opposition: we deserve to have an answer and not really just spend the time because they don't have the answer. Minister, will you undertake to provide these answers in writing? None of the answers you provided relate to anything I asked, not even remotely.

Mr. Jean: I'm more than happy to answer any of those questions here. I think I did actually address specifically the questions. You know, we did receive \$8.5 million in '23-24 from the federal government for those core legal aid, criminal services that we have. Of course, we know that the federal government is ultimately responsible for that. And the catch-and-release program of Jagmeet Singh and Justin Trudeau, which is obviously letting criminals out in our streets and is not helpful at all, is going to cost our society a lot more money.

Mr. Sabir: Madam Chair, it's not question period.

The Chair: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Sabir: I'm asking simple questions.

The Chair: Order. Hon. member, the minister is attempting to answer your question. You may not like the answer, but there is an answer being given, and there's a sharing of time.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that. As I was mentioning, we have some challenges with the catch-and-release

program that has come forward from the mother ship in Ottawa, in particular their lack of understanding of what's happening in rural Alberta especially and even in our major centres in Edmonton and Calgary. That's why we need to make sure, and that's why this government is standing up for the opportunity to provide legal aid services to the most vulnerable people within our society that need that. When they are down and out and nobody is there to take care of them, they rely on these services that are there to provide supports for them to get what they need to get and to get justice, and we're not going to apologize for that.

Madam Chair, you know, I know the member is well aware of the mental health and addiction issues that we're faced with right now. Whether it be the opportunity to help those individuals, wherever they are, we are going to stand up for those individuals. I want to congratulate our ministers, where we took people off the street, put them in the navigation program, and actually got treatment for them. That was a real success case. You can see even downtown Calgary and Edmonton now: we do not have those individuals. They are in the system, or part of them are in the system, and we're trying to get them help. Those individuals look to the opportunity for legal aid to get the help they need, and we're not going to apologize for what we do for the people of Alberta through legal aid and through the programs we do.

Even though we have to partner sometimes with the federal government, that's necessary, Madam Chair, especially given that they're responsible for all of those things, including the catch-and-release program that they do.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

8:20

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Madam Chair, the question actually was that the government last year estimated that they needed \$8.4 million to meet the obligations and provide the services that Legal Aid provides to Albertans. This year's budget has a huge, massive cut of \$31 million to Legal Aid. A few weeks ago the government also changed the eligibility, which is a good thing, making more Albertans eligible for legal aid. The question I had was that in last year's estimates you were short, and now this year there's a cut of \$31 million, so how will that impact legal aid services? We can see the government needed at least \$8.4 million more for legal aid. That's why they're here, for that ask in supplementary estimates. The minister didn't really touch on anything.

I can move on to public safety instead of hearing complete non answers. There is \$11.7 million for organized and serious crime under public security, page 55, expense 2.8. Can the minister share what specific initiatives or strategies are being funded by organized and serious crime for the gun and gang violence action fund? Where can Albertans find the details and their expected outcomes? What tangible results have we seen so far? How many full-time employees are there in this line item?

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

Mr. Ellis: Well, thanks very much, Madam Chair. I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak here to the gun and gang violence action fund, which I believe is what the hon. member was talking about. Of course, there was the \$11.779 million, as he already indicated here, to combat organized crime and serious crime and preventing gang violence. This, of course, is fully off-set by the federal funding.

Many things I've talked about in the past, Madam Chair, are education, prevention, and intervention. Of course, many of these funds are for law enforcement agencies that go directly to engage in addressing the proliferation of gun and gang violence in communities right across Alberta; funds for Alberta organizations working proactively to prevent individuals from joining gangs – again, that's part of that prevention – and, of course, educating young folks to not join gangs, as an example; and funds for Alberta organizations working to assist individuals who wish to leave gangs or make positive changes in their life.

Those are programs that I think are extremely important: funding for Alberta organizations who target and engage with those at risk for entering gangs, again, part of that prevention program; of course, funds for initiatives which bring stakeholders together to develop educational opportunities and develop new policy and programming; and, of course, funds to support the investment in an expansion of research and data systems to support world-class, intelligent, evidence-based law enforcement. Again, that's part of education, prevention, intervention, Madam Chair.

I can tell you that we certainly appreciate in this context, I would say, the collaboration in supporting people, especially young people, from entering into a gang lifestyle or helping those who are involved in gangs in exiting gangs, and this money will assist in that sort of programming.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister, for that. Much better; certainly, much better.

I do have Justice questions, but since the Justice minister is not prepared to answer any question, I will cede my time.

The Chair: Hon. members, there are three minutes left in the block.

Dr. Metz: Well, I'd sure like to ask some questions of the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction.

The Chair: Share the time?

Dr. Metz: Yes.

The Chair: The minister is agreeable? The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction will go after the question is asked by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Metz: Thank you. On page 48, line 2 under capital investment, an additional \$3 million is being requested to support treatment and recovery programs. What portion of that funding is going to ensure that programs are available specifically for women, for Indigenous peoples, and for LGBTQIA-plus individuals, including women who have just given birth or are about to give birth?

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

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. The truth is that this is part of dollars off-set by federal dollars in the Canada Health Act transfer. The dollars are going towards recovery programming that is going to be accessible to all Albertans. Of course, a distinct portion of that is accessible to culturally sensitive programming specific to partnering with – not imposing but proposing a solution – our Indigenous partners, where we're doing programming with First Nations and Métis communities directly. Of course, there is programming as well that is specific to women, especially vulnerable

women, women with children and families as well. Thank you for the question, and hopefully the answer helps.

Dr. Metz: The same item. The supplementary supply shows an additional \$2 million in funding for recovery communities. How many people were served in these recovery communities? What metrics are being used to monitor and evaluate the success of the programs? Is the government tracking success after someone leaves the recovery community? And how many spaces were detox spaces versus treatment and recovery spaces out of the total 10,000 spaces that the government boasts about having?

Mr. Williams: As far as those dollars requested particularly in the question, those are capital dollars, so not operational, where we look at the number of people and where they go. As a general comment: we do attempt to try and follow up over long periods of time, not just in recovery but after the recovery treatment itself and living in recovery in common life again, so that we have a good sense of the longitudinal data set that lets us know not just immediately but throughout the period if we see people continuing the recovery capital, which is the metric that we're focusing on in government to make sure recovery capital is increasing over time. Wherever someone is on that spectrum, whether it's low or higher recovery capital, we need to make sure that it's increasing. That's where we see our metric of success and where we're going to be focusing as a government going forward.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Metz: Thank you. On page 47, line 2.6, the government requested \$18.1 million additional off-set by revenue from the federal government that will go towards capital grants for recovery. Which programs did this money flow to? Again, how many people would be served by this addition? Did this money go to the opening of more beds, and how many?

The Chair: Hon. members, that concludes the third 20-minute block. However, there are 10 minutes remaining for members of the Official Opposition. Which member would like to take the remaining time? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, probably to the minister.

Dr. Metz: To the minister.

The Chair: To the minister to answer the previous question.

Mr. Williams: Member, would you mind asking that question again?

Dr. Metz: Yes. The government requested \$18.1 million additional off-set by revenue from the federal government that will go towards capital grants for recovery. Which programs did this money go to? How many people were served by this addition? Did this money go to the opening of more beds, and how many? That was page 47, line 2.6.

Mr. Williams: Thank you for the question. It is going towards our recovery communities that we're in partnership with. Eleven are going to be built across the province in partnership, five of them with Indigenous communities, four of which already have been announced, obviously. The additional capital grant funding requested for treatment recovery will support recovery communities being built in partnership directly with Indigenous community-led, culturally sensitive, and appropriate life-saving addiction treatment for no cost for those individuals. These different communities are going to

provide over 2,000 spaces when complete. That will be the initiative surrounding the capital investment on the recovery centres.

The Chair: The hon. member.

8:30

Dr. Metz: Thank you. On pages 46 and 47, lines 2.6 and 2.8, the total amounts of federal funding agreements for the working together and the Budget 2017 mental health, substance abuse, and addictions for 2023-24 are \$335 million. These agreements were signed on December 21, 2023, yet the amounts listed in the supplementary amounts for mental health and addictions are \$48.9 million. If we add up the amounts under primary care to Health and these, we still see a shortfall. I'm wondering if the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction can tell us why we aren't seeing more of this amount in this ministry from these agreements signed on December 21.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Williams: Thank you for the question. These bilateral agreements that we sign as a government fund more than just my ministry and more than just one year, so the sums could make more sense over the period of the three-year funding and also looking at all government spending along with Health.

Dr. Metz: I would cede my time now to the member next to me.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to go back and forth with the minister of agriculture.

The Chair: If the hon. minister is amenable?

Go ahead, hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Now that I have the minister's attention, I would like to just look at page 18 of supplementary supply. Obviously, we see significant increases in requests for this estimate line item. There's a supplementary amount of \$109,249,000 requested together with \$31,392,000 due to: "from lower than budgeted expense in other programs." Could the minister first walk me through that first \$109 million? Then we'll move into the \$31 million.

I forgot to ask if you wanted to go back and forth, or I could do block.

An Hon. Member: No. You did. You asked that.

Ms Sweet: I did? Oh. I'm really tired, too.

Go ahead, Minister.

The Chair: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Chair, for the question. I'll break this down. Of course, much of what's covered off in the supplementary supply estimates for Agriculture and Irrigation are a lot of the statutory requirements of the department. It's broken down as follows: \$140.6 million for provincial support to the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, disaster and emergency program. These increases are associated with the following programs: \$132.6 million in higher provincial contributions to the agriculture income support programs; broken down, \$63.7 million for AgriRecovery programming, including \$68.6 million for the Canada-Alberta livestock drought assistance, partially off-set by \$4.9 million in the lower than what we forecasted Canada-Alberta bee colony

replacement initiative; \$56.5 million for AgriStability; and \$12.4 million for AgriInvest.

Now, an \$8.1 million increase in provincial premiums for insurance programs includes \$7 million for AgriInsurance under the crop side and \$1.2 million for wildlife damage compensation, partially off-set by \$0.1 million in lower livestock insurance. Now, these increases are partially off-set, just so you understand where we get the total value from, by department lapses to the following program, which was \$31.4 million in deferred capital grant payments in support of the ag sector strategy irrigation projects as presented in the ministry's third-quarter fiscal update. That was primarily due to a lot of the supply chain issues that a lot of the IDs are having in getting the material required to be able to move forward with some of those projects. But they do have time. This is long term, so we will be pushing that off, but it will be seen in the years to come.

On the capital investment vote, we have a \$293,000 increase for the general capital and laboratory equipment purchases for the food and bioprocessing to enhance service delivery to clients and improve existing capital equipment.

That incorporates the entirety of the supplemental supply estimates as it relates to agriculture.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister.

I appreciate that part of this is recovering the deficit that was created out of the payouts from last year with AFSC and the fact that we had massive payouts with the disasters, with the drought, and AgriRecovery and AgriStability. I guess, as we're moving forward and we're looking at that, this is a significant ask in supplementary supply to cover off the liability that AFSC is currently carrying. We talked about this with the previous minister, who, I see, is quite interested in this topic as well. What I'm curious to hear from the minister is: how are we being forward facing so that we're not going to be facing another significant risk on the AFSC file if we have more payouts? What is the plan, and how is the 60-40 split going to work? Are we looking at asking the federal government to step up and take more of a cost share in looking at the AgriStability and AgriRecovery programs? How can we ensure the stability of the fund?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Chair. These are all excellent questions. Just to be clear, this has happened in the past. We've seen drought situations. Our AFSC business risk management programs have functioned really well in the past. They will be there in the future for our farmers and ranchers. When we look at how we're planning in future years, as you can imagine, it's almost impossible to forecast how much rain we're going to get, damages that could result because of hail and/or pests and/or other loss of yield.

What I would like to comment on is that the approach of building back the fund is over a 25-year period. That's how AFSC manages building back the premium pool to make sure it's there in the future. They do that to hold the premiums more stable for farmers and ranchers, which is very important when they're looking at the decisions they're making in the spring and when we're moving into this upcoming growing season. The volatility of that: of course, this year, understanding that we're seeing lower than average snowpack and we could have another year that could strain certain parts of the province, that is why the government has moved to increase their contingency fund overall, which is where we deal with that disaster portion.

Of course, building back the premium pool is a share, as you mentioned, between the federal and provincial governments and, as well, the farmers and ranchers themselves, which are a 40 per cent shareholder. The government split between the feds and the province is a 60-40 split, roughly about a 24 per cent split for the province of Alberta as we build back on the premium side of it. But, as I mentioned, we take a long-term approach to that because we do see cycles when it comes to above-average payments, and in other years we see below average, which is where we see that premium pool climb back and get back into a comfortable spot. We were comfortable with the way it was managed previously, when we saw strain back in 2000, 2001, and 2002. The premium pool built back very quickly after that.

I would just like to express that the approach that AFSC has been using both on the management side, the payout side, and understanding that these are statutory payments and how they build back the premium pool has worked in the past. The strategy is the same strategy as it was before, and this has actually created the stability within our business risk management programs. As well, working with the federal side, understand that these are long-term agreements. We strike five-year agreements when it comes to our business risk management . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, that concludes the first 60 minutes of questioning.

We will now move to the independent member for a 20-minute block.

Mrs. Johnson: No. Thank you. No questions.

The Chair: So waived.

We will now move to members of the government caucus for a 20-minute block. I see the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright. Would you like to share your time or take the first 10 minutes?

Mr. Rowswell: I'd like to share my time if I could.

The Chair: With which minister?

Mr. Rowswell: The Minister of Energy and Minerals.

The Chair: Minister of Energy and Minerals, are you amenable?

Mr. Jean: I am.

The Chair: Sounds good.

The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Great. I did have questions for Justice, but they got asked, so well done over there.

Okay. Minister, I see on line item 3 of the supplemental estimates that the cost of selling oil is eating up a portion of the budget larger than some departments, with a requested supplementary estimate of over \$40 million on top of the current estimate of \$316 million. Why does the government of Alberta participate in the business of selling oil?

Minister, your department ran nearly 13 per cent over budget on this program, nearly \$41 million in cost overrun. Is there something you can do to solve that for next year?

8:40

Mr. Jean: Well, I sure hope not, Madam Chair. You see, the more it costs us, the more revenue we get. The truth is that Alberta receives royalties from oil producers in kind. The producers provide a portion of oil directly to the government of Alberta as royalties

instead of paying the royalties in cash, and we sell the oil to realize the cash. There are costs, of course, associated with selling oil. Higher crude prices result in increased crude royalty volumes, which are marketed by the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission on behalf of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, arm's length, and they make sure they get the best price for our oil and do so in a cost-effective way.

The APMC bears the costs related to the marketing and the selling of Alberta's in-kind royalties, which include pipeline tolls, crude oil and condensate purchases, trucking costs, and other marketing fees that are associated with it. The increased royalty volumes also give rise to, as I mentioned, increased crude oil revenues from the sale of these barrels.

Now, I'll tell you that the Minister of Finance is pretty happy with how we produced that and how it's gone even though it's a little bit more expensive. Of course, last year we got about \$18 billion in royalties and another \$3 billion or \$4 billion from taxes. Those numbers have gone up, and that's a good thing, and that's good news for the province as those revenues fund, of course, the critical programs we need such as health care. Some of the changes that we had to make there, of course, are expensive, as are some of the things that have happened as a result of COVID in relation to health care and education.

Now, bigger costs mean we realized more revenues, and, as I mentioned, that's a good thing. That is why it's actually a good-news story and not a bad-news story.

Thank you to the member.

Mr. Rowswell: Minister, under line item 4 on page 32 I see that on capital grants your ministry didn't deliver the full budgeted amount, underdelivering by almost \$31 million. What program or programs didn't deliver the full amounts, and what prevented the ministry from delivering the full budgeted grants?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the hard-working member for that question. It's a great question. In fact, the cost of selling oil is due to a number of factors, but the realization of the capital grants is something a little bit different. We have a program now called APIP, which is the Alberta petrochemicals incentive program, and that program is amazing. Companies are saying that it's a world-class program. They're coming here to invest their dollars. We've had Air Products come in with more than a billion dollars. We've had Dow Chemical now announce that the first phase is going to be about \$10 billion, and they might even go up to \$16 billion in investment. That's a huge amount of money.

Madam Chair, what happens with that program is that people apply for the program, they get preapproved for that program, and then once they've completed construction and it's up and operational, they get over the next three years a third, a third, a third by way of a 12 per cent refundable tax credit back to the company, which means that once they've paid that billion dollars or \$1.2 billion or \$10 billion in the case of Dow, they actually get \$1.2 billion, or 12 per cent, back after they're finished.

In this particular case, we forecasted that we would have to pay that money out, but there was a project that wasn't finished in time, so we didn't allocate that money to them. That's what that is indicating. So it's a good-news story as well because it shows that we didn't have to pay out that money unless the money was actually invested for the benefit of Albertans. This government is not going to have any boondoggles, Madam Chair. What we're going to make sure of is that every single dollar invested for the people of Alberta

goes for the people of Alberta, and we're going to make sure we manage that properly, which we did in this case.

Thank you to the member.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: That's all I've got.

The Chair: All right. Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Wright: Thank you.

The Chair: Which minister, and would you like to share?

Mr. Wright: Shared time with the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, please.

The Chair: The minister is amenable? All right.
The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Wonderful. Thank you, Madam Chair and, through you, to the minister. Minister, I can see on line item 2.8 that the majority of your requested additional supply amounts were targeted at children and youth programs. The requested additional \$24.5 million on the \$46 million current budget is a substantial increase. What results has the government of Alberta delivered to children and youth across the province with this line?

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Member, for the question. The member is right that it's \$24.5 million in operating funds requested to go towards critical in-school mental health services for children and youth. The program is in partnership with CASA Mental Health. Government is expanding mental health classrooms to 60 new schools across the province. Mental health classrooms support students facing complex mental health challenges, providing individual and group therapy and psychiatric care while continuing their education in school and in their classrooms.

There are currently eight CASA Mental Health classrooms with eight schools throughout the province and, obviously, more to come with that 60. The funding will also support the expansion of school mental health programs focused on prevention and early intervention in our schools. We're very happy that we're doing the program and, obviously, very excited to share more details in the coming weeks.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, through you, to the minister. Minister, you also have a capital planning amount on line item 2.6 of the department capital acquisitions of treatment and recovery. On page 46 it explains that \$1 million of this is for adult and youth mental health wellness centres. Can you provide a breakdown of what is targeted towards youth versus adults and what services these wellness centres deliver?

Mr. Williams: Thank you to the member for the question. The nomenclature could have been misleading; \$1 million in additional funding is to support planning for new youth mental health and wellness centres. It's focusing one hundred per cent on youth. These details are coming out in the coming weeks, and I'm happy to share more surrounding that.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, you also have a dramatic expansion of capital grants for treatment and recovery

programs on line item 2.6, more than tripling the budget amount. What organizations are receiving this funding, and what supports have they provided to Albertans as a result of these grants?

Mr. Williams: Thank you for the question. The member is right. These go towards our 11 recovery communities across the province, including five in direct partnership with Indigenous communities: four First Nations already out the door that we're working on together. The capital grant funding for treatment and recovery will support recovery communities being built in direct partnership through capital grants with the Indigenous communities themselves.

The Indigenous-led recovery communities provide culturally safe addiction treatment services for Indigenous within Alberta or anyone who ends up soliciting those services. Once fully operational, the 11 communities will provide more than 700 long-term live-in treatment beds. That's 2,000 spaces on average per annum, which means approximately 2,000 Albertans getting access to recovery treatment that is life-saving and otherwise would not be there for them.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to ask a question to the minister that's very near and dear to my family's heart. A number of years ago we actually lost my aunt to suicide. Minister, giving hope to those suffering from the deadly disease of addiction or mental health challenges is a key priority of our government and certainly of my family. Anyone suffering from either of these challenges deserves the opportunity to pursue recovery. On page 46 of the estimates it requests additional dollars off-set by federal spending in operating expenses to expand mental health and addiction programs for children and youth. Can you expand on where and how these monies will be spent?

Mr. Williams: Thank you to the member and for sharing what I think for many can be a difficult thing to talk about. It's important for us to be open, to share the difficult stories around suicide, mental health challenges, and addiction. It's not the end of the story, but that awareness is a big part of what we need to do in the province to make sure everyone understands that there's an opportunity for you, that recovery is possible.

The additional \$3.3 million in funding for treatment and recovery will support the expansion of certain essential mental health supports across the province. An additional \$18 million in capital grants and treatment for recovery will support recovery communities being built in partnership with First Nations. Each of the five Indigenous-led communities will be built through the capital grant process. Providing funds to First Nations in consultation with the facility allows greater leadership for the nation to ensure culturally sensitive and appropriate treatment and programming.

No matter who you are, especially in a community that's been so disproportionately affected, you deserve the opportunity of recovery. You deserve access to mental health and addiction supports, and that's exactly what this government plans to do with these funds.

Thank you for the question.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Wright: No additional questions from myself.

8:50

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore. Which minister, and would you like to share time?

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Chair. I have a question for the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services, and I also have a question for the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

The Chair: Order. Order. Order. There's no passing between the chair and the speaker.

Is the hon. Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women agreeable to share time?

All right. Please proceed.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Chair. Minister, on pages 21 and 22 of the supplementary supply estimates I see that there is an additional \$335,000 requested for environmental remediation. Through the chair, can you please explain where these additional funds went and what the impact of these funds have been on those sites?

Ms Fir: Well, thank you to the member for that question. Arts, Culture and Status of Women is responsible for any environmental remediation required at our historic sites due to historic contamination. The total estimated cost of required remediation has been previously accrued, and we estimate the cost of how much remediation will be completed each year as part of the budget process. Because work for environmental remediation was completed faster than anticipated at three historic sites – the Turner Valley gas plant, Greenhill mine site, and Bitumount – the cost in 2023-24 was higher than originally anticipated.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you to the minister, through the chair. I really appreciate that answer.

I don't have any more questions for the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, but I do have a question for the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services. My question, Minister, is regarding federal flow through. I see on page 54 that you have received some federal funding, and while much of this went towards disasters, some also went towards fighting organized crime. Can you, through the chair, please tell us how your ministry could get the maximum impact from this funding that has been allocated to fight organized crime?

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

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, and thank you to the member for the question. A very similar answer to what I told the previous member, but I think it's still worth mentioning because, again, we're talking about young people here; we're talking about education, prevention, intervention. Since 2019 the government of Alberta and Public Safety Canada, of course, have been operating under the gun and gang violence action fund and contribution agreement, and Alberta was allocated \$29.8 million over a five-year period from fiscal year 2017-2018 to fiscal year 2022-23 and used this money to fund law enforcement and community-based initiatives to address gun and gang violence. These funds are no longer going to be available as of March 31, 2024.

Now, I think it's also important that successful initiatives in the previous round of the guns and gang violence action fund along with new and emerging priorities identified – steering committee stakeholders: these consisted of the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, Alberta law enforcement response teams. We also have the Alberta Crown prosecutor service as well as areas within pieces such as provincial corrections. Again, without going into much greater detail here, we are talking about young people, and there are many, many, a vast array of programs that this goes to fund for education, prevention, intervention programs all throughout Alberta and, of course, through various organizations and police

services, again, to help kids stay away from being involved in gangs and violence and, of course, if kids are involved in that, to take them away from that.

Thank you very much.

Ms de Jonge: I have no further questions.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak from the government caucus? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Chair. If the Minister of Children and Family Services would be okay with shared time.

The Chair: Perfect. Yes.
Please proceed.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Chair. Preventing and addressing sexual violence is everyone's responsibility. Every one of us has a role to play in creating communities that our families feel safe in. Chair, through you to the minister, on line 4.2 of the estimates it states that \$2.55 million is being requested by your ministry budget for prevention of family and sexual violence. Minister, can you tell us more about what this expense was used for? How will this additional funding be used to help end gender-based violence?

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

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you very much to the hon. member. I know she's a passionate advocate for ensuring that women are looked after. Children and Family Services is committed to family violence prevention, and that's why our mandate places such a strong focus on ensuring that individuals and families experiencing domestic violence continue to get the supports that they need. The \$2.5 million investment is part of Alberta's response to the national action plan to end gender-based violence, and that's led by the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

The federal funding is being used to scale existing programs that are culturally relevant and responsive to those that are targeted to supporting men and boys. The funding is also being provided to public agencies to enhance public awareness campaigns and existing training for both the sector and bystanders. Again, I'd just like to thank the hon. member for asking just a great question.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Chair and, through you, to the minister. Minister, I noted that on page 28 of the estimates it states that \$1 million of the budget amount was not used for affordability supports and inflation relief for families with children. Can you please explain to me why this \$1 million was not necessary?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Turton: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Another great question. The affordability payments program was a six-month program that ended on June 30, 2023. Our government reached approximately 695,000 children with timely and much-needed inflationary relief payments, and this includes approximately 7,200 children in care. The \$1 million reduction to support costs was a result of lower than anticipated administrative costs associated with running the programs such as staff support, registry costs and controls, et cetera.

Mrs. Petrovic: I have no further questions, Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, we will go to members of the Official Opposition for the next 10-minute slot. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. Which minister, and would you like to share your time?

Ms Sweet: I'd like to start with the minister of forestry, please. Minister, are you willing to go back and forth?

The Chair: The hon. minister? Yes.
Please proceed.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the minister. The wildfire presuppression response was not budgeted in the '23-24 fiscal year but did end up spending \$45.9 million. Why does the government anticipate that the budget concerns observed in the previous fiscal year won't persist into this wildfire season, and given the similarities between the initiatives 2.1 and 2.3, were there any allocations towards FireSmart initiatives, fireguarding for communities, and can you also give us the success rates of those programs?

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

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thanks to the member for the question. Yes. In supplementary supply we have a total of \$22 million being requested, and this money was part of the presuppression and actually battling the wildfires in 2023-2024. That work continues on and will continue on through this fiscal year, and we'll start again on April 1 of the next fiscal year.

Those funds went for a variety of things, including our own personnel but also bringing in personnel from around the world to help with our suppression. The member mentioned the fireguard program and FireSmart program, which is funded through the organization called FRIAA, and we continue to provide funding both from the last budget year and this upcoming budget year for FRIAA to be able to work with fireguard and presuppression.

The question was regarding success. I was happy to sit down with members from Bigstone Cree Nation today and talked about the fireguards that they had in their community and how much they helped in this past fire season. We want to continue that good work with these fireguards and FireSmart programs because we know that they help save our communities. We know that there's actually activity on the landscape right now when it comes to some communities taking advantage of FireSmart and fireguard programs, and we hope that we'll have more coming as we get plans approved and go through the First Nations consultation to do that work on the landscape. Again, these programs have been very successful. They have helped communities and have saved communities, and we expect them to continue to do so.

Again, when we're looking at this supplementary estimates, we look at that \$22 million, and that's, again, money that has been spent and is in the process of being spent at the end of this fiscal year battling the wildfires that we've had in this province.

9:00

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just one more question. It's actually to the Minister of Finance. To the Minister of Finance, just a real quick question. Both the minister of agriculture and the minister of forestry have mentioned the contingency fund and the fact that many of the expenses have been paid out of the contingency fund. That would include the two line items that I've highlighted, which would include the \$45.9 million along with the

\$102.9 million for the AFSC insurance programs. Can you walk me through why we have to do supplementary supply for the insurance programs as well as for the presuppression budgets when it was paid out of the contingency fund and why we're now putting it in two different areas within the budget?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Yes. Happy to answer the question. The reason that it's here in supplementary supply is because the contingency was fully allocated. This is over and above the \$1.5 billion contingency. Everything we're talking about here today in these line items is permanent spending under the fiscal rules, and everything, like I said, that's outside of the contingency is off-set by revenue or disaster related. That's every line item today.

Ms Sweet: I have so many more questions now, but I will pass on to my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview. Maybe I'll see you in QP.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you. I'd like to share time with the Minister of Health if she's willing. [interjections]

The Chair: Order. Order.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I didn't hear you.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes. I'd like to share time with the Minister of Health if she's amenable.

The Chair: Perfect. That sounds good.

Please proceed.

Ms Sigurdson: Okay. I'm just looking at line 11.2 on page 39 of the supplementary supply. It indicates \$69.4 million for continuing care as part of the aging with dignity initiative. Alberta has yet to sign an agreement with the federal government regarding this, and I just wonder if the Minister of Health can tell us when this agreement is expected to be signed and if there will be additional funds when it is.

Member LaGrange: There have been very good discussions going on with this bilateral agreement, aging with dignity, and we anticipate it being signed very soon. We are in the final processes of those negotiations.

Ms Sigurdson: In addition, I'm just wondering if there is further funding expected to come from that agreement.

But I'll ask another question also before the minister answers that. Can the minister assure Albertans that funds received from the federal government under the working together agreement will only go to providers that are licensed, tracked, and approved and will provide the necessary care to ensure Albertans age with dignity? Of course, I'm asking this question just because of what's happened recently with the motel medicine fiasco. I just wanted to make sure that the minister will make sure that those agencies are properly vetted.

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the question. The funds are going to go to continuing care workforce education, training, development, and engagement; continuing care workforce mental health supports; rural continuing care workforce capacity development; enhanced compliance and monitoring capacity; enhanced quality-of-life best practices and initiatives. These are

very detailed negotiations that have been ongoing with the federal government that have gone extremely well.

We have been very clear in our communications around the situation that happened over the course of the last week that we have no agreement with that particular agency. It was very much a housing service provider that provides also nonmedical services. We don't have a contract with that individual or that company.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you. Now I'd like to ask some questions to the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services, Madam Chair. If he'd be willing to share time, that would be amenable to me.

Mr. Nixon: Sure.

The Chair: All right. Please proceed.

Ms Sigurdson: Okay. I'm looking at line item 7.4 on page 59. Certainly, gender-based violence has devastating effects on Albertans of all ages, including seniors. Seniors are often in vulnerable situations, as leaving violence can be more challenging due to mobility issues, cognitive decline. Seeing as the plan seeks to end gender-based violence, what specific funding is going to gender-based violence in the seniors population?

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

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. The supplementary amount the hon. member is referring to is \$525,000. It ultimately is being requested to support the national action plan to end gender-based violence initiative. It is fully off-set by the federal government. We have received \$525,000 in federal funding under that plan.

I'll give some examples of what that \$525,000 went to in the previous fiscal year. For example, \$80,000 went to fund a second elder abuse awareness campaign, that ran from December 2023 to February 2024; \$20,000 went to translate material on elder abuse into multiple languages for community distribution; a grant to conduct community outreach to ethnic minorities across the province for \$125,000; funding of two positions for the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council; education and community training for \$105,000; Indigenous navigator, which is two part-time positions, one each for the north and south, for \$120,000; funding for Unison Calgary in co-ordination with safe spaces to create a community of practice for the newly launched safe spaces program, which is \$75,000. Collectively these investments enable greater outreach and support for elder abuse prevention and intervention.

I think that answered the question, but we'll find out.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Sigurdson: Through you, Madam Chair, thanks to the minister for answering that.

Also, the national action plan mentions improving supports for seniors as a way to ensure participation in the economy for women who are often caring for families and thus compromising their careers. They are caring for their parents oftentimes, but it's often women who have that work; therefore, they can't be in the workforce. This is one of the important pieces of the action plan, that women should be able to contribute to the economy. How does the government plan to allocate money to ensure that seniors have adequate support so that women don't have to forgo their careers?

The Chair: Members, that concludes the 10-minute block to members of the Official Opposition.

We'll move to the independent member for the next 10 minutes. So waived.

We'll move to members of the government for the next 10 minutes of their time. Hon. Member for Taber-Warner, which minister would you like to speak with, and would you like to share your time?

Mr. Hunter: Madam Chair, I'd like to ask some questions to the Minister of Forestry and Parks, please.

The Chair: All right. The hon. minister is amenable?

Mr. Loewen: I'm happy to oblige.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Hunter: Thanks, Madam Chair. I'm looking on page 34 of estimates. Minister, I see that a considerable amount has been transferred from the contingency fund to your ministry, ensuring that the government is prepared to address natural disasters and emergency issues. Obviously, it's essential. Minister, can you please explain how the supplementary \$22,776,000 for wildfire presuppression and response was used?

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

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Thank you very much for the question. I appreciate that. Yeah. The total expenses for presuppression and response during the 2023 wildfire season were \$839 million. The allocation of this funding supported our operational presuppression and suppression program delivery. This funding included expenses relating to having all government crews, imported crews, equipment, aircraft, supplies, and resources ready to protect human life, communities, critical infrastructure, and natural resources. These firefighting assets are prepositioned across the province, based on wildfire hazard and risk, to be ready when needed. Once a wildfire starts, the entire cost of fighting the fire is also part of the \$839 million.

Due to the prolonged extreme wildfire conditions, Forestry and Parks also imported a record number of firefighting resources from other jurisdictions to provide additional firefighting capacity. As of September 30, 2023, 4,033 personnel, overhead, and firefighting crews were imported from a total of 23 jurisdictions, including personnel from the Canadian Armed Forces, other jurisdictions across Canada, and from the U.S.A., Australia, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, New Zealand, and South Africa. The imported overhead teams of firefighters worked a total of 88,000 days. The previous record for the number of imports was set in 2019, with 2,992 imported personnel who worked 48,858 days.

Madam Chair, this funding is very important for the firefighting that took place and continues to take place on the landscape as we speak right now. We have over 50 fires that are burning across the province right now. We've had at least 40 fires that have started this calendar year. We're working hard. We have good men and women working on the front lines right now and doing the good work that they have to do to protect Albertans and their communities.

9:10

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister, for that response. This was a very dry year, obviously, and it was a scary year for many families. To the minister: can you help

us understand how that allocation helps protect Alberta families, their homes, and their communities?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Thanks very much again for the question. Yes. So far things are looking like another dry year coming up. We can always hope for some more snow yet in this winter, and then some timely rains in the spring could make all the difference in the world and leave us in a substantially better position than where we are right now.

On May 6, 2023, the province declared a provincial state of emergency to help protect Albertans from wildfires, and that declaration expired on June 3, 2023. The supplemental funding allocation allowed us to import additional resources, when necessary, to strategically position firefighters and equipment throughout the province to ensure a rapid response when wildfires broke out. Had the supplementary funding not been in place, the damage and impacts of the 2023 wildfires would have likely been more severe.

During this past fire season we also built fireguards in several communities, and those fireguards protected the communities during this firefighting season but also will protect in the upcoming firefighting seasons, too. We want to make sure that we continue to do this good work and make sure that we do our best to protect their communities. We know that wildfire is a natural part of our landscape here in Alberta that's been going on since the beginning of time, but we want to make sure that we do our best to protect from catastrophic wildfire. We do so by making sure that we're prepared and making sure that we do the good work ahead of time that needs to be done to protect our communities.

Again, we have some good – we have crews working right now, and we will be bringing on more crews as we move into the spring season, when we get even busier with wildfire. The training is taking place right now; the physical tests are taking place. We're preparing our crews to be ready for April 15, and we'll have a full contingency of crews in place for May 15. That's two weeks ahead of time, the April 15 date, from the past. We did start fire season 10 days earlier this year to make sure that we could have a good understanding of what's happening on the landscape going into this fire season.

Again, I appreciate the questions. This funding was very important when it comes to protecting our communities and Albertans and their homes.

The Chair: The hon. member has no more questions.

Any other members from the government side?

Seeing none, I will go to the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Continue to share your time with the minister?

Ms Sigurdson: Yeah. I'll just repeat that question to the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services because he didn't have a chance to answer it before. The national action plan mentions improving supports for seniors as a way to ensure participation in the economy for women who are caring for families and thus compromising their career. Women oftentimes are the caregivers in families, and if there are adequate supports for seniors, then women can be active in the economy and not compromise their careers. I'd ask the minister to please explain some of how he is ensuring that this can happen so that seniors have the supports they need.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nixon: No, I'm good. Thanks. It's not about supplementary supply.

The Chair: Did the hon. member have a specific line item?

Ms Sigurdson: It is line item 7.4, page 59. It's about the national action plan. I mean, it does refer to it, but if the minister is not going to answer, then I'll cede my time to the Member for Calgary-Edgemont.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Edgemont. Which minister?

Ms Hayter: Thank you so much. My first question is to Seniors, Community and Social Services. On page 58 you are receiving a supplementary amount of \$525,000 requested to support the national action plan to end gender-based violence initiative, which is fully off-set by federal funding. Why isn't more allocated, and will this funding level continue into Budget 2024?

Mr. Nixon: I'm not sure I follow the question, Madam Chair, about more allocated. The \$525,000 referred to in supplementary supply is allocated. If you maybe want to elaborate a little bit more on the question, I'm happy to answer if you have a question.

Ms Hayter: Will the allocated funds that are there right now be going out the door, or will they be spent by March 31?

Mr. Nixon: I actually didn't hear the question. I apologize.

The Chair: Did you want to ask it again?

Ms Hayter: Will the allocated funds be going out the door this year, or will they be spent by March 31?

Mr. Nixon: The allocated funds will be going out the door this year. Yes.

Ms Hayter: To the Minister of Children and Family Services. Page 26 shows that the supplementary amount of \$1.5 million is requested together with \$1 million made available from the lower than budgeted expense in other programs to provide just over \$2.5 million for the national action plan to end gender-based violence, fully off-set by federal money. On page 27 line 4.2 of the supplementary supply estimates shows a total of \$1,122,785 for the prevention of family and sexual abuse. What programs was this money allocated to, and why isn't more allocated? Will the funding level continue into Budget 2024, and will all the allocated funds go out the door this year?

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

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you so much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. Yes, as the previous minister said, those funds will be spent by the end of the fiscal, so you don't have to worry about that.

In terms of the 4.2 item and the \$1 million, that has to deal with the affordability payments, which was a six-month program that ended on June 30, and all the funds that were in that program were spent. The \$1 million reduction was to support costs as a result of lower than anticipated administrative costs associated with running the program such as staff support and registry costs, controls, et cetera.

Ms Hayter: To the Minister of Justice. Page 42 of the supplementary supply estimates request shows that \$250,000 went to court and justice services, the business and resolution service for

the national plan to end gender-based violence, which is fully off-set by federal funding. What programs was this money allocated to? Why isn't more allocated? Will this funding level continue into Budget 2024, and will all the allocated funds go out the door this year?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Chair. Allocation this year in all areas of Budget 2024, when it comes to Justice, have been increased, and we are working with our partners in the Indigenous community, directly with the courts, a number of different organizations and stakeholders to make sure that we provide additional support. So for gender-based violence: we'll continue to do that; we'll continue to spend money. The hon. member will see that Budget 2024, as it relates to Justice, saw significant increases in court and justice services, and that was intended to provide supports to Albertans all across the board in a number of different areas.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hayter: Thank you. To the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance. The federal government has funded \$54 million for the national action plan to end gender-based violence over 10 years, so we would like to assume that that would be \$5.4 million allocated each year in Alberta. We've added up all of the funds over the ministries in the supplementary supply, and we have \$4.6 million. Are we leaving \$600,000 on the table? How are we allocating these funds in this fiscal year? And if we didn't get the federal funding, would the Alberta government fund these much-needed programs?

Mr. Horner: The allocation is what you see in the supplementary estimates because that's all we're talking about here today. If it wasn't in the estimates where you had a chance to quiz the ministers previously, then it's in these line items here because it's fully off-set by off-setting revenue, or it's disaster related and outside of the contingency.

Ms Hayter: I just wanted to repeat the one question: if we didn't have the federal funding, would the Alberta government fund these much-needed programs?

Mr. Horner: If ifs and ands were pots and pans, turnips would be watches.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Are there any other members of the Official Opposition wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia. [interjections]
Order. Order.

Member Batten: Perfect. Thank you, Madam Chair. My questions are for the minister of child and family services. My first question is found on page 27 of supplemental. According to the supplemental supply the increase of \$2.5 million for prevention of family and sexual violence comes mainly from the federal government, something we've seen for a number of years. How much of the roughly \$20 million increase in Budget 2024 in this ministry is due to federal funding?

9:20

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

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you so much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. The \$2.5 million is Alberta's

response to the national action plan to end gender-based violence, but it's actually led by the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women.

Member Batten: I'd like ask the exact same question to the Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, please. I could repeat the question if you'd like?

Ms Fir: Nope. I don't need it.

Member Batten: You got it? Okay.

Ms Fir: The questions today are about supplementary estimates, and I'm pleased to answer if she'd like me to talk about the \$335,000 increase in the 2024 budget to address environmental remediation costs at three historic sites. The questions that need to be proposed towards us are about supplementary estimates 2024.

Member Batten: Again, to the Minister of Children and Family Services, page 28 of the supplemental and page 63 of the main estimates: according to the supplementary supply estimates \$1 million of the affordability supports and inflation relief under section 6 didn't go out to families, yet the main estimates indicate a shortfall of \$6 million. I understand you've answered part of this question before, but mine is different because I am wondering about the shortfall of \$6 million. The two documents were only created days apart. Which one is correct with such a large discrepancy, and then how does the minister, I guess, expect Albertans to trust the government when the numbers keep changing?

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

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the question. The program was actually over on June 30, 2023, and I can assure the member that all the funds that were allocated to families and children right across the entire province were properly allocated and the number is what it is in the supplementary estimates.

Member Batten: I cede my time to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, you have 30 seconds.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thirty seconds. Okay.

Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I have a question on line 3 of expenses on page 32, the cost of selling oil. Last December the government authorized \$2.9 billion in lending through the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission to the North West Redwater Sturgeon refinery. Through you, Madam Chair, can the minister break down how these loans are expected to be used?

The Chair: The hon. minister has two seconds to answer.

Hon. members, that concludes the next 10-minute portion of the Official Opposition.

We'll now go to government members. The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I actually have a question for the Health minister, please. In the Health supplementary supply estimates, line item 11.2, there is additional money requested for continuing care. Ensuring Albertans who need continuing care support get it is a priority for our government. Minister, can you please explain how the additional funding listed was used toward improving continuing care in Alberta?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: I'm happy to. The additional funding of \$69.4 million relates to the yet-to-be-signed aging with dignity bilateral agreement. This funding will support continuing care workforce education, training, development, and engagement, continuing care workforce mental health supports, rural continuing care workforce capacity development, enhanced compliance and monitoring capacity, and enhanced quality-of-life best practices and initiatives.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak on the government side of the House?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Al-Guneid: All right. Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I have a question on line 3 of expenses on page 32, the cost of selling oil. Last December the government authorized \$2.9 billion in lending through the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission to the North West Redwater Sturgeon refinery. Through you, Madam Chair, can the minister break down how these loans are expected to be used? What are the terms of this loan? Is this shared time? Sorry.

The Chair: Oh, sorry. Did you want to share your time?

Ms Al-Guneid: If he's amenable?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Mr. Jean: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the member for the question. The investment into the Sturgeon refinery is a very long-term project and will support Alberta to meet increasing global energy demand for years to come and position the province as a reliable, responsible energy supplier. Now, sometimes prices go up, and sometimes prices go down. As a result of that, we need more cash flow in order to support the amazing return on investment for taxpayers that this Sturgeon refinery can be in the future, once the capital cost is paid off, to get us back in a position of profitability, which is just around the corner: 38 years.

Ms Al-Guneid: What are the terms of the loan?

Mr. Jean: Well, great news, Madam Chair. As a result of the incredible position that the Minister of Finance has put our government into for borrowing, we borrow at some of the best rates on the planet. In fact, I think you will find that if you look at the cost of borrowing, depending on which loan you look at, we have some of the best rates that are available anywhere in North America. As a result of that, the cost to borrow is significantly less than it would be at market rates. I can't give the particulars because there are different loans at different times, but for the most part it's very, very low, indeed.

Ms Al-Guneid: In 2021 the government purchased a 50 per cent stake in the refinery. Can the minister, through you, Madam Chair, share with us what the profit or loss for the government has been on an annualized basis since then and what the government is expecting this year and in the following years?

Mr. Jean: I can tell the member this, Madam Chair: I've never really liked this refinery very much as an investment opportunity for the people of Alberta. In fact, the reason why I didn't like it: it wasn't fully engineered at the time of it being built. As a result of that and poor planning, it ran, frankly, over cost significantly.

The people of Alberta continue to support this refinery because it does do a couple of good things for the people of Alberta. It gives us a stable source of supply for the refinery. It controls the price

some and keeps it down. It supplies somewhere around the neighbourhood of 25 per cent of the diesel that is utilized in Alberta. As most people know, diesel is extremely important to our economy, and we needed to have a mature, consistent, reliable source of supply. It does that. But for the people of Alberta it's not a great investment right now. It's going to turn the corner once the original capital cost is paid back, which works out to about \$20 a barrel right now. Once that cost is paid back, the people of Alberta will receive a profit on it. So it's more than just on the basis of a return on investment.

I would tell you that this is not an investment that I would make as the minister of energy today, but it is something that we inherited, and frankly no governments did anything about it until this government. We've done some really good things. We refinanced the long-term debt of the corporation, of the agency. As a result of that, we've saved Albertans a significant amount of money. It's true that it's going to take some time to give the real payback to Albertans, but for the most part we've made the best situation out of a poor situation, and we are the first government to do so. Frankly, the NDP did nothing to help that situation when it arose.

Ms Al-Guneid: Through you, Madam Chair, can the minister tell us: where can we see the poor return on investment reflected in the budget?

The Chair: On the supplementary supply?

Ms Al-Guneid: In the budget overall, too. It's missing.

Mr. Jean: Well, I can't point particularly to the line. There are a few lines too many, and I haven't got it memorized yet. Hopefully, by tomorrow I will. But I can assure the member that what we're looking at is variables on a loss or profit, depending on what the nature of the market gives us back, depending on the price of oil, depending on the differential. The differential doesn't necessarily help us in relation to the refinery itself although it does help us in relation to the oil prices and the royalties received from it. So although we might get a good benefit on royalties, we don't get a great benefit on the refinery itself. But what I can tell the member is that we're doing everything we possibly can to try to minimize any losses on this particular refinery. Sometimes we do make a profit and sometimes we don't, but we have to look at it as a big project. These are projects that we cost over a significant period of time, and we can't just look at it isolated on one particular year. It does a lot of things for the people of Alberta that would not be done if we didn't have this refinery in the province. It's not a perfect situation, but it's the best situation we can make of a very poor, bad investment previously.

Ms Al-Guneid: Through you, Madam Chair: now, in January 2024 the Premier mused about selling the recently acquired 50 per cent stake in the refinery. Can the minister share a timeline with us?

Mr. Horner: Yeah. I would just say: you know, we're here to talk about the supplementary estimates. I would say that when we get to the year-end report for '23-24, a lot of the numbers you're looking for will be there. But it's not appropriate for today.

9:30

Ms Al-Guneid: It's an expense, item 3.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Al-Guneid: Sorry, Madam Chair. Through you, it is on page 32, expense 3.

Mr. Horner: The cost of selling oil?

Ms Al-Guneid: Correct. It's all related to that supplementary.

Mr. Horner: The number you're looking for will be in the year-end report for '23-24 once the year is concluded.

Ms Al-Guneid: A reminder: the province is obligated to pay a monthly toll, which is made up of debt repayment, debt-servicing cost, and operating component, but the refinery's price tag climbed from \$5.7 billion to \$10 billion. Through you, Madam Chair, has the minister talked to any potential buyers or financial institutions that would facilitate the sale of the government's stake?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Sure. Alberta receives royalties from oil producers in kind. The producers provide a portion of oil directly to the government of Alberta as royalties instead of paying the royalties in cash. We sell the oil to realize the cash. There are costs to selling that oil. Higher crude oil prices result in increased crude oil royalty volumes, which are marketed by the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission, or APMC. On behalf of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals the APMC bears the costs related to marketing and selling Alberta's in-kind royalties, which include pipeline tolls, crude oil and condensate purchases, trucking costs, and other marketing fees. The increased royalty volumes also give rise to increased crude oil revenues from the sale of those barrels, which is good news for the province as those revenues fund critical programs that all Albertans rely on.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Al-Guneid: Thank you, Madam Chair. A study by Alberta's Auditor General bluntly stated in 2018 that because of the structure of the agreement there is no plausible scenario where it would make financial sense to pull out of this agreement. Through you, Madam Chair, what has the government done to address the Auditor General's concern?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Yeah. Once again, not a supplementary estimates question.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Al-Guneid: Well, thank you, Madam Chair.

Another question. On page 32, expense 2, there is a \$3 million decrease in the resource development and management budget. Where exactly are these cuts specifically applied? Which projects and initiatives were affected by these reductions?

Mr. Jean: I'm not sure if the member could point to that, have a chance to do it, but I see the Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board standing.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Madam Chair. The lapse is split between two program elements: \$501,000 from element 2.2, energy policy, and \$2.6 million from 2.3, industry advocacy. In the third quarter the energy policy program reprofiled money related to NAFTA litigation, freeing up some funding authority in the current year. The industry advocacy program forecasts reductions in grants to the Canadian Energy Centre at third quarter.

Ms Al-Guneid: On page 79 of the estimates and 4 of the supplemental under expenses we have \$153 million for economic

recovery support. Through you, Madam Chair, can the minister outline what is contained under this item exactly, and who are the stakeholders intended to use this support?

Mr. Horner: One more time, the line item, the page?

Ms Al-Guneid: Item 4 in the supplemental. It's only one page, page 32.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Sure. The ministry reprofiled \$37 million for the Inter Pipeline heartland petrochemical complex project under the Alberta petrochemicals incentive program, or APIP.

The Chair: That concludes the 10-minute portion of the Official Opposition.

We'll go to the independent member. Waived.

We'll go to the government members. Any members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I'll go to the Official Opposition.

Member Ceci: If you're amenable to go back and forth with the minister, just the one question. I think you've already touched on it, Minister. It's on pages 22 and 23, and I heard some of the answer, when the question was directed your way, from the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore. But I wonder if you could clarify: which are the three historic sites that requested earlier than planned environmental remediation? The money is already spent, but which are the three? I heard one was the Turner Valley gas plant, and I didn't catch the second, and I don't think you mentioned a third. So what's the third? And what is the nature of the environmental impact on each of these historic sites?

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

Ms Fir: Yeah. I'm happy to answer the question again. Because work for the environmental remediation was completed faster than anticipated at the three historic sites – again, the Turner Valley gas plant, Greenhill mine site, and Bitumount – the cost in 2023-24 was higher than originally anticipated.

Member Ceci: Did you say Bitumount? I don't know it personally, but what can you tell me about it?

Ms Fir: Yeah. For sure. I can spell it – and I could be not pronouncing it exactly right – B-i-t-u-m-o-u-n-t.

Member Ceci: I'll have to travel there.

Mr. McIver: There's no "ch" in there.

An Hon. Member: The "p" is silent.

The Chair: Order. Order.

Are there any other questions from the Official Opposition? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: would you like to share time?

Mr. McIver: I'd love to.

Mr. Kasawski: Wonderful.

The Chair: Sounds good.

Please proceed.

Mr. Kasawski: To the minister through the chair, Municipal Affairs has requested a supplementary expense in the amount of \$1,197,000 for assessment services to address elevated legal expenses associated with the rise of assessment complaints involving high-value properties. My constituents in Sherwood Park will be interested as to whether this legal effort will raise municipal revenue from property taxes from high-value properties in my riding, like those owned by Imperial Oil, Suncor, Gibson Energy, and Air Products, or is the provincial government assessing the value of these business properties unfairly? The question: did you arrive at the amount of \$1,197,000 for the assessment service to address the elevated legal expenses from a quote or estimate by a law firm hired for legal services?

Mr. McIver: Well, Madam Chair, it is exactly what it says it is, but the way the hon. member across said \$1 million, I was surprised he wasn't biting his little finger at the same time. Anyways, you know what? We do a lot of industrial assessment in Municipal Affairs, large plants including, I'm sure, some of the ones that the member across mentioned, as well as linear assessment. And it's the staff's opinion that the legal costs – people sometimes don't like their assessment. I know that's a surprise to everybody in here, but sometimes when they don't like their assessment, they go to court. Our staff's estimate of the additional costs when people have gone to court because they don't like or disagree with the assessment is \$1,197,000. I am resisting biting my little finger for everyone's benefit, especially mine.

Mr. Kasawski: Thank you, Minister, through the chair. Is the supplementary amount – it said that it'd be fully off-set by dedicated revenue. Which revenue? Is the revenue guaranteed, or is it contingent upon the government winning the legal case or cases?

Mr. McIver: No. The people that get the service pay for the service, and we organize it so that it's self-funding. So the hon. member can sleep soundly at night, I hope, knowing that his constituents will have neither a larger nor a smaller tax bill because of this supplementary supply.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Kasawski: I'm done.

The Chair: Are there any other members of the Official Opposition wishing to speak?

Seeing none, would the independent member like to speak?

Would members of the government like to speak?

Seeing none, hon. members, I will ask the officials to leave the Chamber. Thank you very much for your time.

Members, please return to your assigned chairs.

9:40 Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2023-24 General Revenue Fund

The Chair: Hon. members, we shall now proceed to the final vote on supplementary supply estimates. Those members in favour of the resolutions for the 2023-24 supplementary supply estimates, general revenue fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

I would now like to invite the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report the 2023-2024 supplementary supply estimates, general revenue fund.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

Ms Pitt: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again. The following resolutions relating to the 2023-24 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024, have been approved.

Advanced Education: financial transactions, \$278,767,000.

Agriculture and Irrigation: expense, \$109,249,000; capital investment, \$293,000.

Arts, Culture and Status of Women: financial transactions, \$335,000.

Children and Family Services: expense, \$1,550,000.

Energy and Minerals: expense, \$7,044,000.

Forestry and Parks: expense, \$22,776,000.

Health: expense, \$133,100,000.

Justice: expense, \$9,855,000.

Mental Health and Addiction: expense, \$45,900,000; capital investment, \$3,000,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense, \$1,197,000.

Public Safety and Emergency Services: expense, \$81,471,000; capital investment, \$1,170,000.

Seniors, Community and Social Services: expense, \$525,000.

Technology and Innovation: financial transactions, \$25,000,000.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly agree in the report? If so, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried and so ordered.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 15

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 15, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2024. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Bill 15 will provide authority for the government to pay from the general revenue fund for additional costs that are not already covered or otherwise provided for during the current fiscal year. The supplementary estimates include \$412.7 million in expense, \$4.5 million in capital investment, and \$304.1 million in financial transactions. I ask all my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:45 p.m.]

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