



Province of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 18, 2025

Day 87

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 31st Legislature

First Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Batten, Diana M.B., Calgary-Acadia (NDP)
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Boparai, Parmeet Singh, Calgary-Falconridge (NDP)
Bouchard, Eric, Calgary-Lougheed (UC)
Brar, Gurinder, Calgary-North East (NDP)
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
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Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Assistant Whip
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Haji, Sharif, Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
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Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC)
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(UC)
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Vacant, Edmonton-Strathcona

Party standings:

United Conservative: 48

New Democrat: 37

Independent: 1

Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Haji: It's my pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly grade 6 students of Kildare elementary school. I visited them last month, and I'm so glad they are here today. I want to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Ip: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you 52 awesome grade 6 students of Parkland Immanuel Christian School along with their teachers and educational staff, Mrs. Ostermeier, Ms Hamoen, Mrs. Bégin, Mrs. DeWit, and some wonderful parent volunteers. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you my guests, who are absolute pillars of the agricultural community, Jason and Paula Lenz, Kent Holowath, and Mark Lyseng. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mrs. Petrovic: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you the Crowsnest Pass council: His Worship Blair Painter, councillors Dave Filipuzzi, Dean Ward, and their CAO Patrick Thomas. I ask that you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you on behalf of the MLA for St. Albert her two constituency assistants, Jenna Poirier and Alena Brown. Jenna is a social work student, and we're happy to have her here. If they both could rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Ms Sigurdson: Yes.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my constituency assistant Stephen Smith, no relation to the Premier. I

just thank him for his exemplary work supporting me. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you 20 volunteers of Jaza Relief, a Canadian charity dedicated to alleviating poverty and supporting vulnerable communities all over the world. All of them are incredibly wonderful and dedicated members of our community, and I ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has a statement to make.

Health System Reform

Dr. Metz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm going to share some serious concerns brought forward by Dr. Paul Parks, past president of the Alberta Medical Association. In light of the corrupt care scandal he is sounding the alarm on the unprecedented government takeover of our health care system, a move that threatens the integrity and the quality of health care in this province. Dr. Parks warns that the Premier's office and Alberta Health ministry have seized direct operational control of health care, forcing leaders to follow political orders, no matter how reckless or harmful, under threat of losing their jobs, careers, and potentially their ability to work in this province ever again.

Currently, three of the top four positions within Alberta Health Services are filled by government-appointed bureaucrats with no clinical experience or health care leadership qualities. These individuals serve at the sole pleasure of the Premier and the Health minister and cannot exercise independent judgment or conduct due diligence. Mr. Speaker, this is not leadership; it is control. Health care leaders are stripped of any authority but remain fully responsible for the consequences.

Meanwhile the government continues its dangerous doublespeak. They're taking full control of Alberta's health care system and blaming AHS for any failures. Dr. Parks warns that the toxic environment will drive away experienced health care professionals, risking the future of our system. Allegations have even surfaced that the government monitors physician leaders. This is why we will continue to call for a full public inquiry.

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

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have some of the greatest farmers and ranchers in the world right here in Alberta. They deliver high-quality food from their fields to our tables year after year. They are contributors not only to our growing economy but also are essential to their families and their communities. But they are only able to do that if they can stay safe.

This week, between March 16 and 22, is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. This is an important time for all of us to consider what role we have in keeping our farmers and ranchers safe. Safety is not just a box to be checked. It is a necessity to make sure our hard-working producers stay healthy and can keep delivering the best agricultural products in the world.

Mr. Speaker, as we enter into another growing season, now is the perfect time to reassess potential hazards, do proper training, and take preventative measures to ensure that this season everyone makes it home at the end of the workday. Education and awareness

are key to preventing injuries. At all levels, from farm workers to our government, we all need to renew our commitment to farm safety because one injury is too many. I am proud of our hard-working agricultural community in Alberta. Our agricultural community should know that your government stands with you to support you in all the important work that you do, including ensuring that you are safe.

I encourage everyone to visit agsafeab.ca for the farmers care program, which is a free, simple, and practical tool focused on agricultural health and safety hazards. It has been designed to help you find realistic ways to prevent injuries and potentially even save a life on your farm or ranch. Let's make sure our farmers stay safe this year and can keep producing the world-renowned food products Alberta is known for.

Thank you.

Investigation of Health Services Procurement

Ms Ganley: Where there's smoke, there's fire, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Health filed her statement of defence. According to the Premier and the minister this document was supposed to answer Albertans' questions about political interference by this UCP government. Unfortunately, the minister's statement leaves us with a lot more questions than answers. The statement of defence responds to the legal issue of the termination of the CEO of AHS, but that's only a very small part of the larger concern: allegations of corruption, kickbacks, and more. Certainly, the termination of AHS's CEO to stop her investigation is one of those allegations, but it's only a very small part of the story.

These allegations are levelled against the UCP cabinet. The statement of defence doesn't address them at all. The statement of defence does nothing to address the allegations that the minister herself and the Premier's chief of staff, Marshall Smith, frequently interfered in activities that were meant to be arm's length. The facts won't stop this minister from trying to claim she can't speak: the allegations are before the court. That's exactly the problem; they aren't. One small portion of the allegations is before the court, but Albertans deserve answers from the UCP cabinet on the entire salacious mess.

This government has provided no answers to the serious and widespread allegations of kickbacks and corruption. Mr. Speaker, there's no getting to the bottom of this scandalous mess without an open and transparent process. The UCP's 'shamvestigation' simply will not cut it. While some members across the aisle seem to have difficulty with the distinction, a third-party investigation with limited scope and no subpoena power is not a public inquiry.

Albertans deserve ethical, competent government. They deserve to know the truth. We need a full public inquiry conducted under the Public Inquiries Act. Nothing short will do.

1:40 Federal-provincial Relations

Ms de Jonge: Mr. Speaker, since its inception Alberta has always had to defend itself against outside forces. From before provincehood people have looked greedily upon the resources and wealth of our province and wanted to take it for themselves. Clifford Sifton, minister of the interior when Alberta became a province, said: we desire, and all Canadian patriots desire, that the great trade of the prairies shall go to enrich our people to the east to build up our factories and our places of work and in every legitimate way to our prosperity. If Ottawa had its way, we would exist only to enrich the east, with our wealth forever redirected without fair compensation or respect for our autonomy.

We owe much to Frederick Haultain, who fought tirelessly for our sovereignty even if this meant challenging political currents of the time. Haultain was our defiant champion. Time and time again Albertans have faced attempts by eastern elites to leverage our resources for their own gain, peaking with the national energy program in the '80s, devastating lives and livelihoods in the name of making Alberta do its part for Team Canada. When the Premier of Ontario tells us to implement export taxes on our oil as a trump card in the trade war with the U.S., something he won't do for automobiles, it comes as no surprise to us.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans will make these decisions about our own resources, not a politician in the east. Our government will guard Albertans from anyone who would seek to reduce their wealth, rob them of their resources, or punish them for being boldly and proudly Albertan. We have an independent culture that stands up to bullying wherever it is found and that finds real solutions to problems without having to strut about and pound our chests.

Diplomacy backed by firm resolve is the Alberta model, and I have no doubt that Haultain, the great man to whom we owe our provincehood, a leader unafraid to stand apart when necessary, would be proud to see us do the same, ensuring Alberta remains free, prosperous, and protected, no matter the threat. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Coal Development Policies

Member Miyashiro: Mr. Speaker, the number one concern of people in Lethbridge and from across southern Alberta is the risk to our environment and economy from the potential for coal mining in the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains, which is the source of water for most Albertans. When the UCP government lifted the eastern slopes coal exploration ban in January, there was an immediate outcry. A huge crowd braved the cold and protested this action in the streets of Lethbridge. Many people who gathered on that day had never before protested. My inbox filled with letters of concern from many of whom had never before written an MLA.

At a recent town hall we heard from Indigenous leaders, a toxicologist, and other people fighting the coal lobby. Over 200 people heard that the decision about coal mining is purely political. Many have pledged to hinge their vote in future elections on candidates' vocal opposition to coal mining. For the record, the Alberta NDP has been clear: no mining in the eastern slopes.

We're lucky to live along the Oldman River, which is named after the old man Napi, or Creator. Napi is sacred to the Blackfoot people, and it's through them that we have learned to fully appreciate the river. We live in traditional Blackfoot territory. The Piikani, the Kainai, and Siksika Nations have treaty rights that also must be upheld by this government.

The science on the detrimental effects of coal mining and exploration is clear and cannot be disregarded. The potential devastation of Canada's premiere agrifood corridor in our region is an existential threat to our way of life. The Lougheed government's 1976 coal policy protected us from that harm. This government's rejection of history and refusal to hear the overwhelming voices of Albertans opposed to mining in the eastern slopes has set a dangerous course.

I am pleased to sponsor a private member's bill, Bill 214, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act, which was introduced by the hon. Rachel Notley. The people of southern Alberta will not sit idly by and watch our precious resource, our life, and our future destroyed. The eastern slopes are ours, not mines'. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Funding for FSCD

Mr. Kasawski: One of the great honours in this role of MLA that grounds me every day is when the people that we serve share their stories of their battles with us. Parents in Sherwood Park are afraid of what comes next for their disabled child's life because family supports for children with disabilities, FSCD, is being starved of funding. Like so many things in Alberta that are funded by this provincial government, FSCD is being run to failure. Critical and urgent cases are the only ones getting attention in our system now, and most families are waiting three years to get access to the full range of services.

We struggle in this Chamber with the big questions of how to govern Alberta. What do we pay for collectively together? What do you pay for individually on your own? For example, collectively, we pay to spread sand and gravel on the roads in winter to make them safer, but you pay for the chips on your windshield to have them repaired.

One of the powers of this Chamber is that we decide what we pay for as a provincial government and by default what you or someone else pays for without us. Parents of disabled children are not complaining, but luck has put them in challenging circumstances, and it is understandable that they need help, respite, support for their children to help them thrive and be safe and secure. Every cut is another rock put on the sled of families who are already carrying more than their fair share. Families are fraying under duress and collapsing under the pressure of unmet needs.

I think that, collectively, we should help families of disabled children. With Budget 2025 let's collectively find the funding in the provincial treasury to bolster the resources of FSCD. When you are able to understand the battles that others are fighting, the only choice is to help.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 44

Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 44, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2025.

The amendments proposed in this act will reduce waste, create additional nutrient options for crop production, and provide legislative backing to the emerging biogas industry.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I hereby move first reading of Bill 44.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table two more of the hundreds of e-mails that we are all receiving calling on this UCP government to reverse their heinous cuts to the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton. It's not too late for them to change course and do the right thing. Fund the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton.

The Speaker: Are there are others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of another two e-mails regarding Calgarians' outrage at the government's fooling around with the green line alignment. They really wish it would be left alone.

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

Ms Hayter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of the letter from Mary Jane James, the CEO of the Sexual Assault Centre, to all the members of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities, expressing disappointment about the wait-list grant and requesting the reinstatement of \$900,000 per year.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Loewen, Minister of Forestry and Parks, response to Written Question 7, asked for by Ms Sweet on May 27, 2024, how many grants were distributed to municipalities in 2023 by the Forest Resource Improvement Association through the Alberta FireSmart program; response to Written Question 8, asked for by Ms Sweet on May 27, 2024, what was the total amount paid by the government to municipalities for costs incurred in 2023 as a result of wildfires that occurred outside of forest protection areas.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Ellis, Deputy Premier, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services, response to Written Question 9, asked for by Ms Sweet on May 27, 2024, what is the total amount of compensation payable under any government program to municipalities for costs incurred in 2023 as a result of wildfires that occurred outside of forest protection areas that remains outstanding as of April 15, 2024.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Energy Industry Liability Management

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, R-star, the UCP's oil well cleanup scam, was resoundingly rejected by Albertans, and the Premier shelved it after the last election. Well, the Premier has been secretly working on a sequel. In leaked documents the Premier's special adviser David Yager is proposing that Albertans pay for big oil companies to clean up wells. Taxpayers will now be on the hook for hundreds of billions in pollution liabilities from bankrupt companies. Why would the Premier stick Albertans with this ginormous bill for well cleanup instead of making companies pay for their pollution?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report in question is still being looked at by our energy minister and the department, and we're going through the recommendations. We'll be releasing the final report early in April. I'm looking forward to talking about it at that time. I would tell the member opposite that we did a broad consultation, from a number of people, and have quite a different approach than what was presented years ago, and I'd be more than happy to explain more about it. We're quite excited about it.

Ms Gray: What has been done up till now is protecting the legal rights of landowners. It's concerning that the Premier may be moving away from that.

With these new schemes the Premier is admitting she's done with the polluter-pay principle. The leaked plan means the Premier may want to set up a new Crown corporation to clean up these polluted sites at incredible cost. Paul McLaughlin, the former head of RMA, calls this just another scheme on behalf of industry. He says, quote: I think it's shady; I think literally the industry needs to pay their bills; I think the government, quite honestly, needs to regulate. End quote. Well, there's some common sense. Will the Premier take that advice?

Ms Smith: Actually, Mr. Speaker, David Swann and Regan Boychuk with the liabilities association proposed an idea a number of years ago where instead of having assets go into the orphan well fund and then be used and taken into the private sector, those assets actually would be used to clean up the liabilities of that same company. That's one of the things that we're proposing, and it's one of the ideas that actually came from a left-wing group. We're pretty excited to be looking at that as an option, and we'll have more to say about it when we release the report.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, if you go to a restaurant and you skip the bill after eating, you'd be stealing and leaving the restaurant owner on the hook. That's what we're talking about here. Resource companies dine out on Albertans' oil and gas wealth, they make bucketloads of money, then they skip out on the cleanup bill. These companies are required by law today to do their own cleanup. Why would the Premier stick Albertans with a massive bill for well cleanup instead of making companies pay for their own pollution, as has always been the case until now?

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this is the problem about media reports from leaked documents that the members opposite haven't seen. They think it says one thing, and it actually says something completely different. One of the things that was proposed by economist Andrew Leach is that we should never have an orphan well again, that there should be dollars that float with the well as it moves on to different owners. That's another thing that's being proposed in the document.

Ms Hoffman: Then table it.

Ms Smith: I will table it, happily, when we release the report at the beginning of April. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The Leader of the Opposition for her second set of questions.

Health Services Procurement Process

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Premier about a December 20 letter sent by the chief financial officer of AHS to MHCare. The Premier said that Albertans should read the government's statement of defence. Well, we have. The statement of defence is about a termination of a CEO. It doesn't answer questions about corruption and kickbacks, and it doesn't mention the December 20 letter at all. So I'll ask the Premier again: what did MHCare say when asked by this government why one individual had an MHCare e-mail address while he was working for the government to buy things from MHCare?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, the government of Alberta has filed a statement of defence related to the AHS matter. As it's before the courts, I would just encourage the members opposite to review the statement of defence. But I can say

that one of the issues that we are facing here is that we just have a difference of opinion about how to deliver services to Albertans. We believe, having looked at the evidence, that chartered surgical centres are the only place where we're seeing year over year an increase in the number of surgeries, so we're going to continue using them.

Ms Gray: We should be able to agree that the person selling and the person buying shouldn't be the same person working for government. Albertans understand that a cover-up is happening right before their eyes: Tylenol we couldn't use, expired gowns and masks we can't use, a failed lab privatization, private surgical contracts at inflated prices, and all of these at the expense of the taxpayer, all of them with ties to one company owned by an associate of this Premier. The Premier is bringing in a retired judge who can't subpoena witnesses and will only see what she wants him to see. At this point how can the Premier not call a full public inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, we're just as concerned about the procurement practices in AHS, which is why we're taking them over in Acute Care Alberta and returning AHS to what it always should have been, just a simple service provider of hospital services. They never should have been given any procurement duties because the problem is that you cannot have an entity that is delivering services also determine what the contract terms are for the people that they end up competing with. We're fixing that, and I'm looking forward to cleaning it up in the process.

Ms Gray: Among the many concerns is this government's political interference into what was happening. The December 20 letter shows that MHCare was supposed to import \$50 million in additional products, but to date they have not: \$50 million in tax money paid in advance, nothing delivered. The letter says that MHCare hasn't even started the process for importing additional medication and makes clear that AHS is worried about what's really going on because, quote: one or more former AHS employees was or were affiliated with MHCare. Why haven't we demanded that \$50 million . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The terms of that contract allow for us to be able to determine different types of products that we'll be able to receive to fulfill it. The company is in the process of getting the approvals from Health Canada so that we are able to get the product that we're looking for. We'll hopefully be able to have more to say about that.

As for the particulars that are being raised by the members opposite, we've got the hon. Raymond Wyant, former Chief Judge of the provincial court of Manitoba. He is leading the third-party investigation. The report will be delivered in June and posted online soon after. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for her third set of questions.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, in the statement filed last week, the government defends Marshall Smith, the Premier's former chief of staff, even though he's not being sued. The statement claims that Marshall barely knew procurement employee Mr. Prasad and had only met him a few times. The Premier's chief of staff should be a very busy man: meetings, travel, hockey games, you name it. Given

the accusations of political interference, corruption, and kickbacks, why was the Premier's chief of staff meeting with an AHS procurement officer? And why did he refer to Mr. Prasad as "his guy"?"

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how many times I can say it, but we are moving the procurement function from the agency, Alberta Health Services, so it can be returned to a service provider. In July 2023 it was part of the mandate letter to the minister. We announced it formally in November of 2023. We've been working towards that end for the last year. We've had many, many meetings about how to transfer that procurement function over to Acute Care Alberta, which gets its operational day one on April 1. That transition is happening. That's the reason for the meetings.

Ms Gray: And I don't know how many times I can say it: moving the procurement function so what used to be political interference would now be legitimate does not forgive the bad behaviour this government has been engaging in.

The Premier has access to all of her chief of staff's records, including his cellphone. We know because they included screenshots in the statement of defence. But it doesn't address the serious accusations of political interference, corruption, kickbacks. So to the Premier: how many times did your former chief of staff call or text Athana Mentzelopoulos, Jitendra Prasad, and Sam Mraiche?

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what type of leader they think I am, but I don't monitor every single text from every single staff member or every single minister. The information that they are looking for is contained in the statement of defence that has been filed within the courts. I just have to put it into the context. It was in answer to a statement of claim asking for \$1.7 million as a settlement. None of the allegations have been tested in court, and I think we should let that process play out. In the meantime we have the Auditor General looking into it. We also have the judge looking into it. We'll know more in July.

2:00

Ms Gray: Albertans are watching a cover-up right before their eyes. The former CEO spent months looking into corruption and got fired for her efforts. No one fired Marshall Smith, though. What happened to him? Oh, right. He's a VP at a company now that's lobbying this government. Albertans need real answers as to why so much of their vital health care funding has been lost to a single questionable company. Hundreds of million dollars are at play right now. The Premier's carefully controlled fake inquiry will never get to the bottom of the scandal. It is not designed to. Will the Premier call a real inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Ms Smith: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We take cooling-off periods seriously. My former chief of staff is not permitted to lobby the government for the next year. So I would ask the member opposite to retract any of the slanderous statements that she is making about him because they're just simply not true. As I mentioned, we've got lots of processes undergoing. The answers will be made clear. [interjections]

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

Ms Smith: We've taken the allegations seriously. We're looking into them in a multitude of different ways. The information will be available through the Auditor General, through the court process. We have already filed a disclosure, and we encourage the members opposite to read it.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, the statement of defence filed on behalf of the Minister of Health in the corrupt care scandal is a fascinating read. The minister's main defence is that the government was not the employer of the AHS CEO, so the minister cannot be responsible for her being fired. But then it proceeds to spend 23 pages setting out exactly why the government, not AHS, was justified in firing her. It admits what Albertans have known all along: the UCP is and has been responsible for AHS for the past six years. Will the Minister of Health admit that her statement of defence is actually an admission of liability?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Nothing in the member opposite's statement was accurate. The CEO, as I mentioned earlier, was fired for very particular reasons, which are outlined in that statement of defence, none of which are as alleged by the member opposite.

The fact of the matter is that Albertans expect to have health care available when they need it. These surgical facilities have been providing a service to Albertans for many decades. It's an important feature of Alberta's health system, and we'll continue to do everything we can to deliver on that service.

Ms Pancholi: What's incredible about the statement of defence is that it contradicts the UCP's public statements about chartered surgical facilities. In paragraph 32 they admit to spending more than expected on a contract with Alberta Surgical Group, connected to Sam Mraiche, even though ASG didn't have to build a facility and the contract was for a shorter term.

Paragraph 55 includes a text message where the former CEO tells Marshall Smith that ASG's own projections showed "they will not deliver the contracted volumes and will go over-budget." Why would the minister fire the CEO for questioning why Albertans were paying more to get less? The answer is, Mr. Speaker, corruption.

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, once again, Albertans would be so much better served by an opposition that states facts and not falsehoods.

The fact of the matter is that ASG has performed many surgeries in this province, and they're doing a great job of that as well. All of our surgical facilities are doing a phenomenal job. The statement of defence alleges that the work that is being done by the surgical facilities is something that is very important to Albertans. We'll continue to do what we can to make sure that our health care system is available whenever needed.

Ms Pancholi: It sounds like the Minister of Justice hasn't read the statement of defence. It alleges that the government wanted to renew bad surgical contracts; otherwise, they had no backup plan to perform these surgeries. The UCP wanted to double down on their own bad decisions. Sound familiar? Useless PPE we're still paying for, Turkish Tylenol we're still paying for, DynaLife lab services we're still paying for, and now surgical contracts. Yes, it seems the CEO was infatuated, infatuated with ensuring taxpayer dollars were being spent wisely to get the best outcomes for Albertans. That used to be called fiscal responsibility. Wouldn't it be nice if the UCP was also infatuated with that?

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the member has not read the statement of defence. What it actually says in there is that the former AHS CEO's own investigation turned up that these surgical facilities were – there was no reason for them not to provide further contract extensions, and that's exactly what this government was promoting.

Energy Industry Liability Management (continued)

Ms Al-Guneid: Mr. Speaker, for weeks now the Premier's adviser, David Yager, has been holding secret consultations on building R-star 2 to let oil and gas companies off the hook from paying to clean up their own pollution. Why would the Premier let David Yager, a friend of the Premier's, a UCP insider, and the former Wildrose Party president, hold secret consultations to make Albertans pay billions to clean up for bankrupt oil and gas companies in rural Alberta?

Mr. Jean: Secret meetings, Mr. Speaker? It sounds like the NDP back in the AER days when they were letting them commit a fraud on Albertans. That's what it sounds like. [interjections] I've heard corruption a couple times over there. That corruption: they must be referring to 2015 to 2019 and all the ridiculous things that went on. In fact, I would just say this, that we wouldn't be in this coal mess except for their ministers sending out an invitation to billionaires across the world saying: come on into Alberta and dig, baby, dig. We're not going to take any lessons from them on any issues.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that Mr. Yager is introducing himself as an adviser to the Premier and Executive Council in public events and consultations, given that the last time I checked, the Premier appointed Mr. Yager on the board of the Alberta Energy Regulator, which means that he and the regulator must be at arm's length from the government, why is Mr. Yager working on government policy to bail out bankrupt companies on taxpayer dime and representing himself as a special adviser to the Premier and Executive Council while being an AER member?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the reason why we're listening to Mr. Yager is because he's an industry expert. He's written a book on it. He's been in this industry for many years, and he's done a great job. You know what else? He is coming forward with some great ideas to protect Albertans. In the four years that they were in power, we just had a record amount of orphan wells come forward. We had a whole bunch of issues come forward, including a whole bunch of fraud that they allowed happen under their watch, and we're not going to let that happen. One other thing we're not going to let happen is any taxpayer dollars being given to private companies. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Al-Guneid: Given that this whole scheme looks like a way for the UCP to make Albertans pay billions for bankrupt oil and gas companies, given that this UCP attempt to use public money to finance and pay for industry's mess is a violation of the polluter-pays principle and must stop, given that this leaked scheme looks like an expanded and much worse version of the Premier's R-star program, can the minister explain why this government is dismantling our regulatory process and ignoring the polluter-pays principle?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, taxpayer dollars will not be given to private companies to clean up their wells. It's simple. We're not going to

allow that. We do believe in polluter-pay principles. That's why the oil sands are doing a first-class job at doing what they do, bringing out the resources in an environmentally friendly way that's in the best interest of Albertans. That's what we're going to continue to do.

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

Foster and Kinship Caregiver Supports

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week the Minister of Children and Family Services announced an increase to the basic caregiver rates for foster and kinship caregivers. I understand that this increase came after months of province-wide round-tables with providers to hear about what issues caregivers are facing. I'm very supportive of our government and this minister for making changes for these caregivers. To the minister of children's services: how much will this 2 per cent increase amount to, and what else can be done to support foster and kinship caregivers?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of children's services.

Mr. Turton: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. Foster and kinship caregivers deserve to worry less about finance and focus on what they do best, which is providing a safe and loving home to children in care and setting them up for a strong foundation for the future. That's why I'm so proud to have announced this week a 2 per cent increase of the caregiver rates, a total funding increase of \$3.1 million to support them in this incredibly important work. This is on top of our announcement last June that increased these rates by 4.2 per cent, for a total of 6.2 per cent increase over last year. This is the largest increase in over a decade. We're proud of our work to support kids.

2:10

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

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister, given that there are thousands of children across Alberta that are in kinship care and foster care with rising case complexity and given that there is close to as many foster care and kinship parents in Alberta as children requiring care, to the same minister: how many foster children and caregivers will benefit from this increase to caregivers' rates, which hasn't been seen in this sector for almost 10 years?

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

Mr. Turton: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Again, thank you to that member for just being such a tireless advocate for vulnerable children here in our province. I'm proud that this announcement will have an incredible impact and benefit almost 6,800 caregivers and more than 10,000 children and youth across the foster and kinship care system. This is a significant investment to ensure that these children and families can have the basic needs, which will help them out and set them up with better foundations for the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that these foster and kinship caregivers provide so much for children in care, often going above and beyond the call to action to support these vulnerable children, and given

that these families open their homes, provide day-to-day needs, and, most importantly, make them feel like they are an important part of the family, to the same minister: what will this increase of rates cover for caregivers, and what supports are available to them?

Mr. Turton: Mr. Speaker, government remains committed to ensure that cost of living is not a barrier to safe and loving care, and our government is meeting that challenge. That is why this increase will cover the costs of basic needs like clothing and food and provide additional support for caregivers who care for their children with more complex needs. This builds on our recent investments to support caregivers, including mileage, meal compensation, counselling supports, funding for helping youth in transition, and the refer a foster caregiver program.

Vaccination Policies

Ms Hoffman: Alberta is facing a measles outbreak, with confirmed cases in Edmonton, Calgary, and many northern communities. Measles is a serious, highly infectious disease which can lead to severe health outcomes, even death. The rise of measles in Alberta is directly linked to vaccine hesitancy because of harmful misinformation. So will the minister set the record straight, stop sharing misinformation, and tell Albertans that vaccines are safe and that they should get their children vaccinated?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite never get tired of being wrong, and they're wrong again. We have never provided misinformation to the people of Alberta. In fact, we have been sharing information with them. When the first cases showed up in a northern Indigenous community, we worked with Indigenous Services Canada to make sure that community had immunization available to them, that they had all the information available to them. We know that right now these cases are contained within families.

Ms Hoffman: Given that while measles is spreading across the province, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed toured a well-known antivaxxer, Chris Shoemaker, around this very Legislature and given that Mr. Shoemaker spreads vaccine hesitancy, pushes false narratives around vaccine risk, and was investigated by the Ontario college of physicians for professional misconduct before losing his licence to be a doctor, to the minister: will she denounce the Member for Calgary-Lougheed for spreading harmful misinformation that increases vaccine hesitancy, especially as our province is under a measles outbreak?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're going to continue to share information with Albertans, and for that matter we're going to continue to monitor the situation. Public health has been monitoring the current situation. We do have 13 cases now, all contained within families, and we're going to continue to monitor that situation, make sure that Albertans have the information they need so they can make really good decisions for themselves and their families. We also have the ability for Albertans to look it up at www.alberta.ca/measles.

Ms Hoffman: Given that their minister refuses to say that vaccines are safe but given that Dr. Mark Joffe, Alberta's chief medical officer of health, is urging Albertans to get vaccinated, saying that we have a highly effective vaccine with a proven track record of

being safe, and given that only 10 per cent of two-year-olds in the High Level region, where this first outbreak was identified, are fully vaccinated for measles – only 10 per cent – will the minister commit to additional funding to break the misinformation that people like Mr. Shoemaker are spreading or her own government's \$2 million sham COVID report? Vaccines are safe, Minister. Say so.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the member opposite didn't read the *Edmonton Journal*. It was on the very front page that I've ready said that vaccines are safe. We continue to make sure that Albertans get the information they need so that they can make good decisions for themselves and their families. In this particular case we are watching all of the measles cases that are out there; there are 13 right now contained within families. We'll continue to monitor it and make sure Albertans can make really good, solid decisions. The members opposite need to not fearmonger and, in fact, do what's right.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:15
The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Coal Development Policies

Dr. Elmeligi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In December the ministers of energy and Environment and Protected Areas announced the development of a new modernized coal initiative. The minister has promised things they can't deliver: no open-pit mining, no selenium in waterways. Albertans know that's not possible, so they've been protesting in front of AER hearings, MLA offices, minister town halls, writing weekly letters to the editor, e-mailing me and the ministers thousands of pleas to stop the madness. Why won't the minister of energy listen to thousands of Albertans? No coal mining on the eastern slopes.

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

Mr. Jean: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, in 2016 the former NDP government invited billionaires into Alberta and caused this problem in the first place. They were not helpful, and they have not been helpful in relation to what's going on. They're misrepresenting the situation. We have already been very clear that we have banned mountaintop removal. There won't be any new open-pit mines in the eastern slopes. We're looking at modernizing some of the issues that have crept up before, including with the NDP government. We're going to make things better. We're going to protect the waterways, protect people, and protect animals. That's what we'll do.

Dr. Elmeligi: Given that these permissions don't apply to existing applications, only to new mines, the Grassy Mountain mine is still a massive controversy. The research is clear. Selenium levels in water remain above guidelines decades after coal mines have been reclaimed. This contamination spreads across provincial boundaries, international boundaries, ecosystems. The minister of environment had these results in hand when she told Albertans that selenium could be effectively removed from the water. We're talking about our water. It is the source of all life and all economies in the province. How can the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas allow this?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is correct in that our department has been doing studies on the impacts of selenium. We are closely monitoring Alberta's water, specifically in this area of the province. This is the second most heavily monitored area of the province. Selenium is already considered a contaminant of concern under our remediation standards and is monitored under all surface water quality frameworks. This exact data is what the minister of energy is using as he modernizes and has put in place restrictions about new open-pit coal mining moving forward.

Dr. Elmeligi: Given that selenium cannot be removed from the water in nature, only in a lab; given that Albertans aren't giving up so easily, three of them – Corb Lund, CPAWS, and the Livingstone Landowners Group – have recently and very publicly invited the Premier and ministers to a long live stream public debate about coal mining; given that Global TV even offered their studio for the debate; and given that the government has yet to take up these three dedicated, passionate, and knowledgeable Albertans on their offer, if coal mining is so great, why won't the ministers and Premier do this debate and share their knowledge with Albertans?

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we are putting the highest standards on selenium and pollutants in the world in relation to what's going on in Alberta. Now, I know the NDP are looking at their NDP Party in B.C. and what a mess they made of the rivers and flora and fauna in that province. We're not going to let that happen. If the coal miners can't be up to our standard in relation to what they're doing, they're not going to do it. We're going to protect Albertans. We're going to protect the waterways. Water is life, and we take it very seriously.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has a question to ask.

Victims' Services

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta recently transitioned to a new regional model for victims' services. The previous model required about 400 board members to operate over 60 societies whereas the new model: approximately 40 board members for just four societies. Victims are supposed to continue to be referred to victims' services units in a streamlined manner. Can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services provide this Assembly with the number of cases referred to victims' services units by the RCMP in Airdrie between October and December 2023 to the same months in 2024?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister of public safety, the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and of course I thank the member for the question. The RCMP K Division victims' services unit provided data for comparison on referrals made by the RCMP to victims' services and Airdrie RCMP detachment specifically. The analysis actually showed that almost no change had occurred, with 88 per cent of the files being referred in 2023 and 87 per cent of the files being referred in 2024. With the old model, local victims' services, there were 16 of 72 areas within the province that had no victims' services. I can tell you right now that all 72 have victims' services supports.

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

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that we're now five months into this new model and given that a transition of this scale comes with new opportunities but also

challenges and further given that the RCMP play a crucial role in referring cases to VSUs, I'm also hearing reports that victims are falling through the cracks in my constituency. Can the minister tell this Assembly what steps are being taken in collaboration with the RCMP and community organizations to maintain accountability and ensure that victims in this province continue to receive the support they need and that they deserve?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, no victim should be falling through the cracks as well as no victim of tragedy should be falling through the cracks. Under the old model, local victims' services, 22 per cent of the province actually did not have victims' services supports, and that was a problem. I can now tell you that victims' services actually has predictable, sustainable funding, and we have supports throughout the entire province, and that is a success. I can tell you that they have inclusive programs with the RCMP. I can tell you that they ensure that there are deliverables, and the RCMP have also had a chief superintendent that is responsible for victims' services throughout the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that Alberta's population doesn't seem to be slowing down and, as such, crime rates will continue to rise and given that, sadly, one could assume that there will be an increase in victims also in this province, VSUs provide critical services such as crisis response, counselling, and court support for victims. Can the minister tell this Assembly how he will ensure that these services will keep up with our province's growth and how he will ensure that they are receiving the services that they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the key is that the victims have the predictable, sustainable funding and that all municipalities have that. The government of Alberta is spending almost \$39 million compared to the previous model in which only \$21 million was spent. These regions are required to provide formal quarterly statistical reports, expenditure updates as well as the usage rates along with continued annual reporting. I can tell you that on this side of the House we are going to make sure, with everybody here, that victims have all the supports necessary to make sure that they get the supports that they need. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Government Procurement Process

Mr. Deol: The former Infrastructure minister resigned in disgust over the corrupt care scandal, warning Albertans about shady deals and political corruption. He questioned how the UCP cabinet could look themselves in the mirror without fully investigating these allegations. The new Minister of Infrastructure has been in the role for two weeks. Has he seen the same level of corruption his predecessor raised, or is he turning a blind eye?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. We are doing everything we can to work with the investigative bodies to support that investigation. The Premier has said from the very beginning that we are looking to expedite this process so that we can find the answers that everybody

is looking for as quickly as possible. We're working hard with all of the investigative bodies – the independent RCMP, the independent Auditor General, the independent former justice of the provincial court of Manitoba – so that we can get the answers that all of the members of the Assembly are looking for.

Mr. Deol: Given that the former Minister of Infrastructure ordered an internal audit into the land deal and given that Sam Mraiche, at the heart of Turkish Tylenol and corrupt care scandals, was able to flip a piece of property for a \$300,000 profit within three months and given that the Premier called flipping properties with her government's profit supplier "very routine [and] mundane," will the minister update the House on the internal audit and tell Albertans how Sam Mraiche was able to earn \$300,000 on that property flip? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Infrastructure is the government's property manager and is responsible for buying and selling property based on government needs. Due to the delegated authority protocol this purchase was done entirely at the department level, and I will say that I have a great department. This is the usual process for transactions like this. Given the short turnaround between the previous owner buying and selling, the matter has been referred to the Auditor General should his office want to look at it. I look forward to that process moving forward.

Mr. Deol: Given the former Minister of Infrastructure called for a potential RCMP investigation into the corrupt care allegations of corruption and given the former minister was concerned that unethical and possibly criminal procurement practices were not only in AHS and the Ministry of Health, saying, "I have voiced concerns regarding the Government of Alberta's procurement practices across all departments," what has the minister done to address his predecessor's concerns of corruption within this government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Sorry to disappoint my friends on the other side of the aisle, but they're about two weeks too late. The RCMP is investigating. We are fully complying with the investigation. All of the investigative bodies are receiving the full co-operation of every ministry in this government. We're very much looking forward to seeing the end of those investigations and the reports that come. Look to www.alberta.ca for the report from former Justice Wyant on June 30, 2025. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Water Management in Southern Alberta

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour representing the great constituency of Taber-Warner, where we experience lots of sunny days and very warm nights. Together these two factors make our region extremely dry, causing our communities and agricultural industry to rely heavily on irrigation and water reservoirs. To the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation: could you please share with my constituents what plans the government has in place to build and maintain essential water storage to ensure our communities and agricultural producers in southern Alberta can thrive?

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

Mr. Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the incredible question. Our irrigation infrastructure, of course, is essential to our farmers, ranchers, food processors, and communities, and modernizing our irrigation network will position our agricultural sector to drive our province's economic growth. That's why we're investing \$19 million through the irrigation rehabilitation program. This is a cost-shared program between the government and the irrigation districts, our amazing irrigation districts. Our government is making sure that irrigation systems across this province remain functional and accessible for generations to come.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that the community of Milk River in my constituency has faced significant challenges due to broken water infrastructure on the U.S. side of the border, leading to serious water concerns in my area, to the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas: what specific actions is the government planning to take to provide secure water to the communities of Milk River, Coutts, and Sweet Grass on the U.S. side?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We're aware of the challenges, of course, that Milk River has faced, and we're committed to continuing to support and work with them. Since the siphon failure last June, thanks to the advocacy and co-ordination of the MLA for Taber-Warner we've been in close contact with impacted communities, water co-ops, ag operators, and Milk River irrigators as well as working with federal officials to address the situation. We're also committed to look at investing in longer term water storage and ensuring water security, and I've made it clear to my department that if any additional support is needed in the coming months, we will absolutely be there to help.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that we have seen years of persistent problems relying on aging infrastructure in the U.S., with their latest siphon failure and drop failures in the past, and given the urgent nature of water issues in Milk River caused by this infrastructure failure, can the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas please give us a timeline of when this situation will be rectified?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize the importance of proactively investing in long-term water storage infrastructure and getting this issue addressed as soon as possible. We're doing more to address long-term water storage than any other government in the last 50 years. If this budget is passed, we'd invest \$5 million over three years for more water storage information while also undergoing a province-wide review to help us evaluate existing and future water storage options throughout our province. This is a dynamic situation. From the moment the siphon broke, we've been engaging closely with the municipality. It will depend on what solutions are proposed by the municipality, and we'll be there to work alongside . . .

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

2:30 Premier's Appearance with Ben Shapiro

Mr. Haji: March 27 marks the most significant night of the month of Ramadan, a sacred night that Muslims deeply cherish, a night dedicated for devotions and prayers, yet on the same night the Premier will be sharing a stage with Ben Shapiro. Shapiro has smeared Muslims with derogatory, extreme rhetoric and has even supported the idea of annexing Canada into the United States. Why has the Premier chosen not only to sit down with Ben Shapiro on March 27 but also failed to denounce Shapiro and his racist, Islamophobic views?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, we've been clear on this side of the House that we condemn all forms of hate, but we also have to be very clear here that we are facing a threat of a tariff from the United States that could cripple not just the economy of Alberta but cripple the Canadian economy. There are existential threats coming from another nation right now. We have somebody, in the Americans, who has the ear of the President of the United States. We are going to pull every lever in the tool box to make sure that we let the President know we don't want these tariffs.

Mr. Haji: Given that Shapiro has openly stated that over half of the Muslim population is radicalized – he has declared that, and I quote, Islamic civilization is inferior – given that Shapiro broadly characterized the Muslim world as barbaric and irrational and given that Shapiro supported Trump's Muslim ban and even suggested Trump should be deporting Muslim Americans, will the Premier show some respect for Alberta's Muslim population by cancelling this event and refusing to stand alongside Ben Shapiro and his hateful ideology?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I condemn all the statements that that member had made. I hope that the members opposite can jump on the Team Canada train here and understand that we need to not have tariffs by the United States. They don't want to agree with that. That's fine. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Shapiro has over 20 million followers. He has the ear of the President of the United States, and he is opposed to tariffs. We are going to pull every lever in the tool box to make sure that we do not get tariffs. I know they like taxes; I know they like tariffs on that side of the House, but we're on Team Canada here. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Haji: Given that on this side of the House . . .

Mr. Nixon: When are you going to condemn Hamas?

Mr. Haji: . . . we are proudly Team Canada and given that Shapiro has repeatedly argued that not all cultures are equally deserving of respect and inclusion, insisting that the best society is not the most diverse one . . .

Mr. Shepherd: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Haji: . . . given he claimed that multiculturalism contributes to a breakdown of civic bonds, given that the Premier is not only meeting with Shapiro but also making taxpayers fund a trip to raise

funds for Shapiro, is the Premier attempting to distract from the ongoing corrupt care by . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. A point of order is noted at 2:33.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, again, we condemn all forms of hate. However, we are facing an unprecedented, existential threat from . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ellis: . . . the United States of America. We are facing 25 per cent or higher tariffs that could cripple our economy. Again, we are going to pull every tool, every lever that we have to make sure that we do not get this 25 per cent, and I hope the members opposite can jump on the Team Canada train. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

School Construction and Modernization

Ms Chapman: This government is all talk and no action when it comes to building the schools that Albertans need. Our metro Alberta schools are beyond full, yet this year's capital plan moves fewer school projects to construction than last year's plan. School project numbers are being bloated by announcing new designs, so many designs. Is the Minister of Education aware that while the pictures may be very pretty, students can't actually learn inside of a design?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to announce that as part of Budget '25 18 more schools are on the way for the Calgary area. Our government is taking the initiative to build these schools in these needed communities because we know that we're seeing record population and enrolment growth, and we will get the job done. And yes, we recognize that it does take some time to plan, design, and build a school. Unfortunately, the NDP thinks that you can just snap a finger and a school can be created, but we know what it takes and we will get the job done.

Ms Chapman: Given that new school builds are dragging and modernizations are lagging, given that John G. Diefenbaker school in my riding was approved for modernization in 2023 and construction still hasn't begun and given that parts of this 50-year-old school are literally being held together by duct tape, can the minister explain to students at Diefenbaker why he's dragging his feet on critical updates and when they can expect to see some action?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not dragging our feet at all. In fact, as the member just mentioned, our government is very proud of the fact that we are providing modernization for the school in the member's riding. We want Albertans and Calgarians to ensure that students can access the latest and best possible facilities in every corner of the province. That's exactly why the Premier has shown incredible leadership by committing \$8.6 billion over the next seven years to build and modernize schools in every corner of the province. That'll collectively add over 200,000 needed spaces.

Ms Chapman: Given that fewer than a third of school projects funded for construction in 2024 have actually started construction more than a year later, given that communities in Edmonton, Calgary, Airdrie, Cochrane, and Chestermere desperately need new schools to ease enrolment pressures and given that the promise to accelerate was apparently a smokescreen for a minister committed

to just moving at the pace of government, can the minister inform the House when these metro schools will actually be built?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, this highlights and illustrates why it's so critical and important to make sure that there is proper planning, effective oversight, and proper design done so that these projects can be completed as quickly as possible. Our government is taking action to build these schools now. We are working as aggressively as possible. We've changed internal process as well to make sure that schools can be built as fast as possible, and we will get the job done for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose has a question.

Augustana Campus

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Augustana campus is a truly phenomenal institute with a rich history. I'm proud to represent it and will continue to advocate for Augustana, including for the return of the nursing program. In the fall of 2024 semester the U of A Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine opened three new master of science programs at Augustana campus: speech language pathology, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. To the Minister of Advanced Education: how has the uptake of these new programs been, and what does that say about students interested in Augustana?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to thank the member for that great question and for her relentless advocacy for Augustana campus. Through the targeted enrolment expansion program we committed \$7.4 million over three years to create 88 seats in these three programs. Currently there are 16 enrolments in each of these programs for a total of 48, exceeding targets for 2024-25. These programs are helping train students for essential roles in the health care workforce. Our government is taking action to meet the health care needs of rural Alberta. We know that students who train in rural communities are most likely to stay in rural communities.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that today's job market is becoming increasingly competitive, focusing on skills and competencies, and given that it may be challenging to compete in that market as a new university graduate without the benefit of work experience and further given that one of Augustana's strengths as an institution is its focus on providing undergraduate research opportunities, to the same minister: what are the benefits of engaging in undergraduate student research, and why might the students choose Augustana for their studies?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, research experience can help students explore areas of interest within their field of study. Research skills are also transferable to all manner of professions and occupations. The ability to critically analyze information and sources and synthesize input from multiple sources is valuable in any industry. I know that Augustana has a number of directed studies courses where students can even earn academic credit for their undergraduate research.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that rural, remote, and Indigenous communities can face difficulties in

recruiting and retaining teachers for their classrooms and given that students who pursue studies at more rural institutions are more likely to remain in rural areas after graduation and further given that one of Augustana's strengths is its combined bachelor of education program which is completed in five years instead of six, once again to the minister: why might students interested in teaching choose Augustana, and how might that choice lead to more teachers choosing rural Alberta?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, the member is absolutely right. We know that students who study in rural areas are more likely to stay in their communities. The first step to recruiting and retaining more teachers in rural areas is to train more teachers in rural Alberta. Augustana and other rural institutions help fill a critical need by doing exactly that. With a strong, close-knit campus community and an educational experience based on personalized, hands-on learning, Augustana is a great option for aspiring teachers in the Camrose region and across the province.

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

Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. At 2:15 the Deputy Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rose pursuant to 23(h), (i), and (j). At that time the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was asking the Minister of Health a question about measles outbreak, a highly infectious disease, and talked about misinformation and hesitancy around vaccines and asked the minister to fund efforts to fight misinformation and encourage Albertans to get vaccines, that vaccines are safe. The minister responded by accusing the member directly, "The members opposite need to not fearmonger."

If you just look up fearmonger – I was looking it up in the Cambridge Dictionary – it defines that as "someone who intentionally tries to make people afraid . . . when this is not necessary or reasonable." The question was about a highly infectious disease, of which parents are certainly fearful. Accusing the member directly that the member opposite need not to fearmonger: I think that crosses the line. That's out of order.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the member opposite raising the point of order, which isn't often the case from a government deputy House leader, but it is. Not only is it not the case that this is a point of order; the minister was answering a question, as stated by the opposition deputy House leader, where the minister said, "the members opposite need to not fearmonger and, in fact, do what's right" – I think that's a good thing for everyone always to do – and was clearly speaking in the plural. It is not a point of order but a matter of debate and appropriate debate for this Legislature.

However, Mr. Speaker, what's inappropriate for this Legislature is the question asked by the member opposite, which I wouldn't have caught had I not had to read the Blues, where the Member for Edmonton-Glenora said, "So will the minister set the record straight, stop [spreading] misinformation," particularly citing the individual minister and talking about spreading misinformation, which has been . . .

The Speaker: It's unfortunate that the member didn't bring that up at the appropriate time, which would have been at the time of a potential infraction.

I do have the benefit of the Blues, and I am prepared to rule unless there are other submissions specifically related to the point of order that was called.

With the benefit of the Blues I see that the hon. Minister of Health said the following: "the members" in the plural "opposite need to not fearmonger and, in fact, do what's right." As the Deputy Government House Leader has appropriately argued, the use of the word in the plural certainly makes it less challenging.

But perhaps I would also like to reference a ruling from 2016, when the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills raised a point of order when he said that the Member for Grande Prairie "had implied, or fearmongered, that the budget cut caused the fire or was [the cause] of the reason for the fire. So for clarity's sake . . ." He continued. It's important to note that on that particular day the Deputy Speaker did say, "I will rule that there is no point of order," just as there is in this context. This is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

The second point of order was raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre at 2:33. I'm not sure if he chooses to argue it. The Official Opposition Deputy House Leader has risen.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sabir: Thank you again. At the said time the Member for Edmonton-Decore was asking a question to the government about the Premier's plan to fund raise for a hate group along with a known Islamophobe and racist, Ben Shapiro. I think it's an important concern that was raised yesterday by myself. Government can choose whatever they want to answer.

Again, the Member for Edmonton-Decore raised it, and the Member for Edmonton-Decore also happens to be the first Black Muslim member of this Legislature, so certainly it's a concern that runs deep in our communities. Whatever the answer was – I will not talk about it – the Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services heckled the Member for Edmonton-Decore, and I quote: why don't you speak out against Hamas? That's horrible, that's borderline racist, and that should be beneath anyone in this Legislature. It's clearly offside. The minister should reflect on it and do the right thing and apologize.

Mr. Nixon: First of all, Mr. Speaker, it's very rich for the opposition who just spent most of the question period accusing members of this side of the aisle of being racist, including the Premier because of where she will be when she goes to Florida to speak on behalf of Albertans, to then get up and say this. First of all, I was not heckling that member; I was heckling other members, who I will talk about in a moment. I most definitely did, though, say, "When are you going to condemn Hamas?"

We have members across the way from us, including the Member for Calgary-Klein, who have called the Jewish people barbarians, accused them of being guilty of genocide, diminished the attacks on

thousands of Jewish people, including men, women, and children who lost their lives in the Hamas attacks. I still have not heard it ever condemned in this place, Mr. Speaker. I would encourage them to do so rather than continuing with this approach. [interjections]

2:50

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

I'm not convinced that continuing debate on such an important issue is going to lead to decorum inside this Assembly.

The Speaker cannot rule on what he did not hear. There is no point of order. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Speaker: What's that?

Mr. Williams: I'd like to raise a point of order.

The Speaker: You'd like to raise a point of order on what?

Mr. Williams: At 2:14 the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was speaking, asking a question to the government minister.

The Speaker: You needed to raise it at 2:14.

Mr. Williams: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. I know of nowhere in the rules prohibiting me from raising it now. If it's your ruling that I can't, I accept that.

The Speaker: Yeah. You will accept it today.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) and the 2025-2026 main estimate schedule the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

The Legislative Assembly policy committees . . . [interjections] Order. You're welcome to have a seat. It's at least three minutes of meetings.

The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon, this evening, and tomorrow morning for the consideration of main estimates. This afternoon the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for Executive Council in the Rocky Mountain Room and the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will continue the consideration of estimates for the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services in the Grassland Room.

This evening the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Energy and Minerals in the Rocky Mountain Room.

Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Children and Family Services in the Grassland Room, the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Status of Women in the Grassland Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:52 p.m.]

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