

**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24**

**HALL D | EDMONTON CONVENTION CENTRE**

- 12:00 PM**      **OPENING REMARKS**
- Darren Reeder, President & CEO, Tourism Industry Association of Alberta (TIAA)
- 12:05 PM**      **OPENING BLESSING**
- Brenda Holder, Mahikan Trails, Chair Indigenous Tourism Alberta, Vice-Chair Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada
- 12:10 PM**      **ALIGNING COMPENSATION CULTURE IN TOURISM  
TOOLS TO DRIVE PERFORMANCE AND BUILD TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE**
- Greg Klassen, Managing Director, Skift Advisory
- 1:30 PM**      **GROWTH IN THE MIDST OF TRADE AND TARIFF UNCERTAINTY:  
LEVERAGING THE POWER OF TOURISM**
- Ryan Jespersen, Real Talk, Moderator
  - Janet Brown, Pollster and Political Commentator, Janet Brown Opinion Research
  - Duane Bratt, Professor and Political Commentator, Mount Royal University
  - Charles St-Arnaud, Chief Economist, Alberta Central
- 2:30 PM**      **REGIONAL GROWTH & PROSPERITY: AN NDP PERSPECTIVE TO 2035**
- Moderated Conversation with NDP Leader Naheed Nenshi & MLA Nicole Goehring

**3:40 PM - 4:00 PM**      **NETWORKING BREAK**

- 4:00 PM**      **TOURISM AS A VEHICLE TO SUPPORT EXPORT DIVERSIFICATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**
- Ryan Jespersen, Real Talk, Moderator
  - Ben Brunnen, Principal and Founder, Verum Consulting,
  - Bin Lau, Director, U.S. Midwest, Alberta Chicago Office, Government of Alberta
  - Jon Mamela, Chief Commercial Officer, Travel Alberta
  - Kent Rupert, Managing Director, Invest Alberta

**5:00 PM**      **TOURISM ECONOMIC BUDGET FORUM CONCLUDES  
PREMIER'S DINNER RECEPTION BEGINS (FOYER)**

**GRIT**  
AWARDS

**TOURISM ECONOMIC BUDGET FORUM**

**12:00 PM**

**OPENING REMARKS**

**Darren Reeder**  
President & CEO  
Tourism Industry Association of Alberta (TIAA)



With over 30 years of experience in policy, advocacy, and industry development across a wide range of Alberta's economic sectors, Darren Reeder is a leading voice for expanding Alberta's visitor economy and advancing meaningful policy to support its full potential. He has successfully brought together industry coalitions, coordinated high-impact advocacy campaigns, and informed government decision-making using current and detailed industry data. Darren led the Alberta Chambers of Commerce for 13 years, helping to advance key fiscal reforms during the Klein era. Since then, he has been a tireless advocate for tourism through leadership roles with the Banff and Lake Louise Hospitality Association and by providing strategic and governance support to tourism organizations across the province. As the driving force behind the creation of TIAA his passion for Alberta's people, places and culture has meaningfully moved Alberta's tourism economy forward.

**12:05 PM**

**OPENING BLESSING**

**Brenda Holder**  
Mahikan Trails, Chair Indigenous Tourism Alberta,  
Vice-Chair Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada



Brenda is of Cree/Iroquois lineage and is pleased to follow her heritage as a traditional guide from the Kwarakwante of Jasper. She is a Traditional Knowledge Keeper of plant medicine from her Cree lineage and teaches courses on plant medicine, offers unique and fun hands on workshops on plants and their medicines as well as doing story-filled walks into the boreal forest to explore the amazing medicines on display.

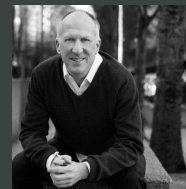
She is Vice-Chair for the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada and is the Chair of Indigenous Tourism Alberta recently she has been appointed to the Destination Canada Board. Brenda has been the recipient of several prestigious awards for her work in using her company to share her Indigenous culture. Some of these awards include Aboriginal Woman Entrepreneur Award of Distinction from the Alberta Chamber of Commerce and the Esquao Award from the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW).

**ALIGNING COMPENSATION CULTURE IN TOURISM: TOOLS TO BUILD TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE**

**12:10 PM      ALIGNING COMPENSATION CULTURE IN TOURISM:  
TOOLS TO BUILD TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE**

An in-depth look at Alberta's labour shortages, turnover, and the urgent need for a new compensation culture that leverages people as an investment in the business enterprise, not a cost. This session, which flows from the first phase of a TIAA-SKIFT Advisory lead research project, will deliver insights into current HR systems and practices, offering a host of tactical responses that better position tourism leaders to build high-performing and profitable businesses. Designed for tourism HR professionals and those with an interest in workforce development tools and solutions being advanced through this project.

**Greg Klassen**  
Managing Director, Skift Advisory



Greg is the Managing Director of Skift Advisory, the consulting arm of Skift, where he leads a team dedicated to helping tourism operators and destinations build distinctive competitive advantages through data-driven strategy and innovative technologies.

He is the co-founder of Twenty31 Consulting, established in 2015 and acquired by Skift in 2023. Prior to that, Greg spent more than 13 years at Destination Canada, serving as Chief Marketing Officer and Senior Vice President of Strategy and Marketing, and finally as the Chief Executive Officer.

Greg holds an MBA from the Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University and a degree in Economics from the University of Victoria.

The Province of Alberta is working in partnership with the  
Government of Canada to provide employment support programs and services.



## GROWTH IN THE MIDST OF TRADE AND TARIFF UNCERTAINTY

**1:30 PM**     **GROWTH IN THE MIDST OF TRADE AND TARIFF UNCERTAINTY:  
LEVERAGING THE POWER OF TOURISM**

Against a backdrop of increasing global uncertainty, leading political analysts will deliver timely insights on the fiscal and political outlook for the province. The session will explore the factors influencing the government's policy and spending options leading up to the delivery of Budget 2026—from economic and trade headwinds, to the evolving dimensions of our federal–provincial relationship. The session will highlight both the risks and the opportunities presenting for the industry and the best ways government can de-risk conditions for the sector.

**Janet Brown**  
Pollster and Political Commentator, Janet Brown Opinion Research



Janet Brown is Alberta's most recognized public opinion pollster. With over 35 years of experience in polling and marketing research, Janet has developed a knack for asking the right people the right questions. Janet sees beyond the headlines and talk show chatter to assess and interpret what's happening beneath the surface in Alberta politics.

Together with Trend Research, Janet Brown conducted the most accurate public opinion polls released during the 2019 and 2023 Alberta provincial elections.

In partnership with journalist Paul McLoughlin, Janet publishes the Wild Ride Update, a quarterly report that weaves political insight with proprietary polling.

**Duane Bratt**  
Professor and Political Commentator, Mount Royal University



Duane Bratt is a political science Professor in the Department of Economics, Justice, and Policy Studies at Mount Royal University (Calgary, Alberta). He teaches in the area of international relations and Canadian public policy.

His research interests include Canadian nuclear policy, Canadian foreign policy, and Alberta politics. Recent publications include: co-editor of *Blue Storm: The Rise and Fall of Jason Kenney* (University of Calgary Press, 2023), co-editor, *Orange Chinook: Politics in the New Alberta* (University of Calgary Press, 2019), co-editor, *Readings in Canadian Foreign Policy: Classic Debates and New Ideas 3rd edition* (Oxford University Press, 2015) and author of *Canada, the Provinces, and the Global Nuclear Revival* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012).

Current projects include a book on the politics of covid in Alberta and volume 3 of the series on Alberta politics. Duane is also a regular commentator on political events

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**Charles St-Arnaud**  
Chief Economist, Alberta Central



Charles St-Arnaud is Chief Economist at Alberta Central, the central banking facility and trade association for Alberta's credit unions. He has more than 20 years of experience as an Economist in the public and private sector, both in Canada and internationally.

Before joining Alberta Central, he was Senior Investment Strategist at Lombard Odier Investment Manager in London, England advising investors and portfolio managers on global financial markets. Before that, he was Senior Economist and FX Strategist at Nomura International in NYC and London. Charles was at the Department of Finance in Ottawa during the global financial crisis, where he advised senior officials on economic policy to respond to the crisis.

He also worked for the Bank of Canada and Morgan Stanley. He is a regular contributor to the Financial Post, Globe&Mail, BNN Bloomberg, CBC/Radio-Canada and Calgary Herald. Charles holds an Msc. in Economics from Université du Québec à Montréal.

**Ryan Jespersen**  
Real Talk  
**Moderator Extrordinaire**



Ryan Jespersen is the host of Real Talk, one of Canada's most-downloaded modern talk shows, where he leads engaging conversations on politics, culture, and current events. Widely recognized for his impact on Alberta's media landscape, Ryan was featured on the cover of Edify Magazine as the "Prince of Podcasting." He has been named one of Alberta's 50 Most Influential People by Venture Magazine and was included in Avenue's inaugural list of Edmonton's Top 40 Under 40. With a strong presence both on-air and online, Ryan connects with audiences through ryanjespersen.com and across Twitter and Instagram, continuing to shape conversations that matter to Albertans and Canadians alike.

## REGIONAL GROWTH & PROSPERITY: AN NDP PERSPECTIVE TO 2035

2:30 PM REGIONAL GROWTH & PROSPERITY: AN NDP PERSPECTIVE TO 2035

A candid dialogue with Alberta's Official Opposition on the tourism economy and its role in Alberta's long-term prosperity and in enhancing residents' quality of life. The session will explore how tourism fits within the NDP's social and economic policy platform and how the party sees tourism as contributing to a more balanced and diversified provincial economy.

**Naheed Nenshi**  
Leader of Alberta's New Democrats



During his three terms as mayor between 2010-2021, Calgary was named the third best city to live in globally. His leadership in Calgary saw an unprecedented investment in quality of life including transit, roads, recreation centers and libraries. He also saw the City of Calgary through four states of emergency, including devastating floods in 2013 and the COVID-19 pandemic and was named the best mayor in the world in 2014.

In 2024, Naheed reentered political life to run for the Alberta NDP leadership. He was elected with 86% of the vote to become the next leader of the Alberta NDP and is proud to usher the party into its next era.

Naheed is a graduate of the University of Calgary where he served as President of the Students' Union. He also earned a Master of Public Policy Degree from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University where he studied as a Kennedy Fellow. He served as Canada's first tenured professor of nonprofit management at the Bissett School of Business at Mount Royal University. He was also a management consultant for McKinsey & Company. Naheed ran his own firm, Ascend Group, headquartered in Alberta. His clients included the United Nations where he advised on how corporations can help the world's poorest people and the Gap on the creation of their Canadian growth strategy.

**MLA Nicole Goehring**  
Edmonton- Castle Downs



Nicole Goehring is a champion of collaboration and dedicated to serving her community. She has served as the MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs since 2015. During her first term, she was named the Government of Alberta's Liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces, and currently serves as the Official Opposition Veterans Affairs & Military Liaison.

Before being elected, Nicole spent nearly a decade working with Child and Family Services in a number of roles and also worked as a group home supervisor. Through that work, Nicole co-created a mediation manual and program that gave Edmonton youth a second chance to find a path to success.

3:40 PM - 4:00 PM NETWORKING BREAK

### TOURISM AS A VEHICLE TO SUPPORT DIVERSIFICATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

#### 4:00 PM TOURISM AS A VEHICLE TO SUPPORT EXPORT DIVERSIFICATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Tourism is no longer a peripheral sector: it is one of Alberta's most strategic exports and 4th largest by international receipts. This session will explore how the visitor economy can be leveraged as a hedge against global uncertainty, a source of international capital, a tool of soft political diplomacy, and, a catalyst for rural and urban prosperity. The question is not whether Alberta needs tourism but how it can be rapidly leveraged as a driver of diversification, resilience, and long-term economic security.

**Ben Brunnen**  
Principal and Founder, Verum Consulting



Ben is an executive leader with experience as a chief economist and public policy expert. He has a proven record in advancing successful policy, regulatory and legislative initiatives at all levels of government in jurisdictions across the country for nearly 25 years. He has served as a Senior Fellow at the C.D. Howe Institute and has worked with a breadth of sectors including tourism, oil & gas, manufacturing, the public service, Indigenous organizations, municipalities, academic institutions, business associations and research institutes.

Ben led the development of the B.C. resort municipality initiative, and has worked TIAA and the Towns of Banff, Canmore and Jasper in advancing tourism initiatives in Alberta.

**Bin Lau, Director**  
U.S. Midwest, Alberta Office in Chicago, Government of Alberta



Overseeing a territory that encompasses 14 states, Bin assumed his position as Alberta's representative in the US Midwest, co-located with the Consulate General of Canada in Chicago, in 2023. As a communicator and relationship builder, Bin briefly managed government affairs, stake holder relations and communications for the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta in 2022, after having served alongside Edmonton's 35th mayor, Don Iveson, through his two terms. Before city hall, Bin was communications director at Edmonton Tourism and Edmonton Economic Development.

A member of numerous boards and committees before relocating to Chicago, Bin was an Edmonton's Newcomer Centre board director in 2018-22, culminating as board chair. With a BA from the University of Alberta and an MA from Cornell University, Bin is a fervent volunteer—most notably at North America's largest and longest-running fringe theatre festival for more than a decade.

**TOURISM AS A VEHICLE TO SUPPORT DIVERSIFICATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

4:00 PM **TOURISM AS A VEHICLE TO SUPPORT EXPORT DIVERSIFICATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Jon Mamela**  
Chief Commercial Officer, Travel Alberta



As the Senior Vice President and Chief Commercial Officer for Travel Alberta, Jon drives the organization's destination development strategy, including aviation investment and product development in partnership with communities, private capital, entrepreneurs, and the government. Prior to Travel Alberta, Jon served as the Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) at Destination Toronto, where he led the organization's digital marketing transformation, crafted a new destination narrative and brand platform, and led the pitch team to secure FIFA 2026 for the city. Jon held a similar CMO role at Destination Canada, where he helped Canada's tourism industry achieve several years of record growth in international visitation. Outside of the office, Jon is an avid baker experimenting with cookie and cake recipes to test on his friends and family. In the summer time, his hopes run high for another Saskatchewan Roughriders run to the Grey Cup.

**Kent Rupert**  
Managing Director, Invest Alberta



Kent Rupert has been a driving force in business and economic development, with over 25 years of experience in various sectors. Currently the Managing Director at Invest Alberta Corporation, that is dedicated to attracting private sector investment and promoting Alberta as a prime investment location. Kent previously led the Economic Development team in Canada's fastest-growing city, where his innovative strategies attracted investments and earned his team accolades at all levels.

He started his career as a trail guide in the stunning landscapes of Lake Louise and his journey has taken him through the hotspots of tourism's Banff and Jasper in the areas of operations and economic disaster recovery. He has also recently consulted internationally, focusing on foreign investment in locales like Dubai, South Korea, Vietnam and Ireland. Kent varied background played a pivotal role in creating "Invest Greater Calgary" regional partnership and he was selected as the first Executive Director of the Canadian "Blue Zones Project," aimed at enhancing community well-being in 2019.

Beyond his professional achievements, Kent is a community champion, serving on various boards, local community foundation, food bank and, most recently the Ireland-Alberta Trade Association. With a passion for improving lives and fostering growth, Kent continues to inspire and lead in Alberta's economic landscape. In April 2025 Kent was recognized by



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4:00 PM **TOURISM AS A VEHICLE TO SUPPORT EXPORT DIVERSIFICATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Ryan Jespersen  
Real Talk  
Moderator



5:00 PM **END TOURISM ECONOMIC BUDGET FORUM**

ALBERTA  
**GRIT**  
AWARDS  
2025

**PREMIER'S**  
Dinner